



EXAMINING CONTEXTS, PRACTICES AND COSTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN INDIA

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REPORT I

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Executive Summary

This report details findings from an ethnographic study of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in two states – Bihar and Tamil Nadu. Focusing on the relationship between families and ECCE institutions, the study set out to examine how institutionalised forms of ECCE provision could be responsive to local political economies and social contexts of early childhood. The study involved six months of ethnographic research in a rural block within each state – Korha in Bihar and Gudalur in Tamil Nadu – focusing particularly on the experiences of marginalised Dalit and Adivasi communities and the practices within state and non-state ECCE institutions.

The report focuses on the social relations and norms that governed everyday life in the field sites, which were central to understanding communities' participation and negotiations of ECCE provisions. The two sites of the study had distinct political economies and social contexts – demonstrating the need for nuanced understanding of the take-up and effects of ECCE. Discussions in this report examine both the narrow conceptualisation of state targets for children's development contrasted with communities' own broader conceptions of development, along with how the marketisation of ECCE pressurises marginalised families in particular to adopt ECCE provisions that are in contrast with their own ideas of children's development. It further examines how ECCE provisions by the state and the market effects opportunities and outcomes for marginalised communities, thus further exacerbating social inequalities. The report also offers an in depth analysis of the curricula in the various state and non-state ECCE provisions available within these local contexts. The study also involved a costings-analysis, building on the ethnographic findings presented here, which is published in a separate report.

Key findings of the study can be summarised as follows:

- Parents across both sites expressed that early childhood should be a period of unstructured, community-based socialisation, but they felt that formal, highly-structured early childhood education was nevertheless required to give their children a competitive start in the current system of education.
- In Korha, in the face of non-functioning state ECCE provision, and contexts of acute poverty, entrenched casteism, and state neglect and corruption, private markets for ECCE were proliferating.
- In Korha, private provision of ECCE was observed to be developmentally inappropriate and of poor quality, yet parents saw these institutions as more focused on literacy and numeracy and a means of securing class-caste capital for their children compared to state ECCE provisions.
- In Gudalur, participation in state-based ECCE institutions by Adivasi communities was affected less by marketisation of the sector and more by the distance and terrain of the hilly, forested areas. Moreover, Adivasi communities had a broader understanding of the purpose of education, beyond narrow concepts of employability, which meant they held different aspirations for their children that extended beyond school participation.
- In Gudalur, curricular and pedagogic practices did not reflect the different patterns and values of socialisation adopted by Adivasi communities, contributing to the marginalisation of children from Adivasi communities within formal educational institutions.

The study concludes that efforts to 'contextualise' ECCE, often through a focus on language of instruction or contextually-relevant curriculum, do not go far enough in addressing the political economy of ECCE systems, namely: the marketisation and class-caste inequalities of the sector (as in the case of Korha) or the purpose of early childhood education and its links to the modern economy (as in Gudalur). This study thus recommends that urgent attention is paid to these aspects of ECCE participation, centring the aspirations, experiences, and conditions of the most marginalised.

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List of Acronyms

AWC	Anganwadi Centre
B.Ed	Bachelor's in Education
BC	Backward Classes
CDI	Child Development Index
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
DISE	District Information System for Education
dNEP	Draft National Education Policy
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
FRA	Forest Rights Act
GoI	Government of India
IIPS	International Institute for Population Sciences
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate
MBC	Most Backward Classes
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resources Development
MWCD	Ministry of Women and Child Development
LKG	Lower Kindergarten
NECCECF	National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Framework
NECCEP	National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NIPCCD	National Institute for Public Cooperation and Child Development
OBC	Other Backward Castes
PSE	Preschool Education
RTE	Right to Education
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Schedule Tribe
TWIG	Tribal Welfare in Gudalur
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UKG	Upper Kindergarten

Chapter 1: Research Aims, Context and Approach

1.1 Research Aims and Questions

This study aims to shed light on how programmes and provisions for early childhood care and education (ECCE) can be more *responsive* to the contexts, concepts and practices of early childhood care and education in rural tribal and marginalised communities in India.

In the last decade, ECCE has become a central focus of global development agendas, and a policy priority for governments and institutions worldwide. ECCE has not only seen greater advocacy in emerging economies such as India, but 'child development' itself has become positioned as a subject of global governance.

India has approximately 165 million children between the ages of 0-6 years. The child population within this age group is highly diverse with at least 73 percent located in rural areas (National Institute for Public Cooperation and Child Development- NIPCCD, 2014). Within a context of sustained social and educational inequalities, the state-run ECCE programme, called the Integrated Child Development Services – ICDS, caters to less than half the child population under 6 years. Though holistic in its conceptualisation, catering to children's nutritional, health and preschool education, the ICDS suffers from poor quality, issues of accountability and lack of adequate attention to preschool education provisioning (Rao & Kaul 2017; CBPS 2018). Alongside this, a parallel, unregulated market in ECCE is also available, offering varied quality and types of provisions, catering to parents with differing purchasing powers, and who are anxious to secure a head start for their children by investing early in formal learning.

In this context, what does a responsive model of ECCE look like? While the need to be contextually-sensitive, particularly with respect to language and learning in the mother tongue, has been recognised as part of India's National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy (NECCEP-MWCD, 2013), policy and research within the Indian context has tended to overlook historically-situated local conceptions of childcare and development, and how these influence the ways families and communities engage with state, non-state and other provisions of ECCE. The norms, values and indicators that are brought to ECCE planning, provisioning, and regulation are largely drawn from Euro-American centric models of child development and education. The few family-centred accounts of childcare that exist in India have mainly focused on dominant caste and class experiences (see Gupta, 2006; Kapoor, 2006; Saraswathi & Pai,

1997). Furthermore, the voice of parents and communities have been largely absent in the design and management of ECCE programmes (CBPS-UNICEF, 2017).

We suggest that a responsive model of ECCE requires understanding the ways multiple stakeholders – families, institutional actors, and the state – interact around the care and education of children, *in relation* to the specific political economies of their contexts. As such, the following research questions guided the study:

1. How are concepts of childhood, care and education understood and enacted by marginalised families, institutions and the state?
2. How are marginalised families negotiating institutional and state norms of early childhood care and education in their concepts and practices?
3. In what ways do ECCE institutions respond to the concepts and practices of early childhood care within marginalised communities?
4. What are the public policy and financial cost implications for scaling responsive models of ECCE?

These questions attempt to understand how different stakeholders *conceptualise* the constructs of ‘child’, ‘childhood’, ‘care’, ‘education’ and ‘development’, and how provisions and practices generated based on these conceptualisations are negotiated in relation to other stakeholders. The analysis thus foregrounds the physical, historical, social, economic, political and cultural contexts through which ECCE is enacted.

This attention to contextual relationships informed the ethnographic approach of the study, in which participant observation and interviews were conducted over a six-month period in two different field sites.

1.2 Research Context

An analysis of ECCE concepts, contexts and provisions was conducted across two states, the southern state of Tamil Nadu and the north-eastern state of Bihar. Within Bihar, research was conducted in the Korha block of the Katihar district, and in Tamil Nadu, the study focused on Gudalur block, in the district of the Nilgiris. Marginalised communities (Scheduled Caste,

Schedule Tribe, and other minorities)¹ who have been historically excluded from mainstream ECCE programmes make up a significant proportion of the population in both sites. The sites also have significantly different geographies, histories, and sociocultural, political and economic contexts, particularly with respect to ECCE which enabled the study to generate comparative insights.

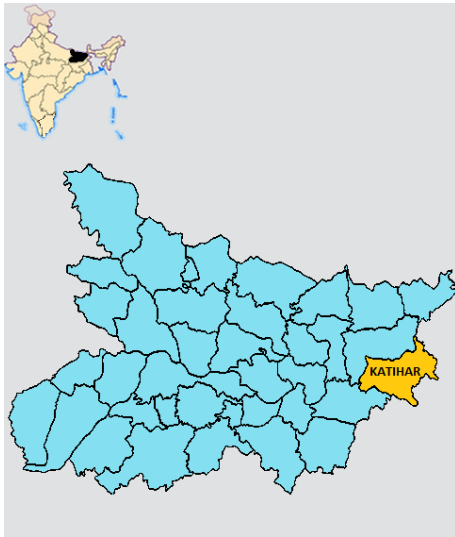


Figure 1: District-wise map of Bihar.

Source:

<http://www.veethi.com/places/bihar-katihar-district-223.htm>

1.2.1 Gajwa village - Korha block, Katihar district, Bihar

Bihar has the second lowest child development index (CDI) in the country at 0.296 (Dreze and Khera 2015) and an Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) of 48 (higher than the national average of 41), according to 2015-16 data (International Institute for Population Sciences - IIPS 2017). Thirty-four per cent of the population is reported to be living below the poverty line (World Bank 2016). The state average for pre-school attendance is 59.8 per cent, compared to the national average of 69.4 per cent (MWCD and UNICEF 2014). The average adult literacy rate in Korha block is 50.16 per cent, and significantly lower for marginalised ‘Scheduled Caste’ and ‘Scheduled Tribe’ groups (37.68 per cent and 39.24 per cent respectively, with female literacy rates lower than male literacy rates across all groups). (GoI, 2011a).

The research focused on one village which we call Gajwa, which has an approximate population of 2800, and is divided into three wards or electoral constituencies, each with their own anganwadi, and two with a government primary school.² Each ward was informally clustered into different *tolas* (hamlets) by sub-castes/communities, creating some geographic segregation between different social groups.

¹ The terms SC, ST and OBC are official categories of the state for identifying populations that have been historically discriminated against and continue to be socially and economically marginalised. Muslims in India are also officially designated as minority populations who face widespread discrimination, particularly with the current resurgence of violent Hindu nationalism. The terms used for, and the boundaries between, different social groups are widely contested. For this report, we use the terms that communities used when referring to themselves, except when reporting on secondary data which uses state classifications. These terms are explained along with their state classifications where necessary.

² At the time of the 2011 census, there were 555 children of pre-school age – between 0 and 6 years – in the village.

The three anganwadis in Gajwa catered to a mixed population of Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), Other Backward Castes (OBC) and Muslim communities. Some 42% of the population in the village were Mahadalits (SCs) from the Mushahar, Pasi, Turi and Dom communities.³ Against an ongoing history of caste oppression and educational exclusion, these Mahadalit communities were mostly landless daily-wage labourers and they lived in visible poverty. Dominant caste groups such as Bhumihars, Rajputs, Poddars and Bhagats were numerically small in Gajwa but held considerable political and economic power as land owners. A large Muslim community also lived in the village, many of whom had some economic power also through land ownership or small businesses. About 10 per cent of the population of Gajwa were Santhals, who were mostly agricultural labourers. Officially designated as a ‘Scheduled Tribe’, many referred to themselves as Santhal or as Adivasi – the latter a collective political identification for the Indigenous peoples of India.

1.2.2 Chalikadu and Seervayal villages – Gudalur block, Nilgiris district, Tamil Nadu



Figure 2: District-wise map of Tamil Nadu

Source: http://static.newworldencyclopedia.org/9/95/TN_Districts_Nilgiri.gif

Tamil Nadu, one of the fastest growing southern states of India, presents a stark contrast to Bihar, with better socio-economic indicators, a long-standing history of social movements and active efforts made by the state in addressing social inequalities. However, progress across different sectors in relation to social inclusion has been mixed. Gudalur block, located in the hilly, forested regions of the Nilgiris biosphere, in which we conducted our study, had a high concentration of SC and ST population (26 % and 13 % respectively) (GoI, 2011b). Five main ST communities were observed in

Gudalur – the Mulla Kurumba, Betta Kurumba, Irula, Kattu Nayaka and Paniya communities. The sites

were also populated by other non-Adivasi communities such as the Mountanden Chettys, Wayanad Chettys (OBC communities) and Christians. Literacy levels for SC and ST

³ Though ‘Dalit’ is used as a term of self-identification and political recognition by SC groups across India, the term ‘Mahadalit’ is a state category specific to Bihar that participants in our research used to describe themselves. The term Mahadalit refers to the most marginalised among Dalit or SC groups.

communities was much lower than for the block as a whole (with SC literacy rate being 41 %; ST literacy rate being 50%; and the block's literacy level being 78%)

The field sites comprised of two villages across two panchayats. The first village that we call Chalikadu was located 17 kms from Gudalur town in the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, and the other village that we have named Seervayal, was located 12 kms from Gudalur town, situated amidst tea estates, and with a significant concentration of ST populations (23% and 98% respectively).

The Chalikadu village was composed of three small hamlets inhabited mainly by the Betta Kurumbas and Kattunayakas, and a few Irulas and Malai Malachars. The village had one anganwadi catering to ST children, but was attended by only those living in the hamlet in which the anganwadi was located, as children from the other hamlets had to cross a river or a national highway to get to the anganwadi. School-aged children attended a government primary and secondary school located 3 kms away from the village, but had no higher secondary schooling options within close proximity. (The Forest Department had therefore organised a van service to take children to Gudalur for higher secondary schooling). Most jobs in the village were provided by the Forest Department with men working as elephant mahouts and Anti-Poaching Watchers, and hired for their traditional skills and knowledges of the forest. Since the village is located inside the reserve forest, lands, livelihoods and resources of the communities was directly administered by the Forest Department.

The other village, Seervayal, was populated by ST communities such as Betta Kurumbas, Kattu Nayakas and Paniyas, as well as non-tribal OBC communities, and had one anganwadi centre which catered to this mixed population. Employment opportunities in Seervayal were divided along caste lines, with OBC communities such as Mountaden Chettys and Wayanad Chettys owning land, while men and women from ST communities worked as agricultural labour on these lands or on tea and coffee estates.

More details about the village contexts and social relations are found within our discussion of findings, particularly with respect to the political economies of ECCE in each site.

1.3 Research Approach

1.3.1 Research Methods

The study employed ethnographic methods to examine the local concepts, norms and practices of ECCE within each field site. Three anganwadis and one private school in Korha, and three anganwadis and two non-ICDS ECCE centres (one private school and one NGO run school) in Gudalur, were identified. These centres acted not only as the locus of the study but also as entry points into the communities. In each site, a research assistant undertook daily observations within the ECCE institutions and within the community, for six months. This observational research was also critical in instructing our econometric analysis of costs, as it enabled ascertaining factors that make ECCE programmes successful (such as specific types of pedagogy or involvement of community). In addition to ongoing conversations with participants, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and narrative interviews were also conducted with stakeholders (see table 1). Systematic fieldnotes consisting of thick descriptions of the two sites were produced through this research and formed the basis of qualitative data that was analysed.

Methods	Korha	Gudalur
Participant Observation	6 months	6 months
Interviews with parents	16	15
Interviews with State workers/officials		
- Anganwadi workers/helpers	5	4
- Block/state level officials	3	2
Interviews with Private/NGO schools		
- Teachers	4	3
- Management	3	6
Focused group discussions with community	4	2

Table 1: Research Methods

In addition, the study undertook a demographic survey of the specific centres visited alongside obtaining secondary data on demographic profiles (detailing age, caste, gender, economic status, education levels, household income) of childcare practitioners and some beneficiaries associated with each of the programmes, in order to also address the 'hidden costs' of programmes - that is, the inbuilt social assumptions and subsidies built into programmes that contribute to equal or unequal opportunities (for example, positioning childcare work as care

work and thus employing women at lower wages; adopting a basic minimum model to provide ECCE for low-income communities, etc). Ethnographic data was then combined with secondary and demographic data, and policy, as well as with data gathered on budgets, expenditures and costs of programmes for ICDS alongside low-cost models of ECCE. The findings from the costings analysis is presented in Report II. Analysis across the data sets enabled us to examine the interactions between family, early years institutions and state approaches and attitudes to child development, which is synthesised and presented in the following chapters.

1.3.2 Analysis and Ethics

All fieldnotes from the ethnography were written up and entered into the project's database. Similarly, all interviews, if recorded, were transcribed for the purpose of analysis. A collaborative, iterative process of coding was undertaken. The study used the NVivo data management and analysis software. Over two months the team systematically read and coded all material generated from the research. Key statements from participants were translated into English during this process. Summaries, thematic reference documents and emerging codes were written up and discussed together. Analyses were cross-checked across sites and between the research team.

Ethical approval for the project was gained through the University of Cambridge Research Ethics review process as well as the Institutional Ethics Committee of the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore. Pseudonyms have been used for all names of individuals, institutions and the villages. To gain local access and approvals, the research team in India visited the sites before research commenced and located community leaders, anganwadis and panchayat officials to discuss the study's intentions and receive feedback on it. Informed consent was gained by all participants in the study, but consent was obtained verbally for participating adults who did not have written literacy. The researchers who were located in the field sites over the six months of ethnographic research (Akash Kumar in Bihar and Arun Viknesh in Tamil Nadu) had regional understanding and proficiency in the local languages and were able to develop rapport with communities over the six months of their stay in the villages. The study has attempted to achieve equal gender participation in the research. Female researchers on the team visited field sites to assist with the research, particularly to interview women who felt more comfortable speaking to other women.

Research of this kind is replete with ongoing ethical considerations, particularly concerning the representation of poor and marginalised communities by elites and outsiders. The study's focus

on community norms and concepts of ECCE was an attempt to foreground the voices and experiences of marginalised communities in a context in which international policy debates about ECCE focus on economic analyses of efficiency and effectiveness. The study sought to highlight the structural inequalities that shape ECCE participation among the poor, to challenge deficit framings around the ‘lack’ of ECCE take-up, or the supposed absence of adequate ‘parenting’ for school readiness which are all found within dominant policy discourse (see for example discussions in Sriprakash et al. forthcoming).

The project was reflexive about the limitations of this aim, and of the possibility that the research itself could misrepresent experiences and contexts. This reflexivity was encouraged throughout the research. The research team conducted an extended reading group before the commencement of fieldwork to critically discuss policy and research literature on ECCE, particularly to consider the implications of developmental norms for the sites of the research. All members of the research team were trained in conducting ethnographic research, particularly with respect to understanding the potential issues of positionality, privilege and power dynamics between the researchers and the participants, with special regard for research with tribal and marginalised groups in the Indian context. Furthermore, ongoing communications, co-writing, and co-analysis helped the study be reflexive about its own assumptions throughout the process.

Informed by these various considerations, we present the findings from the research in the following chapters. Chapter 2 first lays out the social context by presenting an in-depth analysis of the social relations and norms that governed everyday life, and that were central to understanding communities’ participation and negotiations of ECCE provisions. Chapter 3 follows with a discussion on the penetration of markets into local contexts and how this intersects with the social differences observed on field in structuring opportunities and outcomes of ECCE for various communities. This is followed by a rigorous curricular analysis of the various state and market-based ECCE provisions available within these local contexts, critically examining the ways in which these provisions respond to community needs. The final chapter concludes by drawing together the insights presented across the previous chapters and arguing for ‘responsive’ models of ECCE to be attentive to local contexts and political economies that shape early childhood outcomes.

Chapter 2: Social relations and everyday life

In this chapter, the inter-related social relations of caste, class, community and gender are examined, as observed in both field sites. In particular, the relationship between these social institutions and understandings of early childhood care and education are illustrated through an analysis of field data. The impact of the child's immediate learning environment has been acknowledged as critically impacting their developmental trajectories (see Harkness and Super 2014, Gaskins et al. 1992), and the social nature of this learning context and process has also been commented upon (see Serpell and Nsamenang 2014, Weisner 2002, Keller et al, 2005). Our study finds that an understanding of the social relations is of particular significance since it has further implications for how ECCE is provisioned, practiced and conceptualised across differing communities and groups in India, and who gets to access it. We share such understanding of everyday ECCE enactments and negotiations by families and early years providers to explore the complexity of these interactions. Rather than situating the understanding of communities in fixed concepts of social relations, the dynamic nature of these social institutions is highlighted, in their mediation through broader factors of the political economy.

2.1 Social relations in Gajwa, Bihar

2.1.1 Intersections of class, caste and gender in Gajwa

Despite rapid economic growth over the last few decades, Bihar continues to rank poorly in absolute terms on development indicators, when compared to other states in India. Sharma and Rodgers (2015) note how shifts in relations of production have resulted largely from opportunities afforded through migration to outside rural areas, other parts of India, and there has been little change in patterns of agricultural occupations and relations within the state. Bihar has witnessed a continued system of agrarian relations based on caste-class hierarchies, despite the abolition of the zamindari system post-independence. The semi-feudal class structure centred on land is strongly linked with caste-based inequalities, both of which also inform electoral party politics and state functioning.

The village of Gajwa reflected this pattern of agricultural organisation, where the landowning communities were upper caste (Rajputs and Bhumihars) or dominant caste OBC families (Poddar, Bhagat). Some of these families also worked in petty trade-related occupations such as shop-keeping, sometimes in addition to agriculture. The Mahadalit (Mushahar, Pasi, Turi)

and Adivasi (Santhal) communities were engaged in landless daily wage agricultural labour. In addition, there was a high proportion of the minority Muslim population, among whom many were also landowners in this particular village, though there was variation in this regard. Caste relations were made evident in the physically segregated settlements, with Mushahar and Santhal tolas (hamlets) also being situated further away from state institutional provisioning such as anganwadi centres. The Doms, also a Mahadalit community, were among the most marginalised communities. Visibly poorer, their only source of livelihood was basket weaving, which has been the traditional occupation associated with this caste group. The Dom community had little or no interaction with other village members or state institutions, and they occupied temporary settlements on the wet lands along a canal between two wards of the village.

In fact, *pucca* (concrete/permanent) houses were also indicative of social standing, and were owned only by the upper caste and elite Muslim families, with the majority of other communities living in thatched mud houses with tin roofs and no toilets.

Poverty, which was related to poor infrastructural facilities, also affected school and health-related outcomes. Issues of hygiene, such as pools of stagnant water, muddy paths and contaminated ponds, were observed in Mahadalit settlements, and these were causes for diseases and illness. Children often falling sick was one of the reasons they could not regularly attend anganwadis or schools. The link between poverty and hygiene was exacerbated again by caste discrimination, with Mohanlal, a Mushahar father describing how their settlement did not have a community handpump, and other community hamlets did not allow them to use their handpumps because of practices of untouchability. Another manner in which poverty shaped schooling outcomes was the inability of parents to miss a day's labour to go and drop their children and pick them up from the centres, located at significant distances from their settlements, as this would entail a loss of wages. As further elaborated by Mohanlal and his wife Sarita Devi, work and education for them was mostly about earning and surviving, implying how subsistence took precedence over participating in institutional education.

In another conversation, a Mushahar mother, pointing towards her children's torn and unclean clothes, exclaimed: "*hamani bheje bachhan ke ta master bhaga de. Kahe ki phatal kapada me na leve len*" (when we sent our children [to school], the teacher shoo-ed them away. He said they will not take them in with torn clothes). While they acknowledged that "*gandagi*" (dirt/unhygienic conditions) were a cause of "*bimari*" (disease), the dominant caste anganwadi

worker and other community members, present during this discussion, responded in disdain that *‘bimari par paisa kharcha kare ke aa jala par 10 rupaya ka saraf kharid ke saaf suthara naa rah sakelen’* (they are happy to spend money on the ailment/medicine but cannot not spend 10 rupees to buy detergents and keep themselves clean). The attitude of dominant caste members as well as the state-run schools was indicative of the disregard for structural conditions of both caste and class which resulted in material deprivation and restricted access to state institutions.

Caste based discrimination in the village was manifested in various other forms as was made apparent in interaction with community members. Lower castes, especially Mushahar families, were referred to as ‘dirty’ and using ‘abusive’ language, while Santhali families were considered ‘jungle’ (wild/uncivilised). The subordination of these groups was made explicit by the dominant caste’s perceptions of the marginalised and disadvantaged communities, often disregarding their knowledges, capacities, and literacies, expressed as: *“Unaka soch abhi bhi gira hua hai”* (their [Musahars] thinking has still not evolved); *“unko kuch nahi aat ahai, woh santhali hai”* (they don’t know anything, they are santhali); *“kapada aisa pahana hai to isaka matalab Adivasi thode hi hun. Chehara se bhi pata chalata hai.”* (just because I am dressed this way [in a lungi] does not mean I am Adivasi. You can also tell from my face).

Differentiation between caste and community groups was outlined even among children, who would only play with those belonging to their own social groups. Reflecting the early socialisation into caste-based practice, a group of young children from the Turi (SC) settlement, upon being asked whether they were friends with Santhali children, responded saying they did not talk to Santhali children because they were ‘jungle’, they kept *“teer-dhanush”* (bow and arrow) at home, and were ‘rowdy’.

Gendered experiences of work were also differentiated along caste-class lines, though overall figures for Korha block show a lower labour force participation rate for women than for men (table 2).

Korha block	Male	Female
Main workers	36%	11%
Marginal workers	19%	9%

Table 2: Labour force participation for main and marginal workers in Korha. Source: Census 2011

Among main workers⁴ in Korha block, 78% are male while only 22% are female (GoI 2011). There is a higher representation of women among marginal workers (43%), though still lower than that of male marginal workers (57%). The role of class in mediating gendered patterns of labour could explain the higher representation of women in marginal labour. As is often the case under stark conditions of economic deprivation, men, women, and even children from marginalised families in Gajwa would regularly be found working on fields. Agricultural work for women and children usually involved activities such as sowing, weeding and harvesting. In contrast, fewer women and children from dominant caste-class families were employed in agricultural, or other forms of paid work.

All women, however, were engaged in unpaid forms of reproductive labour and care work such as cooking, cleaning and child rearing. The domestic realm was considered by and large exclusively the domain of women. Caste-class positions and patriarchal gender roles also reinforced each other, since women from dominant caste-class families had relatively more time to engage in housework and childcare as compared to Mahadalit and Santhali women, since they were not involved in paid work. This was captured during a conversation with the women in an OBC household, who had a family trading business. Though educated, they were not allowed to work outside the house, so they construed the benefits of their own education as being able to help their children with studies at home. One of the 20-year-old girls, whose husband did not allow her to continue her education after marriage citing one breadwinner as sufficient for the family, did not protest this decision despite her desire to have pursued education. This was explained by other women as a trade-off to ensure that they had the necessary resources to bring up their children, since otherwise they would have to take on the responsibility for both themselves and their children. At the same time, the women expressed their disapproval towards mothers from other communities who left their children unsupervised, while they spent most of their days feeding, washing, clothing and playing with their children. While negotiating their own limited bargaining power as women in dominant caste-class families, they perpetuated a deficit view of women from marginalised families as being inferior by not adequately fulfilling their role as mothers. In this way, their own caste-class positions intersected with their gendered roles to reinstate patriarchal norms of women's work.

⁴ Main workers are defined in the Census of India as those who have worked for more than 6 months in the previous year, and marginal workers as those who have worked less than 6 months.

In another example, a Poddar (OBC) woman had 7 children – 4 daughters and 3 sons, with the eldest being a girl who was currently enrolled in 10th standard in a government school. On the question of whether there was a preference of sons in the family, she responded that she had these many children because the men in the family did not ‘believe’ in surgical sterilisation, saying “*hone do jitana hona hai kismet ka khel hai. Bhagawan jitana de*” (let as many [children] happen, it’s a game of luck, as many as God decides to give.) When asked about the challenges of raising so many children, she did not mention the lack of autonomy as an issue, but went on to say, with a note of pride in her voice, that -

“Bachche hai sahi se rakhiyega, sahi sanskar dijiyega to kuchh nahi karenge [...] mere bachche seedhe hai [...] ab mata-pita jaisa rakhe. Hamto apane bachchon ko sahi se rahana sikhate hai. Jo bachche shararati hote hai to ye maa-baap ki kami hai” (they are children, if you raise them well, give them the right values[cultures], they will not do anything wrong [...] my children are well behaved [...] depends on how the mother and father raise them. We teach our children how to lead their lives in the correct manner. The children who are misbehaved are a consequence of their parents being lacking)

In this case, the dominant caste mother references ‘sanskar’ or the cultural values that sets her family apart from other parents who she does not consider competent. Implicit in this notion of proper parenting and cultural upbringing is caste-class superiority, which is also elicited in a later remark by the woman on how she did not allow her children to play outside since she did not want them to mingle with Mushahar children because they were ‘dirty’ and used abusive language. The regulation of women’s bodies and caste oppression go hand in hand, and serve to reproduce a casteist-patriarchal system in this way, on which much has been written about (Chakravarti, 1993; Menon, 2009).

2.1.2 Social relations and state institutions

As mentioned earlier, caste-class positions determined access to state institutions. This access however extended beyond physical distance, with the governance of state institutions being subsumed under logics of social relations. The anganwadi centre, for example, is envisioned as a space to bring together local communities for state welfare provisioning. Anganwadi staff – an anganwadi worker and a helper for each centre, are selected from the community, and trained to deliver various health, nutritional and educational benefits. In efforts to conceptualise

anganwadis as community-based spaces, they were observed to effectively replicate patterns of social relations present in the village.

Active caste-based discrimination extended to the functioning of anganwadi centres. For example, a Bhagat (OBC) woman with four children, residing in a Mushahar settlement on account of having recently moved to the village from the nearby market town, did not send her four daughters to the anganwadi, despite being enrolled, because the community was ‘not good’ and ‘dirty’. Seemingly upset, she explained how the area was unpleasant and she did not even allow her children to play outside. This was a common reason cited by dominant caste parents for not sending their children to the anganwadi, and in fact, anganwadi centres were mostly accessed by children from the most socio-economically marginalised families [See chapter 4 for more details]. The functioning of the anganwadi centre itself was determined by caste relations. Yasmin, a Muslim anganwadi worker, speaking about the Hindu upper caste helper, said “due to her caste, [Kiran] does not go to Mahadalit or Muslim tola to bring children”, and for the same reason she did not bring water from the handpump for cooking, expecting children to do so, since such a task was beneath her caste status. Kiran did not bring children in spite of this being her designated responsibility as helper and Yasmeen from her relative position of administrative seniority having asked her a few times to do so. Yasmin expressed her helplessness in this situation, which was exacerbated by Kiran’s seniority in terms of age, and her social status as an upper caste Hindu. The attitude of the helper is also illustrative of the complex relationship between the two different religious communities, despite both, in this case, belonging to affluent families.

Mirroring patterns of established social relations as seen in the village despite being a government run centre, administrative norms for accountability were also seen to fail. In a noteworthy instance that provides some insight into powerful community interests overriding institutional logic, Mansoor, a Muslim resident of Gajwa, said he had stopped lodging complaints with the higher up ICDS officials because they would come down and demand a bribe from the anganwadi worker but not take any action. He felt that the repeated occurrence of this would only put further financial burden on the worker, who after all was also a community member. While Mansoor belonged to the dominant group in his village, the more marginalised families expressed a sense of helplessness due to state neglect, and also mentioned that many village members would not openly speak up against practices of graft because of their personal relations with anganwadi officials. With existing power relation coupled with

weak implementation and monitoring at all administrative levels, these centres in effect enabled the continuation and entrenchment of caste-class exclusion.

The effects of gender relations were similarly noted in the functioning of the anganwadis. Husbands of anganwadi workers and helpers were often seen to share the latter's responsibilities in gathering village children to the centres, during visits made by monitoring teams and completing odd jobs for the centres such as buying balloons and biscuits for events. There is an evident ownership of the work conducted as shown by one of the anganwadi worker's husband, who having completed some construction work at the AWC stated, "*ham apana kaam kar diye, darwaja bhi banawa diye. Ab chalate hai*" (I have done my work, have got the door built/fixed, now I am off). Husbands of workers and helpers would often speak about the anganwadi in this manner with an implicit reference to their ownership of the centre, despite (or because of) it being a state-owned institution. This involvement of men from the family in the anganwadi's activities is especially interesting since the nature of care-work conducted at anganwadi centres has strong associations with feminised work, especially in an existing context of strongly conceptualised gender roles.

This participation of men reveals a claim to the authority of the state that was embodied in these state-centres, and perhaps a re-assertion of their gender-class-caste status through this association with symbolic state power. Indeed, the prevalence of men informally representing their wives or other female relatives formally appointed to government positions, also points towards this desire to secure government-positions and some part of its engendered authority.

While women did hold government positions (whether as panchayat secretaries, gram sabha members or as ward members and representatives), it was their husbands or other male relatives such as sons, brothers or brothers-in-law who carried out the day-to-day duties and activities. As a result, though there were posts reserved for women in the gram panchayat, their involvement appeared to be tokenistic at best. During a Gram Sabha or village meeting, attended by 33 community members (of whom 22 were male and many were women ward members' "*pratinidhis*" or representatives) from two villages of Korha, the researcher found the "*mukhiya patti*" or the chieftain's husband guide the activities. It was ironic too that he was also leading the conversation on *Nari Shaktikaran* (women's empowerment) while disempowering his own wife's position as the actual head. At another instance, at the Panchayat Bhavan in Gherava, where the fieldworker had gone to interview the woman Secretary, he found that her brother and son were attending to her duties at the panchayat office. The son

informed that it was both of them who “handle” the secretary’s job when she is sick, and that his uncle came every Saturday for the block office meetings. He mentioned further that they only needed her for her signatures, for which they took the papers and documents home. This was reinstated in instances where the researcher had gone to interview the village’s panchayat representative and could only gain access to the village head’s husband, who informed that he was responsible for all the administrative or related work, relegating women representatives to a mere face of the governing bodies whilst designating all the power to their husbands.

Much like the institutions of caste and class, patriarchal relations were also seen to be impacting state functioning in Gajwa, though unpacking the complexities of this process and its intersections with caste and class would require further examination. It is worth noting here that observations of women’s own everyday forms of negotiations were not possible, in part due to the inability of the male field researcher to interact freely with women in the community, dictated again by patriarchal norms of acceptable male-female interactions.

2.1.3 The dynamics of social distinction

Along with the active ‘othering’ and exclusion of marginalised populations, Gajwa also demonstrated a complex inter-dependency in the nature of communal relations, especially between the numerically smaller but socially powerful upper caste families, and the majority socio-economically marginalised populations. For instance, upper caste groups often expressed the need to accommodate community expectations in order to maintain the social balance of power. At a moment when a lower-caste anganwadi helper’s family was struggling to find a place to host their wedding guests, travelling from the bridegroom’s village, the higher caste anganwadi worker’s family decided to offer her the anganwadi space, for the purposes. As the anganwadi worker’s husband argued, in this context protecting the image of the village and its peoples in front of outsiders (that is, the bridegroom’s family, and the accompanying relatives and members from their village) was considered more important than caste-based distinctions. Here again, the family’s institutional power comes together with their caste-class position, as well as the relatively authoritative position of the male member, to not just assert ownership of a state-institution, but also to take on the role of a superior benefactor who mediates the balance of power in the village.

In another instance, although families of all village communities were invited to an upper caste marriage ceremony, there were clear examples of caste-based discrimination at the event in terms of the untimely serving of food, differentiated dining, seating and entertainment

arrangements (the dance floor area), from which the children of lower caste-class were continually displaced to provide space for adults and children from the upper caste groups. This illustrates the organisation of social relations through both a sense of inclusion and exclusion, where every member of the village is allowed a chance to participate in the community event, but through a simultaneously careful display and delineation of social hierarchies.

Sustaining caste-class distinction in this manner required that communities were cognisant of their positions in the caste hierarchy. When the fieldworker (who was not a tea-drinker) declined tea offered at an OBC women's extended household, she instantly inquired if he did not drink water or tea specifically at a Poddar's house since many people from the upper caste did not do so in lower caste households. She further went on to assure the field researcher by clarifying that she was not a Mushahar, and that they in fact belonged to the Vaishya or Baniya caste (a dominant caste). Differentiation of this kind was critical to sustaining the caste-class structure, and was brought out prominently in ECCE practice as well.

2.1.4 Educational strategies of communities

As mentioned earlier, anganwadis were considered as catering only to poor and lower caste families. Mukhbir, belonging to an elite Muslim family, informed us of the low quality of food provisioning at the anganwadi centres, because of which he did not send his own children there. At the same time, he said his family would collect their share of ration from centres and distribute it to the poorer families. Here again, there is a feudal display of socio-economic superiority linked with benevolence towards the disadvantaged sections of community, in order to maintain the balance of power. For such families, private ECCE became a means to separate from such communities, and maintain one's caste-class advantage. Kamala Devi from a Khushwaha (OBC) family explained to us how she sent her five-year-old son to a private preschool and tuition classes so he could spend as much time as possible away from the village environment. On the topic of learning in the mother tongue, she felt that learning the locally spoken language of *Thethi* would teach her son abusive words, and she preferred for him to learn Hindi and English. For Kamala, educational capital was also a means to secure caste-class advantage, as was for many other well resourced, dominant caste families who could afford private schooling for their children. An interview with the management member, Sirajuddin, of a private preschool also revealed that the trend among well off families was to send their children away to hostels, or enrol them in private preschools in order to separate them from the

village atmosphere. He added that these children came from deprived contexts and the initial few months had to be spent on socialising them into basic behaviours and proper mannerisms.

This preference for private schooling was clearly however not just to establish their separation from the ‘backward’ village environment, but also indicative of a desire to acquire middle-class cultures, or in Kamala’s words “*naya sanskar*” (new cultures). Other dominant caste-class parents elaborated on this culture by emphasising the need to teach their children “*achese uthna, baithna, bolna*” (to sit, stand, speak well), in reference to proper or socially respectable behavioural dispositions. Learning English in schools was identified as another key aspect of this kind of culturally beneficial knowledge.

2.1.5 Gender, education and work

For most families, some amount of basic early education seemed desirable for both boys and girls. For instance, Rashik Lal and Lalita Devi of the Mushahar community viewed basic reading and writing as important for both girls and boys, and had sent their eldest daughter to school up till 7th standard. They were unable to support their children’s education beyond this point, much like others in the community. Yet they spoke of the gendered differences observed, such as marrying girls off early, by the age of 14-15, while young boys migrated to other cities in search of work. Though differences in enrolment figures for girls and boys were not observed, the kinds of educational-work trajectories envisioned for them by families were different, and also impacted by caste-class location.

What was common among most families was an essentialised account of differing gender roles for girls and boys. For instance, a group of OBC women spoke of how at around the age of 10, girls and boys are begun to be socialised differently for their respective roles, with girls expected to take part in domestic work, while boys are expected to learn work outside the home, such as going to the bazaar. They were very clear on the fact that boys do not partake in household chores. As asserted by a Santhal father, Hemlal, such socialisation was not deliberate, and that while boys and girls were treated the same way, as they grew up, boys just started to follow their fathers, learning to graze cattle, learning agricultural work (‘when I take the plough, my son will follow me’), while girls started to follow their mothers and learn weaving, stitching, learning to make cots, domestic work such as making *rotis*, sweeping or cleaning fish. He also marked out the age of 10 as when this kind of ‘natural’ socialisation begins to occur.

While influenced by dominant cultures and practices, some amount of flexibility seemed to be granted with respect to gendered roles in the case of Santhali families. For example, a Santhal father had allowed his college-going daughter to take part in a training camp for learning to use the bow and arrow, though this was a sport largely restricted to boys. Community practices, around women's agency and marriage among Adivasi families appeared to be relatively liberal in comparison to traditional gender roles prevalent in Gajwa. Sunil Hansda explained how in their family they allowed men and women to choose their own partners for marriage. His daughter in fact had liked some boy in the village and moved into his parents' house for 6 months before she got married to the son, after which she returned to her own parents' house. In spite of relatively equitable conceptualisations of marriages, Santhali marriage customs were found to be undergoing changes arising from interfacing with other community cultures, with not all families allowing this degree of autonomy to women.

Expectations of housework from girls as young as 5 or 6 was also noted during observations, with girls seen to be taking care of younger siblings, or being asked to return home early from play so as to help out with household work. In anganwadi centres, it was the girls who were regularly asked to clean utensils, serve food to others or set up the chulha (wooden stove) for cooking.

It followed from such accounts that many families did not think education or work was required for girls. Sohan Soren, a Santhali father, had planned to send his son to school and then college, depending on how long his son wished to study, but did not want his daughter to study beyond 10th standard. His elder daughter, who was 15 years old, had dropped out of school in order to help with household work, and to take care of his youngest son who was not yet in school. In the words of Kamala Devi, a mother of a five-year-old son, from the Bhagat (OBC) community, " *jyada padhane se ladakiya kharab ho jaati hai. Aur jyada padh ke karengi bhi kya?* " (Educating girls too much spoils them. And what will they do anyway after studying so much?). She wanted her son to study as far as it would require him to get a good job, but conclusively stated that girls would not be allowed to study beyond 10th standard, because they would get married and move into their husband's house. This idea of 'getting spoiled' was referred to by Sandeep, an anganwadi worker's husband, who said that many parents felt that if girls were sent to school beyond 8th standard, they would run away from home, or get married to someone of their choice. An elderly grandmother countered this view, saying it was not education per se (she was proud of her granddaughter who had learnt to speak English), but changes in

society resulting from movies and mobile phones that were having a negative impact on young girls. While education up to a certain level was considered beneficial, it was only so long as it did not counter the expected social role of women as homemakers and caregivers.

For women from elite families who had relatively better access to education, the kinds of roles and employment opportunities they envisaged for girls was different. For example, in one Muslim family, where the women had studied up to 12th standard, they felt that women should also learn skills such as tailoring, and it would be beneficial to have “*vyavasthay*” (provisions) for training in the village itself since then girls would not have to go too far to work. Others in the same family felt that “*ladkiyon ko paddahaney key liye, laddkiyon ka hi teacher hona hai na*” (for teaching girls, we need women teachers, right?), construing a specific kind of usefulness that education would have for girls. In yet another Muslim family the mother Gulshan stated that the upbringing and education was the same for girls and boys, but that girls would not be allowed to work outside the house. Upon being asked what the use of education was for girls in this case, the grandmother responded that if a girl had studied up till her Bachelors, then she could take tuitions at home for other children, or become a tailor. Elite families, while allowing education for both boys and girls as an avenue towards social distinction, thus did not necessarily envision similar roles for them.

The priorities of seeking educational mobility seemed to largely be subsumed by the urgency to secure caste-class distinction. In this system, differentiated gender roles went unchallenged. In this context where care-work was considered exclusively the domain of women, it is noteworthy to examine the role of state policy in discursively perpetuating the entrenchment of gendered roles. For instance, in the National ECCE Curriculum Framework of India (MWCD 2014), fathers are barely mentioned; in the four times they are mentioned, they are listed as caregivers twice, as partners in the development of children’s language and to bring in ‘balanced parenting’ into the programmes (p.5). In contrast, discussions on ‘ready families’ makes direct recommendations for how to ready mothers via ‘effective care and stimulation practice at home’, for assessment of learning, and in communication activities with children (MWCD 2014, p.24, 33), while fathers appear to play no role in children’s development. While most official and policy documents rely on the usage of ‘parents’ in relation to early years and ‘readying’ of children for school, this obscures the significant role, amount of time and responsibilities of care that women are confronted with in reality. The gendering of care is further reinstated with fathers remaining invisible from the discourse.

2.1.6 Internalisation of caste-based deficit

While dominant groups sought out social distinction through middle-class educational behaviours, subordinated groups had little opportunity to access these. For many such families in Gajwa, socio-economic stratification, further enabled by state failure and marketisation, had led to the internalisation of a casteist social order. They referred to themselves as “*gavaar*” (illiterate/provincial), “uneducated”, and thus in need of assimilating dominant cultures such as being disciplined, as is taught in schools. Speaking about the family’s role in socialisation of children, a forty-year-old Mushahar mother remarked “in our community, most of us are illiterate, how can we teach anything?”

There was thus an undermining of the capacities of marginalised families to teach anything of value to their children. This is in spite of the fact that children were regularly seen to be engaged in activities such as makhana (fox nut) harvesting, fishing, weaving, tending to animals, farming and sibling care. These skills were generally regarded as arising out of a natural trajectory of socialisation, and economic necessity, and parents would prefer for their children to not have to continue with these. Hemlal, a Santhali father of four children, and an agricultural labourer, felt that his children should not have to face “*pita ka karm*” (father’s work/fate), and hoped that his children could escape the fate he was predisposed to through education.

As one thirty-five year old Santhali father in Gajwa, Sohan Soren, who had enrolled his son at a private school so that he may learn Hindi and English explained, ‘*Santhal dharm ka aadat chhoot jata hai toh bachche ache se shikshit hote hai*’ (Only once the children have become rid of Santhali traditions, can they get educated well). He added, ‘*Hindu dharm se padhayega tab bachcha ko shiksha milega*’ (If taught according to the Hindu tenets, only then the child will get educated). He made it evident that the Santhali language and culture were inadequate for creating future opportunities, for his children. Another Santhali parent, Sunil Hansda, much like Sohan Soren, during the course of a conversation, constantly referred to himself as “*dehati*” (villager) and “*majdur type*” (labourer type), implying that he was poor and underdeveloped, and hence also inept. Accessing dominant cultures and knowledges may be seen an aspirational decision made by this family but is also indicative of the ‘symbolic violence’ perpetuated by dominant framings of poverty, difference, and developmental norms, which leads to a rejection of one’s own capacities, and an erasure of community cultures.

2.1.7 Conversions and the politics of caste

The ongoing sanskritisation and conversion by nationalist groups and missionary ‘charities’ of the area were further indications of this process. This was evident from the assimilation of practices and rituals of dominant religions by disadvantaged groups, Santhal families in particular – like the Hindu purification and naming ceremony for children, *chatti puja*, pictures of Hindu deities or emblems of Christianity placed in their homes, and worshiping of gods from the dominant religions. For Sohan Soren, assimilation into the dominant Hindu fold was the only avenue out of poverty, and towards a dignified life. But there is also an observable dominance of the conservatism thrust upon the minority communities and their philosophies by religious factions. In the case of Gajwa, this has led to the disassociation of Santhal members from their traditional values, languages and sociocultural practices, replaced by dominant religions. This was emphasised in an interview with a retired Indian Railways guard from the Santhal community, and an activist engaged in restoring recognition for Santhals, who having attached himself to Hindu nationalist organisations is fighting for recognition of Santhal people as Hindu. In another family that had converted to Christianity, the father of a 35-year old man and a married daughter who was a wage- labourer explained that Christianity had showed them the “*sahi rasta*” (the right path), particularly emphasising on the practice of abstinence from alcohol, which was customarily served at all ceremonies and gatherings in Santhali traditions. The ASHA worker present negated this, asserting that the family had embraced Christian traditions since missionaries had told them that their children’s expenses would be taken care of, and “*bacchon ka bavishya ujjwal banayenge*” (will brighten the future of their children). This comment may be indicative of how Santhali families were navigating the situation somewhat more strategically rather than entirely discarding one’s own cultures and religious practices for new ones.

In conclusion, Gajwa village was seen to be governed strongly by unequal social relations, and this was reinforced within the functioning of state institutions. Education became a key site for not just mobility, but the sustenance of social distinctions. State inaction and marketisation in the education sector were seen to be exacerbating existing social inequalities.

2.2 State-community relations in Gudalur

2.2.1 Adivasis, forests and loss of livelihoods

Since independence, Tamil Nadu has had active regional and state governments, facilitated by a long history of local movements like the anti-caste Dravidian movement. Adivasi communities or Scheduled Tribes (STs), form large populations in the Seervayal and Chalikadu villages of the Gudalur block of the Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu. It is important to have a historical understanding of Adivasi communities in Gudalur so as to understand the current relationship that Adivasi communities have with the state as well as other non-Adivasi groups in Gudalur such as the BC (backward classes), MBC (most backward classes), forward castes, from Tamil and Malayalam speaking populations.

Customarily, the five Adivasi communities in Gudalur – Mullakurumbas, Bettakurumbas, Irulas, Kattunayakas and Paniyas inhabited the forests, in sparsely populated hamlets located around its hilly terrain. Distinctions between the groups are according to their traditional divisions of labour and specific occupations such as fishing or honey gathering (table 5.2). Social hierarchies have also formed between the communities, entrenched by stratifications linked to state and development interventions. Bettakurumbas and Mullakurumbas are seen to have greater economic and educational advantages. For instance, Bettakurumbas, around the Chalikadu anganwadi, predominantly occupied jobs within the forest department (as *mahouts*, overseers of conservation land or anti-poaching watchers). Accordingly, both communities were noted to be located closer to state institutions, living at the outskirts of the forest lands. Paniyas were employed as bonded labour during colonial times, and after Independence as agricultural labourers by land-owning communities of Gudalur such as the Mountaden Chettys (belonging to the MBC category). They remain the most economically disadvantaged amongst the tribal communities in Gudalur, followed by the Kattunayakas, as traditionally they have occupied more remote locations within forests that are harder to access.

Adivasi communities in Gudalur	Traditional occupations	Current occupations
Mullukurumba	Making bows and arrows	Landowning or agricultural workers
Bettakurumba	Making baskets	Anti-poaching watchers and mahouts; agricultural workers

Irula	Rat and snake catchers	Plantation and agricultural workers
Kattunayaka	Honey collectors	Plantation and agricultural workers
Paniya	Crab hunting and fishing	Plantation and agricultural workers

Table 3: Traditional and current occupations of Adivasi communities in Gudalur

As per a local NGO – Tribal Welfare in Gudalur (TWIG)’s documentation, these five Adivasi communities lived in, and relied on forests as a source of livelihood.⁵ Differentiation and hierarchies between groups were indicated through practices such as not allowing inter-tribe marriages, and also practices of untouchability such as Bettakurumbas and Mullukurumbas not allowing Paniyas and Kattunayaks inside their house, or not eating with them. Rajan, a member of TWIG, explained that while differences existed, different Adivasi communities largely functioned independent of each other. Yet the groups have commonalities with regards to forms of social organisation within which forests are of central prominence. For example, tribal groups had ‘kaavu’ or sacred groves, which are ‘core’ spots within the forest comprising of trees and often streams, around which several customs, leadership roles and practices of spiritual significance were organised. Some Adivasi groups, such as Bettakurumbas and Kattunayakas have common sacred groves, as well as common festivals. Forests were central not just for livelihoods and economic organisation, but also for social relations and community values.

With the introduction of the Forest Act during colonial rule, and successive government policies since, Adivasi communities have been displaced from their forest-based lives and livelihoods. While retaining a distinct socio-cultural identity, most have not been able to access opportunities to benefit from mainstream economic and educational systems, despite affirmative action policies by the state offered to them as Scheduled Tribes (ST). As discussed later, it is in many cases the undermining of their distinct forms of social organisation and knowledges which prevents this.

⁵ TWIG is a pseudonym we have used to refer to a local NGO working in Gudalur with Adivasi communities. See discussions on page 53 and 68 for more background on TWIG

2.2.2 Difference and the discourse of development

Denying the heterogeneity of these communities, Adivasis were mostly referred to as ‘paniya’ by non-Adivasi communities in the region, displaying little regard for the nuances of tribal identities. Further, dominant communities held discriminatory perceptions of Adivasi populations, marking them as ‘unclean’ or ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘lacking interest’ in education. Meghala, the anganwadi worker at Seervayal, informed us how parents from non-Adivasi communities also held such beliefs about the Paniya children, and wanted their children to eat and sleep separately from them, but did not make such distinctions when it came to Bettakurumba or Mullukurumba children. Her own interpretation of this followed from her observation of the latter as being dressed ‘neatly and cleanly’, while Paniya children did not dress properly, did not wear slippers, had unkempt hair, and lived in unhygienic conditions – a reflection of their poorer socio-economic positions, compared to the other Adivasi groups. Internal hierarchies among Adivasis also seem to be reproduced through the ECCE system, such as in the case of Bettakurumba children not attending an anganwadi centre because it was close to a Kattunayaka cremation ground.

While the anganwadi centres were operational (unlike those in Gajwa village in Bihar), there was still an active ‘othering’ of Adivasi communities by non-Adivasi populations. Nandini, a Chetty anganwadi worker at the Katukolli centre explained how Muslim and Christian parents did not wish to send their children to the centre anymore, stating “*Ivanga baashai apro palakatha ah enga pasanaga padichiduvanga*” (Our kids will learn their language and habits of the tribals), and were demanding a separate centre for their children. Meghala, another Chetty worker at Seervayal anganwadi centre, while pointing out unhygienic or unsafe living conditions of tribal families, spoke of how she was angered by it, but would attempt to engage with families. She provided instances of these observations such as Paniyar houses that had only tin sheets as roofs, and a time when she had seen a new born child in a Paniyar household sleeping in a room next to a dog and a wooden fuel stove in a poorly ventilated room. During a later conversation, she did admit to not allowing tribal families inside her house because they were dirty. While her anganwadi centre continued to function largely according to the norms, more subtle instances of exclusion were present. For instance, during a meeting of mothers in the centre, all the non-Adivasi mothers sat away from the one Adivasi mother, with no active efforts made to include her in the conversation, and she remained ignored during the entire interaction.

These instances are telling of the broader perception of Adivasis that existed in the community. Further, the frequent references to their ‘backwardness’ in relation to other groups is tied to the state’s development discourse, which seeks to assimilate tribal communities into ‘modern’ society through appropriate interventions. As narrated by a government health worker at an anganwadi centre, the district administration was aggressively undertaking sterilisation camps through which pregnant Adivasi women were to be identified and convinced into medically terminating their pregnancies. In the same conversation, an anganwadi worker remarked that forced sterilisation could be an option for such women, while the health worker declared that all Adivasi women should get sterilised once they had had two children. In this disturbing example, the active pursuit of the population planning by the state reveals the oppressive and coercive tactics employed as part of the state’s larger development agenda.

Schemes and programmes around other health related concerns, such as that of high infant and maternal mortality rates, though not as overtly oppressive, also conveyed little regard for structural and socio-cultural factors which continue to perpetuate poor health outcomes. TWIG noted that health issues among women came about as a consequence of loss of traditional diets that included nutritious fruits, tubers, mushrooms, leaves, meat and fish that were available in the forest. Having been cut off from the forest after the haphazard implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and moving into manual labour, diets were reduced to eating rice and chili paste twice a day – causing malnutrition and even leading to death during childbirth. Rajan along with Bhama, a Mullukurumba health worker at TWIG, also suggested that the rising cases of hypertension and diabetes may possibly be linked with the lifestyle changes and shift in diets towards large quantities of rice, which is provided for free under government ration schemes, as well as consumption of inexpensive processed food items. Rajan further explained how growing cases of Tuberculosis appeared to be linked to living conditions in the ‘box’ like houses constructed free of cost under government schemes, which had poor ventilation, and trapped moisture in the walls and roofs. Mental illness, depression in particular, has been another manifestation of this kind of drastic restructuring of lives away from the forest ecology as a central organising principle. Further, even legal provisioning such as the FRA, which is intended to grant certain rights to traditionally forest dwelling communities for using forest land, has suffered from uneven implementation and Adivasis are frequently wrongfully accused of encroaching on forest land or denied claims over their land. Importantly though, the prominent presence of the state in this context through the ‘modern’ institutions that they represent have permeated the lives of Adivasi communities in an all-encompassing way. Rajan

captured the resulting implications of this by pointing out how “there is no choice left anymore, there is no question of not going to school anymore”. He argues that “*the option of another way of life, whatever they had earlier, is now closing*”. This sums up how the changes introduced by the state have not only left tribal communities bereft of their traditional means of survival but in doing so have also explicitly or implicitly replaced their distinct ways of being. This alienates tribal communities not only from the very forests and lands integral to their everyday *lifeworlds* and sustenance but also their identity, knowledges, literacies and distinct formations.

2.2.3 Identity, culture, and priorities of development among Adivasi communities

There were fundamental points of conflict that Adivasi communities faced with ‘modern’ institutions as envisioned by the state. Though often painted in deficit by the state for not adequately planning for their futures by prioritising education, Adivasis have conceptualised the significance of time differently. Rather than a linear progression where one moves forward in time through the kinda of material and cultural 'improvements' valued by the dominant castes and classes, such as formal education, stable jobs, changes in patterns of dress, mannerisms and lifestyles, Rajan explained that Adivasis accord importance to their ancestors who inhabited the past. The focus then is on preserving the past instead of bringing about change, and consequently preserving the forest which symbolise the lives of their ancestors. The idea of space and place was another such important one, and came up in many different ways. Rajan explained how Adivasis had historically been very “territorial” and that social organisation was closely tied to geographies within the forest, and would determine how and where one could move around or conduct rituals and customs. The Adivasis currently inhabited small scattered settlements, all at large distances from each other, and some in remote parts. As another elderly Adivasi man pointed out, the space of the forest itself however was of central importance and this was not acknowledged by non-Adivasi communities who had no understanding of what it was like to live in and around one. He elaborated further that institutions like schools would tend to encourage children to move out of forests as a result, while others claimed that Adivasis were destroying forests by burning trees or exploiting resources, but that such a view only reflected their ignorance of how Adivasis actually protected forest land by living in them. He also added that freedom of mobility within forests was a crucial part of their lives, and that restricted spaces such as anganwadi centres did not allow for this kind of movement, and expected children to be seated in one place, in contrast to the village environment where children could move about freely and learn in the presence of adults who would take responsibility for them. The understanding of both time and space were closely associated with

the forest economy, which was seasonal, yet abundant, and thus required different kinds of planning with respect to time and space, to ensure survival and social reproduction of communities.

Further, in these spaces, conceptualisations of childhood and outcomes of children's development were seen to emerge in relation to the forest ecology. Learning was understood to take place through immersion and observation. In the words of one Adivasi man, "*thottu-unarndu kathukarango*" ([children] learn through touch and experience). He argued that children would follow parents and learn different kinds of skills, for example following their parents into the forest and observing how to collect firewood, whereas schools expected children to follow explicit instructions. Learning through this kind of socialisation was common, and festivals were also an important time for teaching skills such as honey gathering. It was not uncommon for children to prioritise these occasions over schooling routines, indicating the significance of community concepts and relationships.

There was also a high degree of autonomy afforded to children, through which they had the chance to explore the forest and gain knowledge about it. Young boys were commonly reported to run into the forest when they did not wish to attend schools, and spend the entire day by themselves. In the words of Rajan, "*nobody tells a child 'don't do this' [...] and that freedom to experiment with life around them is a very important thing*". This kind of exploration and navigation of complex terrain appeared to effect a different trajectory of development. Children as young as four were observed to be climbing coconut trees, or laying tiles on roofs, indicating advanced motor skills. Activities like these, and also those of collecting honey, gathering berries or catching crabs, which children engaged in freely in their natural environments, blurred distinctions between play and work. The work nonetheless formed an essential part of how labour was distributed in this forest-based economy, of which children were an integral component.

Other practices also foregrounded the interdependency of work and the shared value of labour as intrinsic to community life. This was brought out during a Tribal Development Council meeting with the district administrative head for instance, where women Adivasi representatives discussed their concerns around a livelihood scheme which provided funds to purchase raw materials and stitch traditionally embroidered shawls. The officials present were suspicious and inquired why the funds could not be directly paid as wages to individual workers, as the women explained that they preferred to distribute profits from sales amongst

all members of the *kuzhu* (weavers' group), even if not all members participated in stitching, since they contributed to other forms of work in the commune.

Decision making in general appeared to be a more collective process, which was observed at the outset of the research study, when permission for conducting field work had to be sought out at the community level, and was only granted after an extended deliberative process involving several community representatives. Historically as well, Adivasis have had tribal gram *sabhas* (village assembly) to internally discuss issues, independent of the state instituted panchayat gram *sabhas* for local self-governance.

An Adivasi community member explained how this form of community-based unity was discouraged in the dominant mode of thinking which tell children “*tani taniya vaango*” (come alone), emphasising that schools valued and inculcated individualism. Some others also felt that not only should formal modes of education incorporate community values and culture, but that the purpose of such teaching should also be oriented in a manner which could better serve community interests. The value of education was often articulated in relation to this, as was illustrated by one Adivasi man explaining that without education “*oru vishayam teriyadu*” (won't know about anything), giving the example of their ancestors getting cheated of their land because they did not know how to read and write. He continued that it was important to maintain unity and support within the Adivasi communities in order to prevent such incidents, and to create solidarity to further the community's cause by focusing on their specific problems. Especially in the context of loss of rights over forest land, this kind of mobilisation was seen as necessary to bridge the gap created by modern institutions of the state and the economy, and Adivasi socio-cultural and political identity.

2.2.4 Gender and family structure

Gender relations and family structures in Gudalur also highlighted patterns of socio-cultural organisation that were different in many ways from dominant Hindu modes, though these also appeared to be undergoing changes. A prominent observation in Gudalur, which may also be linked to the high sex ratio of 1034 females per 1000 males, was the preference for girl children over boys. Though these Adivasi communities were not traditionally matrilineal, it was reiterated in multiple conversations with Adivasi families that girls were preferred because they took care of their parents during old age, while boys were often irresponsible and did not care about such things. An elderly woman from the Adivasi community explained that girls look after their parents when they grow up, even if she gets married to someone else in the

community, while men acquire drinking habits and never listened to their parents. While there was no specific custom that mandated that women stay back at their parents houses after marriage, one woman was of the view that “*ponnuku akkare irundha appa-amma ode irupa*” (if the girl cared about her mother-father she would stay with them). It was commonly observed that married daughters were staying at their parents’ houses, but Seetha, a member of the Kattunayaka community said this was not a traditional practice, and was happening of late because men do not do anything – they neither study nor work.

Differences in early socialisation existed, as in Gajwa, where boys and girls were considered ‘naturally’ different. Parimala, a Kattunayaka mother of two children in Chalikadu, insisted that men and women were equal, but that “*a son is a son and a daughter is a daughter*”. While young girls, according to her, would help with household chores such as cleaning, cooking and washing, boys would not do so. When asked why boys would not, she said that boys do not listen even if you ask them to do things, and go off to play. She also described that this was new, since earlier the family had worked as a unit, going into the forest together to collect honey or tame elephants, but that these practices were now changing because of the advent of education and the importance of ‘knowing things’.

The constant construction of boys and men as irresponsible may be thought of as a consequence of the changes brought about by education to traditional gender roles. As also noted by Jeffrey’s (2010) research on young middle-class male youth in rural India, the lack of employment opportunities in spite of an education pushes young men into an indefinite period of ‘timepass’, or long periods of waiting, which is seen to precipitate local forms of cultural mobilisation and political strategising. The unavailability of work opportunities and the subsequent periods of limbo without employment in the ‘modern’ economy, or alternatives to return to forest-based livelihoods would imply that men were not seen as contributing in any useful way to households.

Even within these ‘traditional’ livelihood practices, a degree of differentiation existed for men and women. Rajan, from TWIG, explained that while men were involved in hunting, such as using the bow and arrow, or the setting up of small traps to catch animals, it was women who led the trip for gathering forest produce, which contributed to a larger share of food collection. He said women were often still seen gathering in groups, carrying long spear-like instruments with which they dug up tubers. As a result, their knowledge of the forest was excellent.

Rajan further explained that in the Paniya community, women were considered more powerful than men – with men moving into the women’s house after marriage. He said women also held an important position in the Bettakurumba community. This authority, in his opinion, could also be observed as being physically embodied by the women in these communities, with women often walking in front of men, and asserting control through their body language.

While the above instances point towards some degree of differentiation between the roles of women and men, in contrast to Gajwa, the role of women as natural caregivers for children was not emphasised. Though women were seen to be taking care of young children, it was stressed upon in multiple interactions with community members that grandparents traditionally played the role of looking after young children and socialising them into community life and teaching them history, culture, values and rituals, since the parents were out for work for a large part of the day. This was also observed during visits to Adivasi hamlets, with young children seen to be left in the care of elderly members of the village. Rajan noted that for Adivasi children attending Padasalai school, it was the grandparents who regularly dropped off children and picked them up from school, attended the parent-teacher meetings, and took decisions for young children. In another conversation with mothers of children attending the Chalikadu anganwadi, they asserted that all village and family members, including mothers, fathers and grandparents, participated in childcare.

One of the effects of the expansion of education, as narrated by Rajan, has been on the role of grandparents as caretakers. Though he spoke of it anecdotally, and it would be difficult to ascribe a direct causal link, he noted that with young children being expected to spend a lot of their time away in school, grandparents were increasingly experiencing a sense of isolation, which may be one of the reasons for the growing number of cases of depression among the elderly.

Customs related to marriage, within which inter-tribe marriages were forbidden, was another practice affected by these shifts. Though boys marrying girls from a tribe with lower status was accepted after purification rituals, girls by and large were not allowed to marry boys from a lower tribal status. These patterns seemed to be undergoing changes, with instances observed of inter-tribe marriages, as well as cases of women getting married to men from non-Adivasi communities. While some families seemed to accept this, others did not approve, and felt that education had a role to play in disrupting traditional practices. Sushma, the Bettakurumba anganwadi worker at Chalikadu explained how girls were increasingly not being allowed to go

outside the village for higher education since they would fall in love with men who were not part of their tribe and elope with them. As explained by a Bettakurumba mother, Aswini, after puberty girls were restricted from having any kind of contact with men. It was unclear whether this had always been the case, or whether this was linked to concerns around the marriage of girls.

Aside from socio-cultural practices, fear was another reason behind preventing such interactions. A Paniya great-grandmother of 3 children who were attending the Padasalai NGO school described how boys could stay out by themselves for long, but girls could not be allowed to do so because it was unsafe for them. The aunt of these children however was of the view that education was altering these behaviours, and now even girls would be seen alone unaccompanied by their brothers or fathers, though she did not approve of this. Both said that when they were younger, they would not be allowed out by themselves, the fear of outsiders and the lack of knowledge of “bhashay” or language acting as major barriers. This articulation of fear then is not simply because women were considered more vulnerable to danger, but is also linked to the perceived threat of new or unfamiliar cultures. This fear was of non-Adivasi persons was also more generally expressed, as a consequence of Adivasi communities having for long been closed off from interaction with outsiders. The stereotypical representation of Adivasi communities as being meek and subdued has also been claimed to arise from this characterisation, with one TWIG document explaining their identity and character ‘as slinking through cities silent and quiet in fear’, after a long history of suppression by colonial and postcolonial governments.

Unlike the case of Gajwa, parents from Adivasi communities did not communicate differences between boys and girls in planning for their educational or work trajectories. They spoke of the need to educate their sons and daughters, and did not associate these with differentiated job roles for them. Concerns around the lack of employment opportunities in general were more pronounced, with one Adivasi father lamenting how even after going to the local government school, his daughter was still having to do coolie work. In another instance, the field researcher had the chance to interact with three girls in a Paniya settlement who had all completed an ITI degree but were unable to find any jobs, and were attempting to get the help of their college for the same reason.

Though it was not possible to obtain a full understanding of traditional conceptualisations of gender roles and relations among Adivasi communities, what was evident was that changes had

been brought about due to increasing contact with non-Adivasi communities and state institutions such as schools, or new kinds of jobs. Institutional availability of employment opportunities though was often gendered – for example the forest department in Chalikadu employed men as anti-poaching watchers, and women for clearing forests. Women were over-represented in nursing jobs as well, as is the broader trend in the country. There was a massive wage gap in agricultural coolie work, which both men and women engaged in, with women earning only 200 rupees a day as compared to the 500 rupees that men were paid. Such forms of institutionalised inequality would no doubt hinder women’s mobility as the Adivasi community is increasingly forced to rely on non-forest-based livelihoods.

2.2.5 Community relations for political engagement

The Nilgiris district has seen efforts towards community mobilisation, with several civil society organisations such as TWIG working in the region around issues of livelihoods, forest rights, ecological conservation and preservation of tribal cultures and identity. During our field observations, we had the chance to witness the active engagement of multiple Adivasi groups with the state during a meeting at the District Collector’s office, where about two hundred people representing differing tribal groups had gathered in an auditorium to raise their issues in front of her. These ranged from discussions around payment to Adivasi women’s self-help group, reporting on sanctioning and delay in building of new housing for the tribal communities and opening of *ashramshalas* or hostels, to issues around the FRA (2006).

Against state efforts to integrate tribal communities into ‘modern’ society and the consequent changes this brings about in traditional livelihoods and forms of organisation among Adivasi communities, community mobilisation was viewed as critical to enabling stronger representation of Adivasi concerns. Organisations such as TWIG, which largely comprised of Adivasi members from different groups were seen to be working towards more expansive ideas of development that could link state policy to local issues of land, labour and livelihood. Collective action and self-governance through coming together of Adivasi communities, despite internal differences and hierarchies, becomes one of the avenues towards political representation. Adivasi representatives in TWIG echoed this sentiment, speaking about the need for different Adivasi groups to come together in spite of their cultural differences, in order to more strongly advocate for their common rights.

Chapter 3: Marketisation and Governance of ECCE

This chapter examines the structuring and governance of ECCE institutions in the two field sites in Bihar and Tamil Nadu by describing the nature of demand for ECCE and available provisioning by state and non-state actors. While reflecting upon how the sector has come to be highly privatised, it notes the role of the state in mediating the consequences of marketisation of ECCE through the differing roles it plays in both sites.

3.1 State ECCE provisioning and the neglect of preschool education

While free and compulsory education for children aged between 6-14 years of age is a fundamental right in India under the Right to Education Act, early childhood education remains unenforceable by law.⁶ Though the ICDS is designed to offer a comprehensive and holistic set of child development services, historically it is the health and nutritional components which have received priority in state planning and funding. In 2018, supplementary nutrition provided to children and pregnant and lactating women under the scheme continued to receive the largest share of funds from the central government, accounting for over 50% of the planned budgetary allocations. In comparison, the pre-school education component, which includes costs for curricular material consisting of PSE kits as well as training for ECE provisioning, is one of the smallest components, allocated under 4% of the total budget, despite showing a 67% increase in allocation from the previous financial year (Kapur & Shukla, 2019). While supplementary nutrition is planned according to per child cost norms, and stands at 8 rupees per child per day for a total of 300 days in a year, the share for pre-school education is a fixed amount of 5000 rupees per centre.

The National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy 2013-14 (NECCEP) notes the need to focus on all domains of child development in the ECCE years, with the associated National ECCE curricular framework laying down principles for developmentally appropriate educational practices to be followed in ECCE institutions. While these norms are comprehensive in their approach and scope for child development, offering detailed guidelines for the model of non-formal instruction to be followed in the early years, they are not mandatorily enforceable in government or private ECCE centres, including in anganwadi centres. Aside from the lack of financial resources for preschool education, anganwadi centres

⁶ The draft National Education Policy 2019 proposes to extend the Right to Education to children aged between 3 and 6 for three years of preschool education.

also lack adequately trained personnel to impart the kind of holistic and developmentally sensitive education that is envisioned in the policy and curricular framework.

Within such a context of state planning and spending for early childhood education in ICDS centres, observations from our field sites also reflected the lack of emphasis on the preschool component of the programme. This was evident in not just the functioning of the anganwadi centres themselves, but also in how they were largely perceived by parents to be merely ‘feeding centres’ in both sites.

3.2 Anganwadi centres and parental perceptions of education

Anganwadi centres in Gajwa village in Bihar were observed to be dysfunctional with respect to all components. Corruption in all levels of governance of the ICDS was a regular complaint voiced by members of the village, which also affected the supervision and monitoring of the centres, as well as the ability for village members to seek redress. Additionally, caste hierarchies and discrimination strongly governed inter-personal interactions, superseding norms laid out for the functioning of the centres. Anganwadi centres in Gudalur, in contrast, were seen to be relatively well functioning, at least with respect to the regular provisioning of food under the supplementary nutrition component. Monitoring and supervision were also seen to take place regularly. Pre-school education was observed to be taking place in several instances, even if irregular, in Gudalur, unlike anganwadi centres in Gajwa.

Regardless, parents in both sites enrolled children in anganwadi centres, since it was considered necessary to have their children’s names in the register so as to be able to access government primary schooling at the age of 6, even though there was no rule mandating this. Importantly however, anganwadi centres were not considered by parents to be a site for school relevant learning. Parents in Gajwa felt that no education took place in anganwadi centres, and it was merely for ‘timepass’ purposes. Even parents of children attending the relatively better functioning anganwadi centres in Gudalur felt that the purpose of these centres was limited to socialising the children into learning how to sit and interact with peers, in preparation for formal schooling where actual education was seen to be taking place.

The strong sentiment of the inadequacy of state-run anganwadi centres to prepare children for formal schooling was expressed succinctly by Asha Devi, a local level ICDS official as:

“shiksha par zyada dhyan diya hai sarkar ne, mahatvpoorn toh school poorv shiksha mein hai ki chhote bachche ka school mein baithne ke liye, ek pencil pakadne, unko sab kuch seekhna bahut kathin hota ha kyunki bade gharo ke bachche 3 saal poora hoga nahi ki vo LKG UKG nursery mein padhne lagta hai” (The government has focused more on education, but preprimary education is what is important. For young children to be able to sit in schools, hold a pencil, for them to learn everything is very difficult, because children from well off households are not even 3 by the time they start studying in LKG, UKG or nursery.)

Asha Devi not only captures the commonly held opinion of the lack of educational services at Anganwadi centres, but also draws attention to the better resourced families who seek out alternative forms of preschool education for their children. In this manner, the design of the preschool component of the ICDS, though embedded in normatively appropriate educational practices such as informal and play based learning, were not fulfilling the parental expectations or school-based requirements of adequately readying children for competitive formal schooling from the primary years.

While elementary education is guaranteed under the Right to Education (RTE), the form in which preschool education, which is considered foundational for later school success, had been planned by the state, was not seen from field observations to be guaranteeing an equal start. As a result, there was a turn to private provisioning for preschool services, though to varying degrees, and with varied consequences in both sites. It is worth mentioning here that the recently released draft National Education Policy of 2019 (dNEP) proposes to extend the RTE to children in the preschool age group, i.e. children aged 3-6 years. It further plans to extend the ECCE age group to 8 years, integrating early years of schooling with the first two years of primary school, in order to ensure stronger foundational learning for young children. While these are significant changes, the dNEP does not address issues of marketisation in ECCE, which, as the following sections discuss, are a continuing cause of inequity in ECCE.

3.3 Private ECCE provisioning

Private services are the second largest provider of ECCE services in India. With no regulatory mechanism or authority to oversee the functioning of private ECCE institutions, it has been projected as an attractive sector for private, profit-driven investments. While urban spaces are

dominated by franchise models of education, and are witnessing rapid growth, about 90% of private preschools are estimated to be in the unorganised sector⁷. Low fee budget school models extend into the pre-primary sections, with the District Information System for Education (DISE) data for 2013-14 showing that 54.8% of private schools in Bihar and 93.8% private schools in Tamil Nadu have attached pre-primary sections (Paul et al., 2016). The figures for both states are much higher than the all India figure of 43.26%. Coupled with stand-alone pre-primary schools which can be in varied forms such as kindergartens, playschools, preparatory schools and nurseries, the estimated enrolments in private preschools is around 10 million, though the figure may vary since many such school are unregistered (Kaul and Sankar 2009). It has been noted that the lack of a regulatory framework for preschools has led to not only inequitable access and quality, but also the downward extension of primary schooling into preschool years resulting in developmentally inappropriate practices with potentially harmful consequences for young children (MWCD, 2013; Kaul and Sankar 2009).

From our field observations, the existence of multiple private preschools which were catering to the socioeconomically better off populations were seen to create a dual system of early schooling, as is the case in elementary schools, with anganwadis accessed only by the most marginalised populations. Especially in the case of Korha, where anganwadi centres were observed to be largely dysfunctional, the distinction between anganwadi centres and private mechanisms for preschool education become pronounced. As articulated by an elderly man from the Muslim community in reference to government schools,

“aur jo kuch padh le vo yeh gareeb bachchon ka hai yeh school. Chalte firate kuch kar le” (And whatever they may learn, the school is for poor children. They end up doing something as they go about the course of their lives).

3.3.1 Expansion of private ECCE and parental demand in Korha

The proliferation of private schools in Korha, as evident from the three located at a mere distance of a few hundred metres from each other as one enters Gajwa village, though meant to cater to lower income groups, could only be afforded by middle-caste OBC families. Even for such families, they often spent close to half their earnings on private schooling. Manish

⁷ <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/organised-players-strengthen-presence-in-pre-school-market/article24323820.ece>

Bhagat, for instance, sent his 8-year-old daughter Naina Kumari to AJ International School, while his 5 year old daughter attended a government primary school, and 4 year old did not yet attend any centres. He reported an annual income of 30-40,000 rupees per annum, of which he had spent 3000 rupees on books, shoes, uniforms and notebooks for Naina, and spent 1000 rupees per month for her tuition and transportation fees. Upon asking how he could afford this kind of education while being engaged in agricultural labour, he responded

“ab zaroorat hai, jaise 10 rupay kamate hai, 5 rupaya kharcha, 5 rupaya bachate hai, usi mein maintain karte hai” (it is necessary, for instance one earns 10 rupees, spends 5 rupees, saves 5 rupees and uses that to maintain finances).

Other parents similarly opined that schooling was a necessary investment, and they would manage from here and there (*“idhar-udhar”*) in order to finance it.

English language teaching and formal education such as early literacy and numeracy provided by private preschools, even if developmentally inappropriate, were considered by parents to be important skills for young children to acquire an early head start. Mukhabir Mansoori, a Muslim father of a 6 year old son and 13 year old daughter, both enrolled in private schools, felt that private schools, unlike government schools, strengthened the basics such as Science, Maths and English skills, providing an analogy of the importance of having a strong *“neenv”* (base) in the construction of a building. He also stated that children should start going to school early, by the age of 4-5 years, in order to be able to compete.

The relative advantages of private schooling were articulated in several other ways which revealed the implicit assumption that they provided skills that were more relevant not only for later school success, but also social and economic mobility. For example, Kiran, an OBC teacher at the Covenant Private School, drawing a monthly salary of 4000 rupees, explained that parental demand for private preschool education came from the absence of nursery classes in government schools, and the importance of this stage of schooling for preparation towards higher classes. She also said teaching levels were increased in order to prepare children better for first standard, by introducing letters in pre-nursery itself, and then words and sentences in upper and lower kindergarten (UKG and LKG respectively), which were all levels within the pre-primary years. Parents also stressed on the importance of learning English and upon asking what was taught in schools would share instances of children coming home and reciting poems,

alphabets and numbers. Bittoo, belonging to the Muslim community, said enrolling his six-year-old daughter Mehar in a private residential school had led to immediate progress in the form improved speaking skills, and the confidence to perform on stage, which he characterised as openness and boldness. Another common benefit was explained by Kamala, belonging to the OBC community, who had recently enrolled her 5 year old son in a private school, and had a younger 3 year old daughter attending the anganwadi. This she explained as teaching of new ‘sanskaar’ or culture, that was different from that of the village. Kamala also felt that the role of anganwadis was to teach children how to sit, and prepare them for schooling. Actual schooling in the form of reading and writing were seen to take place only in private preschools.

The director of AJ International School, informed us that in order to attract parents to private schools, they would often admit children without an upfront payment of the entire fee amount. He complained however that many parents were often unable to pay the fees even after six months, and would end up pulling their children out of one private school, and admitting them in another. Despite the inability to afford private schooling, this trend betrays the urgency with which parents desired what they perceived as quality education in private schools.

The financial burden of pre-primary education borne by families in Gajwa was a major indicator of the pressure they felt to invest in what they perceived as quality education. This was echoed by a ward representative during a local body meeting who explained the preference for private schooling stating

“Aakhir jo suvidhaye wahan hai agar woh anganwadi mein ho, kitna achha hota. Aur hum apne bachcho ko itne paise na lagakar private school ki jagah anganwadi bhej rahe hote” (After all, the provisions and conveniences which are offered there, if brought to the anganwadi, would be so good. And then we would not have to spend so much money to send our children to private schools, they could attend anganwadis instead).

A prominent feature of our field site in Korha was the active private tuition market, which most parents who could not afford the high costs of private schools, would rely on. These classes were usually conducted by local youth who took this up as part time work. Hemant, belonging to the Santhal (belonging to the ST) community, who ran a tuition centre at home for example, also worked part time in brick making, and as an accountant. He had completed high school, and taught children aged as young as 4 years old, up to 10 years of age. The fee for such tuition

ranged from 100-200 rupees for primary school aged children, and around 50 rupees for younger children. Similar to private school classrooms, only repetitive rote-learning and completion of homework was observed to be taking place in these tuition classes. Often these centres were seen by parents as places to help children finish the homework that was given in school, and to keep children engaged in studies through the day.

Chaya, the OBC mother of seven children, who were all attending either anganwadi centres or government schools explained that private schools charge too much, so she sends her children for tuition, noting that

“bachche school mein toh padhte nahi, toh phir tuition hi lagana padhta hai, jisase kuch toh padh sake bachche” (children do not learn anything in [government] schools, so we have to put them into tuition, so they can learn something).

Since the anganwadi did not provide books and slates, aside from private tuitions, parents were observed to be making whatever little financial investments they could in children’s education, such as in the form of buying locally published books for alphabets and numbers.

Along with material constraints, choices around schooling also involved difficult decisions and emotional anxieties. Bittu, for instance, lamented about how he felt conflicted about shifting his six-year-old daughter Mehar from a private school nearby, to a private hostel, as Mehar would often cry about living away from home. At the same time, he felt this was something he had to do in order to ensure that she could stay away from the village environment and acquire good quality, English medium education.

3.3.2 Active State Provisioning and Private ECCE in Gudalur

Private provisions for preschooling as attached sections in private schools were present in Gudalur, and witnessed a similar socio-economic divide in terms of participation. There were negligible rates of enrolments by children belonging to the Adivasi communities in private preschools due to their high costs. For example, in St. Thomas school in Seervayal, where most children belonged to the MBC⁸ category, and only one girl from the Adivasi community was enrolled in the pre-primary section.

⁸ MBC or Most Backward Classes is a category in Tamil Nadu, and comes under OBC or Other Backward Classes.

Of three mothers interviewed at St. Thomas school, two of them, Rahini and Rohini, belonged to the Nair forward caste, and had completed their education up to the level of a nursing diploma. A third mother that we interviewed, Casey, was a Christian and had studied up till 10th standard. They broke down the costs involved for their children enrolled in the UKG class as approximately 9000 rupees per year for tuition fees, 1500 rupees for purchasing books, 1000 rupees for two sets of uniforms, 575 rupees for a tracksuit, 250 rupees for sweaters, 100 rupees for the belt, 50 rupees for the school diary, and so on. They spoke of hobby classes in which they could enrol their children from primary school onwards upon the payment of an additional fee. They also stated that St. Thomas actually charged a lower fee compared to some of the private schools in the main town, because of which they had opted for this.

Aside from the high fee charged at St. Thomas, the mothers also implicitly expressed the role of the private school as distinguishing them from other families that opted for government schools which were seen to be catering to lower caste or Adivasi populations. While conceding that government schools were improving in quality, they stressed that they would not send their children to such schools since children attending these did not ‘dress neatly’ or ‘know things’, and their parents lacked basic awareness regarding the necessity of education.

While private preschooling in Gudalur was also seen to embed dominant caste-class markers and shape parental aspirations towards such schooling, in the context of a well-functioning anganwadi and government school system, there was a lower degree of proliferation of private school as compared to Korha. The urgency and pressure which was observed among families in Korha was absent in the case of Gudalur, and parents in general reported positive feedback on anganwadis.

Iniyaval, a 35-year-old woman belonging to the Bettakurumba community in Chalikadu village, had four children - four year old Kariyan who was attending the anganwadi, and 3 older children in 4th, 7th and 9th standard, who had all attended the anganwadi as well prior to joining the government school. She had studied up till 7th standard, and her husband, an elephant mahout, up till 5th standard. They had a household income of around 10,000 rupees per month. She was of the opinion that anganwadi centres were important for children before they attended schools because they prepared children by teaching them how to socialise with other children, make friends, and learn basic letters in Tamil. Other parents similarly expressed that the anganwadi centres prepared children for schooling by teaching them basic discipline and socialisation skills, and were satisfied by the manner in which children were taken care of in

these centres, and nutritious food provided. Responses such as these indicate how parental perception of the role of early childhood institutions aligns with what is largely considered developmentally appropriate for young children.

Though parents like Iniyaval, despite their satisfaction with anganwadi centres, did express a desire to send their children to private schools if they could have afforded it, since they were seen as offering better teaching services, some parents felt otherwise. Parimala, a Kattunayaka woman from Chalikadu, had two daughters - 10-year-old Meenakshi enrolled in 5th standard in the government primary school, and 2-year-old Deepika attending the anganwadi. She described to us how she had initially enrolled Meenakshi in a private school's LKG class, but was extremely unhappy with it since they had once locked her up in a bathroom for accidentally urinating in her clothes. She had immediately withdrawn Meenakshi from the LKG and enrolled her in the government school, explaining emphatically how she thought it was unreasonable for the schools to expect such young children to be able to take care of themselves.

The reasons presented by parents for not sending their children to anganwadi centres were of a different nature in Gudalur, and revolved around space and distance. While for some, the centre was situated too far away to access, especially in context of hilly, unsafe terrain and scattered settlements, others felt that the physical one-room structure of an anganwadi itself was too confined for children belonging to tribal communities, who were used to freedom of mobility in their forest-based settlements.

Due to such differences in the value system among tribal families with regards to formal spaces of learning as alienating for their children, there was a lower reliance on, and urgency with which parents aspired towards private preschooling.

3.4 Variations in non-state ECCE provisioning and implications for quality

3.4.1 The NGO model and its challenges

In Gudalur, Tribal Welfare in Gudalur (TWIG), a non-governmental organisation was working on attempting to bridge the gaps that arose in government provisioning due to a lack of adequate contextualisation of their design towards the needs of the tribal communities. They ran a school, Padasalai, for tribal children in the pre-primary and primary ages, and had made several provisions in order to make it more relevant to tribal livelihoods, and responsive to their specific needs. Some such efforts were visible in the participation of members of the tribal community in teaching and management of the school, classrooms that emulated large, open spaces that

the children were accustomed to, and the inclusion of aspects of tribal culture such as songs, dance and crafts in their curriculum. These features were incorporated into a developmentally age-appropriate style of curriculum and pedagogy, which sought to impart mainstream education to the historically marginalised tribal community through a culturally sensitive and relevant design. Such a model is an example of non-state participation in schooling which attempted to work in tandem with the state in its stated policy objectives of providing children inclusive, equitable, quality education.

In spite of this however, it is the RTE Act, a state policy which is seen to hamper the work of such kinds of small scale, alternative programmes. Uniform standardised requirements under the Act, such as minimum teacher qualifications or standardised curriculum and assessment patterns often infringe upon the capacity of organisations to innovate or make beneficial provisions such as hiring locally trained teachers or including curricular inputs which young children can relate to, and contribute positively to their learning environment (Ramdas, 2013). This issue becomes even more pronounced in the case of extremely marginalised populations, such as tribal communities, whose position of disadvantage in mainstream education gets reproduced through dominant modes of schooling through a neglect of the diversity of conditions, aspirations and cultural knowledge of these communities in educational planning (ibid.).

3.4.2 Commercialisation of education

As a stark contrast to this, private schools in Korha which were openly seen to be flouting RTE norms, were actually seen to be flourishing in the context of an ineffective state and an unregulated market. Parental aspirations, choices and expectations within a context of constraint and a highly marketised schooling scenario served as avenues for private institutions to capitalise on these, without necessarily paying attention to quality standards. The private schools observed lacked basic infrastructure, and did not follow student-teacher ratio norms, resulting in overcrowding and age-inappropriate groupings in classrooms. Further, while curriculum in itself was developmentally inappropriate (as further elaborated in chapter 4), teaching-learning activities were observed to be limited to rote memorisation and completion of homework. Corporal punishment was frequently used to discipline children in these schools. Interviews at two of the private schools revealed that the top management were not even aware of the RTE provision of reservation of 25% of seats for socio-economically disadvantaged students.

Further, services provided were oriented around viewing the parents as ‘customers’ of the schools, and thus sought to appease them even if this entailed a reduction in quality. The director of AJ International School informed us that even though the Bihar State board curriculum was of superior quality, the association of the state government with multiple scams had led to an atmosphere of distrust of State certification, so they prescribed textbooks by private publishers in order to attract more parents.

He also informed us of how another one of the strategies to attract parents to schools was to employ teachers from outside the local area, places such as Nepal and West Bengal, because these ‘outsiders’ would be considered more impressive by parents. The director admitted how these teachers had to paid higher salaries, alongside having to make arrangements for their accommodation and food.

While in the first case, there is a lack of faith in their government and all things associated with it, the second brings forth an unquestioning belief in the inherent credibility and superiority of a novel, foreign presence. Both examples appear to convey a sense of inadequacy in the self, or in the community at large and this is an insecurity among families that the private school managements were profiting from.

Practices that reveal an overt disregard for children’s education, in order to constantly keep parents satisfied, also extended into classroom pedagogies. Kiran, a preschool teacher at Covenant Private School, while telling off a 6-year-old student in her class for already having finished the homework given for the next day, commented

“Bachche ki hoshiyari dekhiye. Abhi hi kar liya homework. Isake papa aayenge aur hame bolenge ki homework hi nahi diya” (“Look at the child trying to be clever. He has finished his homework now itself. Now his father will come and complain to us that we have not given him homework”).

She then went on to punish the child by giving him extra homework and asking him to do it twice over.

The nexus of control that private institutions have over parents becomes evident in instances of private school teachers recommending that children attend additional tuition classes in order to be able to finish the homework that the schools themselves prescribe. Some teachers were also conducting private tuition classes after school hours. This kind of control of the private sector

was also visible in another account shared by the above mentioned director about how he was planning on meeting up with 7-8 private schools in the locality to pass a resolution in order to disallow children from gaining admission into a new private school without having cleared dues in a previous one. The motive behind this was to collectively cut the losses of private schools.

These trends amply indicate the susceptibility of such an education system to a profit-driven private nexus of power, without much regard for the choices that parents may wish to make, or the educational trajectory of the children involved. A district level ICDS official remarked that private schools were simply functioning as businesses and not serving the society, by manipulating parents to send their children to schools through the lure of an English medium education. Striking in this comment, which places the blame of inequitable education on the private sector, is the failure to recognise the role of the State in the creation and perpetuation of the very same system.

3.4 State and non-state relations in ECCE

The consequences of both state policy and state action are thus seen to have significant consequences for the functioning of non-state or private ECCE provisioning in both sites.

In Korha block, it is state inaction and a lack of emphasis on regulation through policy which is seen to pave the way for rampant and exploitative commercialisation of education. With the lack of alternative avenues for ECCE, parental demand is driven by basic markers of accountability in exchange for their investments, and perceptions of appropriate preschool education is also shaped by existing private providers and their practices. In Gudalur, an effective state and functioning state ECCE institutions are seen to reduce pressures on parents to rely on private sector services. With functional anganwadi centre and government schools which provide basic provisioning, parental demand for private ECCE provisioning is much lower, and the nature of parental expectations is oriented differently. Parental concerns revolve around the quality of the educational component in the form of formal literacy, and the contextualisation of services to cater better to the needs of the Adivasi population. It is however also the rigidity of policy norms which deter state institutions, as well as non-state schools such as Padasalai, from providing more contextualised services.

Regardless of implementation however, the design of the educational component of the ICDS and the national ECCE policy do not align with the realities of the later years of schooling as

experienced by most families from our field sites. Schooling is largely seen as a means to acquire the necessary skills to participate in a competitive job market, especially for the socially and economically disadvantaged families that we interacted with in our field sites. Parental expectations from ECCE and the shaping of private ECCE provisioning are thus strongly influenced by what is expected from later levels of schooling. Norms of developmentally appropriate educational practices in the state ECCE policy and curriculum do not address such realities of, or systemic challenges of later levels of schooling and how they are currently structured and implemented. The integration of ECCE with successive years of schooling without the current preference towards the trend of downward extension of formal schooling into the early years would perhaps require a further engagement of ECCE policy with the manner in which the goals of schooling are conceptualised at large.

Chapter 4: ECCE curriculum and children's development

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the curricular and pedagogic practices of the different ECCE models observed within our field sites. With ECCE largely being institutionalised, childcare and its associated knowledges have been shifted out from the private domain of the family, to the public domain of formal schools and childcare centres (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). This has significant implications for the development of 'responsive' models of ECCE, as formal, institutionalised provisions have mainly drawn on the disciplinary knowledges of developmental psychology in shaping their practices, rather than from families and communities associated with the child.

In the current context, two important principles guide the practice of ECCE worldwide. The first, termed as 'developmentally appropriate practice' (DAP) is based on the stage theory of development which has identified critical periods /milestones of development across the different domains of physical/motor, cognitive/intellectual and social-emotional. While DAP frameworks have been criticised for narrowing and universalising children's development, later frameworks have accounted for the role played by social, cultural and geographical factors that influence development, but have continued to be reductive by tying goals of development with economic productivity to be achieved through schooling, central to which is the idea of 'readiness for school'.

Conceptualisations of 'school readiness' measure what children should know and do in order to be able to enter school and be ready to learn (UNICEF, 2012). While DAP frameworks denounce the early introduction of formal learning due to their perceived detrimental effects on young children, developmentally appropriate expectations for school readiness emphasise the development of pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills (e.g., identification of shapes, colours, numbers, etc), along with the stimulation required for the development of motor and socio-emotional abilities, required for academic learning. The former sets of skills include gross and fine motor skills, while the latter include behaviours such as sitting tolerance, the ability to pay attention and communicate effectively.

While guidelines for structuring early childhood learning environments on contextualised principles of DAP and school readiness abound within policy and research frameworks, including the National Early Childhood Care and Education Curricular Framework

(NECCECF) in India, ECCE institutions observed within our research hardly converged with these standards. Further, parental aspirations and expectations of ECCE institutions also differed significantly from these accounts. In the following sections, we discuss the curriculum and practices observed across three models – state-run ICDS centres, low-cost private schools, and one NGO-run school, and examine the nature of provisions available within the local contexts of our field sites.

4.2 Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Centres

Five anganwadis (two in the Nilgiris and three in Katihar), were observed across our field sites in Tamil Nadu and Bihar. At the outset, it should be noted that while the ICDS programme is a centrally-sponsored programme of the Government of India (GoI), individual state governments are responsible for its implementation. Thus, ICDS services vary widely between the states, based on availability of additional funds and administrative efficiencies.

The preschool education (PSE) programme is one component of the six services provided under the ICDS, as stated before. This, however, receives minimal budgetary provisions, mainly for the procurement of preschool kits and training of anganwadi workers (see chapter 2; and also CBPS-UNICEF, 2017; CBPS, 2018 for a more detailed analysis of the budget available for PSE). According to the guidelines of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), PSE is to be offered for a total of 3-4 hours a day, with activities planned to suit pre-school aged children's short attention spans of 15-20 minutes (refer National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy [NECCEP] and National Early Childhood Care and Education Curricular framework [NECCECF]). The NECCECF also specifies the use of play and a mixture of individual/ self-directed learning opportunities along with small group and large group teacher-led learning opportunities, development of proficiency in home language/ mother tongue, followed by development of proficiency in school language (English or other regional languages in which learning takes place), as important curricular practices. With anganwadis consisting of mixed age-groups of students between 3-6 years, the NECCECF also recommends age-wise grouping in order to be able to provide each age-group activities that are developmentally appropriate, and further also provides suggestions for organisation of the classroom into various activity corners (such as reading and story books corner, dramatic play corner, puzzles and blocks corner, creative art corner, science corner, writing corner and music corner). It also provides an illustrative time-table for the planning of activities covering the

different domains of development, as well as including various activities such as circle time, prayer, free and guided play, outdoor play, stories, rhymes and school readiness activities.⁹

PSE practices within individual anganwadis, while drawing on these broad guidelines provided by the MWCD, vary based on individual states' contextualisation of the ICDS programme, and more specifically the PSE time-table. As it became evident through fieldwork, the norms as well as the quality of implementation of the PSE component also varied between the two states of Tamil Nadu and Bihar.

4.2.1. Description of Centres and Routines

In the Gudalur block of the Nilgiris district, where we conducted our study, the anganwadis, in comparison to those in Korha, were more regularly open, centres appeared to have more preschool material, anganwadi workers were more affectionate and engaged with the child, corporal punishment was absent and teaching was observed at least during some of the visits made to the centres.

The sanctioned strength for students per anganwadi in Tamil Nadu was 15, thus making it a teacher to student ratio of 1:15, which is in accordance with the norms provided for PSE in the NECCECF. The two centres observed in Gudalur were approximately 240-280 sq. ft in space. Both centres consisted of separate rooms for teaching-learning, and cooking and storage. However, the Chalikadu centre, which was run in old mahout sheds, had lesser space for teaching-learning and children to play, as the centre was spread across two rooms of approximately 140 sq. ft each. With a table and chair for the teacher, and two tin cases to store material occupying one end of the room, the classroom appeared to be crowded with 8-12 children regularly attending the centre. Children were seated on the floor on mats and given blocks, rings, balls, peg boards with English and Tamil letters, tiny toys like trains and cars, to play with. The centre's walls were decorated with various charts of animals, birds, English and Tamil letters, and paper decorations. The centre also had a white board for teaching.

In Seervayal, children had a little more room inside the centre for play, as the centre was larger than the Chalikadu centre, as well as because fewer children attended the centre, due to distances and geographical terrain, along with caste-related factors (explained further below).

⁹ Note: NECCECF is a national level framework that provides a guide for planning ECCE practice in the country. It is however not mandated to follow the NECCECF, though state institutions such as anganwadis draw upon the NECCECF in planning their curriculum.

Since Adivasi families inhabited scattered settlements at large distances, anganwadi centres, built according to population norms, were often inaccessible to Adivasi children. The hilly terrain, the threat of wildlife, and unsafe paths during heavy monsoons further compounded this problem, and made it difficult for children to traverse these distances. In the words of one anganwadi worker “*pasanga taniya varthuku sangada padarango*” (the children feel uncomfortable to come alone), explaining that even if they left at 9 A.M. from their homes, they would only reach the centre by 11 A.M.

The centre consisted of a chair and table for the teacher, placed right in front of the entrance, while children’s play material was stored on shelves against one of the walls of the centre, and was labelled as different activity corners. Here too, children were seated on plastic mats and were given various toys, such as balls, bats, rings, peg boards with English and Tamil alphabets and shapes to play independently.

Lacking in both centres were spaces for outdoor play, adequate ventilation and light. Spaces outside both centres were narrow, uneven, leading off to steep pathways into settlements or on to the main road. The centres were neither protected by a fence or courtyard that could prevent children from entering the road.

In both cases, centres were open from 10:00 A.M. to 3:30 P.M. with at least one adult (anganwadi worker or helper) present at all times to supervise the children. Children arrived at the centres by 10:30 A.M and started playing with available preschool material by themselves or with other children they were familiar with. Food was prepared regularly and given to the children on time by 12.30 P.M. During lunch time children were first lined up and their hands were washed. Anganwadi staff then assisted those children who were unable to eat independently, but most children were able to undertake this task by themselves. After lunch, children were put to sleep on mats for about an hour, before parents came to pick up their children, or anganwadi staff dropped children back home.

In contrast, the anganwadi centres visited in the Korha block, in Katihar, Bihar, functioned irregularly. Infrastructure within the anganwadis was poor, corruption and casteism was explicit and pervasive, and teaching-learning activities were rarely observed. The sanctioned student strength per centre in Bihar was 40, thus resulting in a teacher-student ratio of 1:40, which is double that of what has been identified as the norm. High teacher-student ratios in these early years has been noted to adversely affect children’s learning and development, due

to constraints of space, learning resources and time and attention received from the teacher/caretaker. However, few children attended the centre (as a result of the strong casteism prevalent within society, as explained earlier in Chapters 3 and 4), and few instances of interaction were actually observed between children and the workers at the centres, as on most days anganwadi staff did not come to open the centres on time. Though according to state norms centres were to be opened from 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M (during summers) and 10:00 A.M to 2:00 P.M (during winters), on field it was reported that the official anganwadi timings (in summer) was from 7:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M.. Moreover, anganwadis were rarely seen open for this duration, opening close to 11:00 A.M., with children left unsupervised on most days. ,

The three centres observed in the three different wards of Gajwa village consisted of a single, bare, long rectangular hall of approximately 20X25 sq ft. Each anganwadi consisted of a chair and table for the teacher, plastic sheets for the children to sit on, and one or two official posters of the ICDS. Though ventilation and light seemed to be adequate, the centres had few teaching-learning displays, or children's play material. For example, charts with alphabets and numbers in Hindi and English were seen at one of the angawadis, but this was rarely used in teaching. Other items such as manjiras (a musical instrument) and skipping ropes were also available at this centre and were occasionally given to children to play. Other material such as flash cards, number blocks, masks, and balls that were also available at the centre were not handed out to the children as the anganwadi worker reported that it would get torn or lost. In some centres, the anganwadi worker would hand out slates for children to practice the motor skills required for writing, and would encourage children to copy numbers or alphabets occasionally.

While few opportunities for teaching and learning could be observed, children were largely seen to play and work independently among themselves, along caste lines. Children sat in the corners of the room, singing Bollywood songs among themselves, or in other instances girls from the Mushahar community were seen bringing cosmetic items such as lipsticks from home and applying this on each other. In other cases, it was observed that they were asked to fetch water for cooking, to clean the centre and even starting the fire for the wood stove for cooking of the mid-day meals. The few pedagogic interactions observed between children and the worker and helper were routinised instructions given to children to keep their hands and nails clean, and on occasion we observed children reciting poems taught by the helper at one of the centres. While there was ample common space outside the centres for children to play, no material such as swings, slides, or even bats and balls were available to encourage specific

forms of gross motor development. Outside some of the centres children played games such as four corners (*'gujju gujju kona'*) and another where children stood in a circle holding hands, with the aim of preventing a child standing outside the circle from getting inside to catch the child standing inside the circle.

4.2.2. Social Contexts and Pedagogic Practices

In both states, social factors such as caste, affected the functioning of the anganwadis. Typically, all the centres observed consisted of mixed groups: in Seervayal, children from Betta Kurumbar, Kattu Nayakar and Paniyar Adivasi communities and Mountadan Chetty community were registered with the anganwadi, while the three anganwadis in Gajwa village in Katihar catered to mixed populations of OBCs (i.e., Poddars and Bhagats), Mahadalits (i.e., Mushahars, Pasis, Turis, and Doms), as well as Adivasis (Santhals) and Muslims. Interviews with parents showed that those occupying a slightly higher social status from the rest were reluctant to send their children to anganwadis due to a fear that they would mix with other children from castes considered to be 'dirty' or polluting, get spoilt or learn bad language (see chapter 2). Ironically, while having created an inclusive space for all communities to come together, the ICDS and PSE programme, and even its guiding framework – the NECCECF, does not include the subject matter of social inclusion itself as a critical theme and pedagogical focus area within its content and syllabus. Though pedagogic practices such as group discussions and conversations, particularly around the self and community are included in the syllabus, these conversations are rarely directed towards critical social questions of caste, religion or gender inclusion / tolerance in order to proactively counter the social stereotypes and negative understanding of different groups that children are socialised into very early on in the largersociety.

Another trend observed was the vacation of centres by children whose parents could afford private preschool education. It was observed that parents largely viewed the anganwadi centres as feeding centres, or spaces for socialisation that could teach children to sit, and to interact with other children – skills that were seen as critical to enrolling them into primary schools. However, no learning was considered to take place within the anganwadi itself. Learning in this context was specifically understood as academic learning. With preschool education within anganwadis structured along the lines of DAP, and following the NECCECF, parents did not consider this to be formal learning, and registration with anganwadis was only seen as important

in order to enrol children into government primary schools, based on the anganwadi register that schools checked to enrol children after 5 years, in both Tamil Nadu and Bihar.

4.2.3 Curriculum

a. Tamil Nadu

A closer look at the preschool syllabus and time-table adopted by the Tamil Nadu and Bihar state governments shows how the content of the syllabus is child friendly, appropriate to children's developmental stages, and includes a mixture of learning about the self, the environment, and preschool literacy. The curricular material also emphasises different areas of development such as physical/ motor, cognitive, socio-emotional, language, etc.

However, it is important to note that both in Bihar and Tamil Nadu, a uniform curriculum has been applied across the entire state. For example, the Tamil Nadu ICDS department implements a contextually-modified curriculum called the '*Adi Padi Vilayadu Paapa*' (literally translated as 'Dance, Sing, and Play Little One'). A close analysis of the curriculum shows that despite being developmentally appropriate, child-friendly, using an activity-based approach to learning, and connecting learning within the centre to the larger context and environment, the curriculum fails to address the specific needs of children in the tribal areas of the Nilgiris, and particularly that of the Adivasi communities attending the centres observed.

For example, observations at the anganwadis showed how the topics to be covered under the 'Physical and Motor development' section were seriously limited not due to just the shortage of resources available within the centres, but also because they failed to take into account motor development among Adivasi children. While both centres had balls and bats, other resources such as audio or any musical instruments needed to complete activities like rhythm movements (September's activity), cups for the cup-arranging activity (April), rope crawl or jumping over a rope (July), to aid motor development were unavailable. These observations regarding the shortage of resources (specifically for motor development) has also been made within other studies (National Institute for Public Cooperation and Child Development, NIPCCD, 2006).

More significantly, the universal planning of activities for specific forms of development has also meant that the specific developmental milestones seen in the context of certain communities such as Adivasi children, have received no attention within the curriculum. For example, during fieldwork, children as young as 3-4 years were seen climbing trees, and

navigating treacherous hilly terrains and cliffs independently. Paying no heed to these advanced gross motor developments in Adivasi children, the curriculum still identifies the need to train children in basic activities of walking and jumping in the initial months of June.¹⁰

Similarly, though the curriculum identifies developmentally appropriate topics such as self and the environment,¹¹ and includes activities such as learning about the plants and trees around the centre, neither the curriculum nor classroom transactions made any provisions to include Adivasi communities' knowledges regarding the forest. No provisions were made to bring parents or other resource persons knowledgeable about forests, and the flora and fauna of the Nilgiris as part of classroom transactions.

The exclusion of tribal knowledges was in fact seen in other parts of the curriculum as well. For example, one of the topics introduced via the curriculum is the festival of '*Golu*' (an exhibitions of dolls arranged by upper caste Tamil Hindu families during the festival of *Navaratri*), in the month of September. In the absence of any representation of tribal festivals, introduction of topics such as these which are alien to the Adivasi child, demonstrates how the curriculum is not just decontextualised, but how state education also actively promotes the adoption of upper caste Hindu identities for all its citizens.

Similarly, with respect to Language Development, it can be seen that the curriculum is focused on the dominant Tamil language, and encourages development of linguistic capacities in Tamil through stories and rhymes such as '*Chinna, Chinna, Bommai, Singara Bommai, Thanjavur Bommai...*' (small, small, doll, elegant doll, Tanjore Doll); and "*Trandu siru kangal, anaitthayum paarkka.*" (Two, tiny eyes, to see everything,...-a poem on the self and different body parts and uses). Significant to note about the first poem "*Chinna Chinna Bommai*' is the reference to a historical place in Tamil Nadu (Thanjavur), and its specific artisanal heritage, which mainly forms a part of upper caste and class cultures in India. Specifically, it presents a discussion of the Thanjavur doll, which supposedly represents the king and queen (from earlier times when India was divided into various principalities ruled by independent dynasties), and now finds place in the display of dolls during the '*Golu* 'festival' celebrated within upper caste Tamil-Hindu households.

¹⁰ PSE in Tamil Nadu is planned to start along with the academic time-tables of schools in June, and ends in April, with May used as the period for assessment and revision of concepts. The preschool curricular material shared by the department was also only for the period of our fieldwork from September- April.

¹¹ See table 4 in the Appendix for a full list of topics covered in the curriculum

With respect to the stories used for language development, stories remained relevant to the contexts of Adivasi child, and were based on topics such as nature and forests. For example, a story to teach children adjectives traced the responses of various actors in the environment, such as birds, animals, flowers, etc., to a twig which falls down from a tree (see Language Development Theme for April, p.14 of the Tamil Nadu ICDS preschool curriculum). However, despite the use of appropriate contextually-relevant content, the emphasis through such activities remained on developing competence in the state language, which is Tamil.

Resources such as charts on alphabets, fruits, animals, numbers, and even developmental milestones to guide parents available in the centre were also in Tamil or English, with the latter presenting the milestones through pictures of white, middle class children. Against the guidelines of the NECCECF which recommends the introduction of home language / mother tongue first, what was observed was the use of Tamil stories and songs to build children's linguistic capacities.



Figure 3: Display of informational material on children's developmental milestones in anganwadis

In the Chalikadu anganwadi centre an exception was observed, as the anganwadi worker belonged to the Bettakurumba community. Here she actively used the Bettakurumba language to introduce concepts to children, after which the same was taught in Tamil. This demonstrates the importance of having workers from within the communities that children come from (particularly in the case of marginalised communities such as the Dalits and Adivasis), who can not only contextualise the decontextualised state curriculum, but who are also able to build stronger relations and rapport with children drawing on their own community resources, knowledges, stories and folklores.

Further, workers from the community can also valuably mediate the decontextualised curriculum in other ways. For example, looking at the ‘Idea Sharing’ skill in the Tamil Nadu ICDS curriculum, it can be observed that topics to be discussed cover pre-literacy content drawn from the dominant culture, in line with the expectations of formal schools. For instance, the topic of fruits introduces a discussion on fruits such as apple and grapes which may in fact be unfamiliar to the Adivasi child. Instead, adding fruits like forest berries, guavas and vegetables like forest spinach can help Adivasi children relate these concepts to their everyday life. Considering that the curriculum fails to draw on local languages to support children’s learning, appointing teachers from within the community can help supplement this learning with other examples drawn from the community, to understand concepts such as fruits, vegetables, colours, animals, plants, etc.

ICDS norms have recognised the importance of such contextualisation and does recommend the appointment of local workers from the community, specifically Dalit or Adivasi workers for centres identified as predominantly covering such populations. However, in Tamil Nadu workers are appointed according to reservation criteria set by the state, due to which, in several anganwadis such as the one in Seervayal, it was observed that the worker belonged to the Mountadan Chetty (OBC) community, and was unfamiliar with the languages and contexts of the child. Though Meghala, the anganwadi worker in the Seervayal centre remained affectionate and caring towards the children, she was unable to bridge the distance and build stronger bonds with the children and their families due to the absence of knowledge of tribal languages (although in this she took the help of Ranji, the helper at the centre, who also belonged to the Mountadan Chetty community).

Though the centres cater to children of multiple age groups, teaching-learning within the centres was not seen to be divided according to age. The state’s curricular plan however, identifies certain activities, specifically around school readiness, such as storytelling, English and Tamil alphabets and riddles for children of an older age group. Teachers also reported that the wide range of activities to be completed with the children each day and month was too much, and that there was not enough time to complete all of these concepts and activities.

Assessment practices were also arranged according to children’s ages. The Tamil Nadu government has developed an intricate assessment system, which has been implemented from the academic year 2017-18. The purpose is to be able to identify students’ preschool readiness, by testing whether they are able to undertake age-appropriate activities and also to understand

how far the children have benefitted from the ICDS centres. This assessment system is conducted once in three months (4 times a year) with the help of anganwadi teacher/helper. For each month, the teacher has to assess the children on a given set of activities against two criteria: ‘whether the child needs help’ and ‘doing it correctly’¹². During our observations at the centres, no assessment was conducted by the teachers, who reported that they would be undertaking it shortly and submitting it to the ICDS block office.

b. Bihar

Like Tamil Nadu, the Bihar state government also has a separate preschool education curriculum known as ‘Udaan’ (‘Flight’) though this did not seem to be implemented within the anganwadis.¹³ Here too, the preschool education curriculum focuses on overall development of the child, using child friendly activities, and assigns between 15-30 minutes to different activities focused on the different domains of development, each day. Twelve key topics have been identified for the twelve months. These include: Myself, My Family, Food, Animals and Birds, Trees and Plants, fruits and vegetables, Our Helpers, Our Body, Earth and Sky, Transport, Festivals and Fairs, and Earth and Water. The range of topics show how teaching-learning within the anganwadi aims to link children’s learning to social and environmental knowledge around the child. In the absence of any specific pedagogic practices observed, only certain general comments regarding the appropriateness of the curriculum can be made.

First, as mentioned earlier, in the context of absolute lack of any play or preschool learning material within the anganwadis, the possibility of many of the activities listed in the curricular plan (e.g., hand painting, categorising and matching, making collages, etc.) is questionable. Second, the available curricular material showed that poems and stories that were to be used in the anganwadis were in Hindi, while Theti (a dialect of Maithili) language was observed being commonly used in the community as well as within the anganwadi. Thus, the social and cultural relevance of the curricular material is also brought into question. However, it should be noted that the curriculum offers scope for children to bring in their home practices and knowledge into the anganwadi, as several activities revolve around discussions such as food practices and clothes worn by family members. Further, the curriculum also distinguishes activities by ages,

¹² The age-wise ICDS assessment criteria given by the state is presented in table 5, in the appendix.

¹³ Details of the Udaan curriculum is given in table 6, in the appendix

thus indicating the availability of age-graded curriculum within the anganwadi which caters to children between 3-6 years.

No assessment material or practices were observed at the anganwadis, but children are given a certificate at the completion of 6 years, which they can use to enrol themselves into primary schools. Corporal punishment was also rampant with workers (and even their husbands in one centre) maintaining discipline by hitting children, or using words such as '*bandar*' (monkey) and '*buddhu*' (stupid) to describe children who were mischievous or those who made mistakes with the academic work, respectively.

To summarise our assessment of the preschool education component of ICDS, it can be said that the curriculum (as seen from documents for Tamil Nadu and Bihar) appear to be focused on holistic child development, and appear to be mindful of the children's developmental status, and the need to connect school knowledge with the child's environment. What appear to be major hurdles in translating this curriculum however, are the dysfunctional nature of anganwadis in Bihar, the lack of adequate resources and space in both states, as well as the lack of curricula that is representative of local communities' knowledges. Along with this, the perpetuation of caste stereotypes within anganwadis and corporal punishment and shaming of children, particularly in Bihar, are serious causes for concern.

4.2 Private School in Tamil Nadu and Bihar

As part of our study, private schools offering preschool education were also studied in the two field sites. A large presence of private ECCE providers was seen in Gudalur as in Korha, though a deeper penetration of the unregulated, private ECCE market was observed in Korha where state provisions were largely dysfunctional. Two schools – St. Thomas, a convent school, with classes from LKG to class 10, in Gudalur, and AJ International, an unregistered private school with classes from pre-nursery to upper primary level, located outside Gajwa village, on the main road in Korha, were observed closely. One other private school, Covenant Private school, located about 100 metres away from AJ International was also studied more briefly. Together, the picture that emerged from a study of these schools was that these low-cost, fee charging schools largely catered to relatively well-off families from the surrounding villages, who also belonged to dominant caste groups, and sought to secure better educational opportunities for their children, through an English medium education.

4.3.1 School composition and pedagogic practices observed in Gudalur

Observations at the St. Thomas school in Gudalur showed that the school catered to middle-class non-tribal populations who belonged to OBC and FC communities, many of whom speak Malayalam and Tamil. Of the 500 plus children in the school and 81 children in the preschool age, only seven were Adivasi children, from the nearby villages of Seervayal and Kattukolli, of which one was in LKG.

In the case of Gudalur, the private school observed was significantly better compared to Korha in terms of infrastructural provisions and pedagogic practice, though here too, preschool education practices were seen to be developmentally inappropriate. The school which was located on an elevation, was much larger compared to AJ International, and had two concrete single-storeyed building located in an L shape. Just outside the building was a large, fenced playground which however consisted of no playing (e.g., slides, swings, see-saws) or sports material (e.g., nets, courts, goal posts). Classrooms were approximately 20 X 18 feet, and had adequate space to accommodate the class strength of 49 students in LKG and 32 in UKG. Seating within the classroom, as in Bihar, was organised as rows of benches appropriate to children's height, consisting of 4 children on each bench, facing the teacher and the blackboard. The benches and chairs were also suitable for the children's height and were arranged spaciouly.

LKG and UKG classes were divided conventionally based on age (4-5 year olds were admitted to the LKG and 5-6 year old in the UKG). There were two teachers appointed to the LKG class, with one teacher conducting the class from the front of the classroom, while the other teacher moved around the class to ensure that all children were participating in activities such as reciting poems or copying from the board. The UKG section on the other hand had just one teacher since it was understood that children would be used to the classroom routine by this time. Children were constantly supervised.

Teachers at St Thomas were also seen to have 5-10 years of experience in preschool education, with one teacher also having a Montessori course certificate, while the others had a Bachelor's or Master's degree. In addition, annual training was also conducted by the management, in which teachers were given training about general teaching practises, though training specific to preschool education was not given.

The ECCE classrooms observed also appeared to have sufficient teaching aids, such as charts on animals, birds, and Tamil and English alphabets, that were hung on the walls. Children received subject-specific books from the school itself. Pedagogically, rote learning techniques emphasised within most formal educational institutions in India, were used, though teachers actively engaged with children to generate interest among them in the classes. Despite being an English medium school, teachers taught children using a combination of local languages and English, in order to aid children's learning. Teachers were able to communicate in three languages – English, Malayalam, and Tamil, and often introduced a concept first in Malayalam or Tamil, after which it was introduced in English.

A typical day at St Thomas school extended from 9:30 A.M. to 3:30 P.M., and began with a Christian prayer recited in the assembly, along with the rest of the school. Following this, individual classes were divided along subject lines, according to a pre-set timetable consisting of 8 periods a day, with each being of 45 minutes duration. There was a long lunch break from 12:30 P.M. to 2:00 P.M., after which children were given time to rest, and were asked to sleep at their benches from 2:00 P.M. to 3:30 P.M.

Subjects that were covered for the ECCE groups were English, Tamil, Nature Studies (Environmental Science) and Mathematics. The syllabus covered between LKG and UKG (that is between 4-6 years) rapidly progressed to higher skills and exceeded that covered under the ICDS curriculum. For example, in English, other than introduction to alphabets and words, and focus on stories and rhymes, children were also introduced to parts of speech such as demonstrative pronouns (e.g., these, that), and prepositions (e.g., near, behind), by UKG.¹⁴ Similarly, in Mathematics, children progressed from skills of simple counting to more evaluative tasks such as ascending and descending order, addition and subtraction, and so on. In Nature Studies, children were introduced to similar social and environmental concepts such as colours, shapes, animals, birds, family and so on, but were also expected to understand properties and functions, such as the difference between living and non-living things, and the uses of plants.

What was also evident from a review of the workbooks and teaching material prescribed by the school was the completely decontextualised nature of the stories and poems used to develop English language.¹⁵ For example, the students' workbooks consisted of popular poems such as

¹⁴ For details of topics covered under each subject, refer to table 7 in the appendix

¹⁵ The school prescribed workbooks and textbooks by a private textbook provider called Samba Publishers

“Jack and Jill, went up the hill, to fetch a pail of water” and “Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been? I have been to London to look at the Queen”. While such poems are commonly used across preschool classrooms in India, it is important to note that the references made to ‘pails’ and the ‘Queen’ are completely alien within the Indian context. What was absent was local authors writing in Indian-English, or even translations of stories and poems from local languages. Such decontextualisation of learning was in fact even evident in the teaching of letters, with children taught words like ‘Xylophone’ against the letter X, when none of them had any experience with this musical instrument.

Even with respect to other subjects and topics, the lessons in workbooks appeared to be reflective of relatively affluent middle-class households. For example, on a lesson on household items, images of common items such as fans, were presented with other items such as washing machines, refrigerators and microwave ovens, which may be unfamiliar to the children attending the schools, as most seemed to belong to economically weaker families. While it was reported by the principal of the school that teachers had been instructed to use play-way methods for teaching, classroom pedagogy observed was largely conventional, didactic and involved the rote method.

Unlike in Bihar, no corporal punishment was observed in St. Thomas school, though the teachers had a stick inside the classroom as a deterrent. Overall teachers were observed to be patient and supportive even when children made mistakes, and made their best efforts to correct them through instruction and verbal rewards. Teachers also shared a positive relationship with parents, with room provided to parents to share their anxieties, express their expectations and discuss children’s performances through informal and formal parent-teacher meetings. Thus, parents also expressed satisfaction with the school, though along with teachers they did consider the preschool syllabus for children to be high.

4.3.2 School context and pedagogic practices in Korha

The schools in Korha catered to a mixed group consisting predominantly of first-generation learners, from OBC (Baniyas, Yadavs, Sharmas and Kushawaha) and Muslim communities, and a few Mahadalit and Adivasi students from the nearby villages. The families that could afford these schools, though, were largely middle-class. Even when schools adopted developmentally inappropriate practices, through an extension of primary schooling downwards into ECCE years, these families and communities opined that they offered greater accountability, through the institution of practices such as homework and diaries, while also

offering avenues to learn new behaviours, cultures and the languages of the elite (e.g., English and Hindi), thus overcoming the ‘backwardness’ associated with their home, village and family settings.¹⁶

The schools also provided other visible features of accountability, related to space, infrastructure, and pedagogic routines, that had made them attractive, specifically in the context of Bihar. For example, despite being located in an extended makeshift warehouse, with unpainted walls and a cement roof, with the extended part covered by a temporary cloth ceiling, which leaked in the rain, the residential AJ International school with a single-room hostel for girls and boys provided opportunities for communities to educate their children away from the village environment. The school, which was started as recently as 2018, and was situated directly on the main highway between Katihar and West Bengal, had a small open area in front of the single storey school building cordoned off by a gate. There were separate classrooms of 10X15 feet approximately for each class, divided by half-walls of about 6 feet, which allowed for lessons and noise from the neighbouring classes to filter in. Classrooms also had poor ventilation and light, with most rooms having just one narrow entrance, near which the teacher’s desk and chair were placed. Classroom arrangement also favoured frontal teaching, with a row of metal desks with attached benches placed facing the teacher and the blackboard. Classes consisted of between 40-45 children, with 5-6 children seated at every bench. Overall, classrooms spaces were cramped, with few preschool related teaching and learning materials, except for charts with numbers and letters in Hindi, that were hung on the walls and used in teaching. Play spaces and play material for gross motor stimulation were also absent.

Pedagogic practices mostly centred around books, and classroom transactions mostly used techniques of rote memorisation of letters and numbers. A large portion of the classroom time was seen being spent on correcting children’s homework individually, while the remaining children copied letters, numbers and tables into their notebooks. Classes were divided into ‘periods’ of 30 minutes each with a focus on academic subjects such as English, Hindi, Math, Science, and so on. A few activity-based learning periods were observed, wherein children used workbooks with pictures of fruits, flowers, shapes and so on, and were given activities such as matching, or joining the dots. While the medium of instruction was supposedly English, much of the classroom transaction took place in Hindi. Outdoor play was only allowed during the

¹⁶ Members of the community demonstrated a strong internalisation of deficits circulated through the dominant castes and class narratives about their ‘backward’ status in everyday contexts, as well as through policy discourses (see chapter 2).

interval or break time, but on most days, children spent this time eating lunch under the shade of a tree due to the excessive heat. Overall, the school day appeared to be comparatively shorter, extending from 8:00 A.M. to 12:30 P.M.

Children were also mostly grouped age-wise, though the two pre-nursery sections in the school had a mix of children, ranging in age from 2 and a half years to 7-8 years, as students considered to be 'slow', or older children who had never been to school before, were also placed in the pre-nursery classroom. The different preschool classrooms also had one teacher each, except for the pre-nursery class which had two teachers each. The school recruited teachers with minimum educational qualifications of 10th or 12th grade pass certificates, and looked specifically for female teachers with teaching experience and experience as a mother, according to Sirajuddin, the 'chairman' of the school, who had earlier had a molasses transportation business. With little pre-service and in-service training in pedagogy or childcare among the various teaching and management staff of the school, corporal punishment was rampant, and teachers were regularly seen hitting children, punishing children and verbally abusing them.

In summary, we observed schools in Tamil Nadu and Bihar to be adopting developmentally inappropriate practices, with a heavy focus on literacy and numeracy skills, though the private school in Gudalur appeared to be of better quality, had more space and infrastructure and adopted some practices to support learners such as teaching in a combination of English and mother tongue.

4.4 NGO School in Tamil Nadu

Finally, in addition to anganwadis and private schools, a local school called Padasalai, run by a non-governmental agency working closely with the Adivasi communities, in Gudalur, was also observed. The school was one of several initiatives managed and run by a community-based organisation called 'Tribal Welfare in Gudalur' (TWIG). A short history of the organisation is important to note in order to understand the work undertaken by the organisation, as well as its approach to education. TWIG was an initiative that was started in 1986, jointly by a group of Adivasi and non-Adivasi community members in order to improve the living conditions of Adivasi communities in Gudalur. The assertion of tribal identities and cultures is also important to the vision of TWIG, which believes that dominant modes of thinking have erased these and led to a loss of dignity for tribal communities. Wholly run and managed by representatives from the various Adivasi groups, with some support from a few

non-Adivasi members, TWIG has a set of complementary initiatives revolving around issues of land, livelihood, health, education and legal concerns. The school initiative was started in the late 1990's, to provide free educational services to the tribal communities in Gudalur.

With a total strength of 63 students from pre-KG to Class 5, the dominant student population of the Padasalai School belongs to the Paniya, Bettakurumba and Kattunayaka communities. In order to cater to these children, Padasalai includes Adivasi culture in the curriculum. The objective is not only to promote tribal culture, but to attempt to bridge the distance between formal learning and home environments for children from Adivasi communities, through alternative pedagogic and curricular practices. In fact, one of the first indicators of this was the organisation of the school, classroom space and time-table that were sensitive to the experiences of Adivasi communities. Padasalai, which was located in the same building as the TWIG office, was built into the basement of the two-storeyed building made of stone and earth friendly material. Despite being located in the basement, the school provided a feel of vast space and was well ventilated, as a result of the high ceilings, tall arch-ways, openings and windows built through the structure. Further long corridors and pillars separated the different rooms, few of which had doors, adding to the openness. The school had been designed to emulate the open spaces that tribal children were familiar with, to help new children acclimatise more easily to the physical space of Padasalai, since they had been known to feel uncomfortable in restricted rooms such as those in other formal schools. Classrooms were not conventionally structured with desks and benches, and children moved around the rooms to undertake different activities. In fact, when ECCE aged children first joined school, they were given up to six months to freely move around the space, and engage with it so as to be able to adapt to the school space. The rooms were all shaped and arranged differently as well. For example, there was one large circular room where the whole school gathered to undertake activities such as dancing, singing, theatre or games. On other occasions children used smaller rectangular or square-shaped rooms (of approximately 10X15 feet on average) to undertake group and individual activities. This structuring of the class spaces thus provided Adivasi children particularly with the freedom for mobility and space that they were used to within their own communities. In front of the school building there was a large mud playground with trees, that children used to play various games such as running, catching, skipping, hop-scotch, climbing trees and so on, though there was no play material (like swings and slides) or sports equipment (like nets and basket-ball hoops).

Teachers at Padasalai primarily belonged to Adivasi communities (7 of 11 teachers were Adivasis) and contributed significantly to bridging the gap between school and home knowledge for children. For example, though the school was a Tamil medium school, classroom interactions allowed for the use of tribal languages. Further, teachers drew on everyday experiences within the community in teaching and building a rapport with children in school. For example, during one ECCE class observed, teachers started the class by discussing the animals they had seen around their homes that morning before coming to school, asking children to similarly share their experiences. Intimate knowledge and understanding of the community also helped in contextualising school experiences in other ways – for example, during monsoons, due to the perils of flooding, the school declared a holiday even when the state government did not declare this. Most of the teachers who handled the children had a bachelor's degree in History, Tamil or English and 4 teachers had a Bachelor's in Education (B.Ed), while one teacher had been trained in the Montessori method.

Classroom organisation took on a circular format wherein teachers and children sat as part of the same circle on the floor on mats. This helped break the formal hierarchy of the teacher-student relationship, and allowed teachers and children to develop closer bonds. Formally, there existed one group with 18 pre-primary children aged between 3.5 to 6 years, but the class was divided into three groups based on abilities for all formal lessons. These groups roughly corresponded to UKG and LKG age groupings, with a third group for beginners or children new to school, though groupings were carried out on an activity basis under the teachers' discretion. The class had two teachers, one senior teacher and another who was a trainee teacher. Mostly, the new children who found it difficult to follow the teaching were put with the teacher who was experienced in handling the children. The other two groups (consisting of children who had already studied for a year and also children who grasped things very easily) were handled by the second trainee teacher. During observations it could also be seen how children got divided into these different groups. For example, during one observation the senior teacher asked children to repeat alphabets after her, and picked the children having difficulties to come to her, while she casually told the others to join the other teacher.

A typical day at Padasalai started with a simple prayer followed by physical warm up exercises, and then conversations between teachers and students on various topics. During one observation, for example, we saw a child describing the deer she had seen on the way to school. Such informal conversations were used as ways to break the ice, especially among children

who had joined the school newly. The conversations were then followed by rhymes on topics familiar to the children. The topics included animals, festivals, places or villages that the children came from. For example, a common rhyme that children and teachers practised was on place, where the teacher called out to a student and asked them ‘where do you come from’. The child replied using the same rhyme scheme by naming their village. Ice breakers and energisers such as jumping, touching a point in the class and running back, were also used in between activities to keep children active and attentive, and children seemed to enjoy these kinds of physical activities.

While there was no clear-cut timetable for different subjects or activities, there was a stipulated curriculum to be followed for the pre-primary class. The subjects listed out in the curricular document (which appeared to be for year one) were Tamil, Math, Environmental Science, general activities (art, craft, free play) and English (which was only to begin in the second half of the first year). Each of these further listed down a combination of activities to be conducted and concepts to be learnt. While distinctions between outcomes and processes were slightly fuzzy, each subject was seen to integrate several kinds of activities for children, rather than suggesting formal instructional teaching. For example, while Tamil included describing pictures, storytelling, singing rhymes, enacting scenes and talking about family members, possibly as a means to improve spoken language skills, it also included the specific goal of learning to identify and write vowels through the use of picture cards, worksheets and other local material. Math similarly included pre-numeracy concepts such as understanding quantities, directions, counting and pattern recognition, that are to be imparted through different pedagogic activities such as through use of picture cards, games, everyday objects, puzzles, riddles, worksheets or orally. The curricular document also showed that all subjects addressed the different domains of development identified within child development literature, recognising that these domains were synergistically linked. For example, an activity on learning names of objects seen in the environment, as part of environmental science (flower, leaf, stick, stone, bird etc) was observed to involve identifying pictures, and then colouring them – which included cognitive, language and motor development skills.

For every activity conducted, the teacher would assign tasks of varying levels of difficulty to different groups based on her judgement of children’s abilities. According to the teacher, the basis of this grouping was attentiveness, responsiveness, ability to answer questions and the amount of time they had been attending school. Assessments were conducted simultaneously

during the teaching-learning process in a continuous manner, with the teacher maintaining a portfolio as a record of every child's performance on different kinds of activities. When children were seen to be making mistakes, while the error was pointed out to the child, they were encouraged to find and correct their mistakes by themselves instead of being told how to do so.

Curricular material included multiple teaching aids such as puzzles, picture cards, number strips, games, toys, blocks, beads, art and craft material etc. Importantly, these were contextualised in a manner which reflected the contexts of the children, such as using earthy or organic colours rather than bright shades, and using figures, faces and objects on picture cards that were familiar to the children. Attempts to add culturally relevant material in the curriculum itself was also observed in the inclusion of tribal songs and dance as part of the school routine.

While classes or sessions were usually between 45 to 50 minutes, sometimes they even went on for up to an hour, and did not follow any rigid timetable. Change in subject was indicated through casual conversations with children asking them if they were ready to move on to the next subject or activity. Children were also taken out to the grounds to play, and at times some of the activities such as singing rhymes was also conducted outdoors, instead of in the classroom. All of these practices indicated a kind of flexibility which was woven into the education system, and were also reflective of the sense of time and space that was afforded to the students.

Afternoon classes comprised of the whole school engaging in art and craft sessions, supervised by the respective teachers in the school. Pre-primary children were observed to be engaged in simple activities such as drawing, colouring and threading beads. As per the curriculum document, art and craft activities also include tracing outlines, coconut shell cleaning and painting, working with clay, collage making and mat weaving with paper, together also contributing to the development of fine motor skills.

Part of the daily routine was a short break from 10:30A.M. to 10:45 A.M. where children were given snacks (such as boiled pulses or *ragi* porridge). Lunch time began at 12:30 P.M. and went on up to 2:00 P.M., giving children time to play freely after they finished eating the food they brought from home. Children were observed to be playing outside on the grounds, as well as indoors, using rooms and corridors. While provisions for naps existed, no children were observed to be sleeping at any point during our observations. In one instance, a child was seen

to be dozing off on his plank during the post-lunch colouring activity, though he was allowed to do so, and woke up himself in some time.

School ended at 3:30 P.M., and while children waited for their parents or transport, they utilised the time to play in the grounds.

If any child was absent from school for a long period of time, the teachers or staff at Padasalai visited their homes to check on them. Since the school is tied up with the work of TWIG, the educational coordinators of TWIG who are placed in different villages also contributed by monitoring the attendance of children who attended Padasalai.

While Padasalai was started to specifically cater to the children of tribal communities who have not had access to educational institutions, TWIG's broader work in education also engages with state educational institutions to improve access for all tribal children in general. For example, since many tribal children were seen to be out of school, the management worked with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to improve enrolment rates of these children. TWIG also worked with ICDS centres, assisting the anganwadi workers by placing trained members of their staff at these centres to undertake teaching. Further, since several young children were not being able to attend anganwadi centres due to large distances, thick forests and the threat of wild animals, they put in place a system to bring children to the school, by hiring a jeep to safely transport children to and from the centres.

The strategies adopted by Padasalai school to develop a culturally relevant education system for children from tribal communities was a part of the larger educational efforts that TWIG undertook, which in turn also stemmed from the objectives of TWIG to cater to the specific needs of tribal communities through active community mobilisation.

4.5 Conclusion

Our fieldwork across the two sites showed the proliferation of a number of ECCE models, and differences in the nature and functioning of even similar models (e.g., ICDS centres across the two sites; differences between private schools). Overall, we found the ICDS centres and the NGO school to have been conceptualised most closely along the lines of DAP practice. However, both implementation issues and the lack of adequate contextual sensitivity are significant concerns within the ICDS model. Implementation challenges stem from the lack of adequate provisioning or space and infrastructure, lack of adequate training for anganwadi

workers, as well as sensitisation of parents regarding the strengths of the ICDS curriculum. Particularly, the complete absence of monitoring and supervisions and the continuation of caste-based discrimination within ICDS centres need immediate redress.

Private schools, even comparatively better ones, appear to be least appropriate to and mindful of children's development. While they offer more markers of accountability to parents, through the institution of homework and copy-practice, and cater to relatively more affluent families' aspirations for English literacy, they cater little to other aspects of children's development, such as socio-emotional learning, motor skills, creativity and imagination, and in fact are also detrimental to children's emotional health as they actively enforce corporal punishment as a means of disciplining.

Among the three models discussed, the NGO model appears to be the most responsive model, adopting practices that are developmentally appropriate as well as contextualised to local populations such as Adivasis. The NGO model offers several 'best practices' for adoption – including in terms of planning of space and time-table, content and design of curricular material as well as activities and pedagogic practices, all of which add to make the formal schooling experience for Adivasi children less formidable and more enjoyable.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Implications

In a context of growing advocacy for investing in early years development and ECCE, the project aimed at identifying costs, contexts and practices associated with developing ‘responsive’ models of ECCE. With much of the knowledges, discourses and practices associated with ECCE currently generated outside the domains of the family and community, within institutionalised settings and contexts, our study sought to examine what it means to be ‘responsive’ to family or community needs around ECCE, and whether existing formal provisions for ECCE enable an equal start for all children. Adopting an ethnographic approach, we gathered data on families’ and communities’ own conceptualisations of children’s development and how they negotiated with institutionalised provisions of ECCE within this context.

The study, conducted across two states – Bihar and Tamil Nadu, revealed stark contrasts in ECCE provisioning and uptake by families and communities, reiterating the need to pay attention to local social contexts and political economies in developing responsive models. Within a context of acute poverty, entrenched casteism, and state neglect and corruption, in Bihar, we observed how the proliferation of markets in ECCE were furthering inequalities in early childhood and education. With social logics of caste governing everyday life and practices even within state institutions such as anganwadi centres, parents expressed an inability to make these centres accountable and functional. Instead, they opted to secure early education for their children by turning to the growing number of poor-quality private schools in and around Gajwa village, offering developmentally inappropriate curriculum and even adopting corporal punishment. Private ECCE options were not only seen as providing more accountability, but also as offering ‘learning’, which was equated with formal literacy and numeracy, and caste-class capital of the elite. Despite expressing a more relaxed understanding of children’s development, parents nevertheless desired private pre-schools for the competitive head start, class-caste capital and mobility it could offer their children. Anganwadis, on the other hand, were considered ‘time pass’, and were expected mainly to provide food (which was irregularly supplied) and opportunities to socialise.

In Tamil Nadu, our sites located in the hilly and forested terrains, and Adivasi-dominant regions of Gudalur presented a completely different social context and political economy of ECCE. In

the presence of an ‘active state’, pursuing an agenda of assimilating Adivasi communities into its own developmental vision, a relatively well-functioning ICDS system, and the lower prevalence of caste-based discriminations within ECCE centres, proliferation of private ECCE centres was comparatively lower. Participation in state-based ECCE institutions by local communities were affected by other factors – such as that of distance, terrain and universal state norms for ECCE provisioning and children’s development. Despite ICDS regulations that prescribe different locational norms for setting up anganwadis in tribal areas, we observed that distance, terrain and lack of transport still remained critical barriers for access to anganwadis and schools. Innovative solutions to these problems were identified by a local NGO rather than the state. Further, other norms related to space within centres, developmental milestones, and curricular and pedagogic practices, also contributed to alienating children from Adivasi communities from formal educational institutions, as these did not reflect the different patterns and values of socialisation adopted by communities at home. Expectations around education within Adivasi communities were not so narrowly tied to a means for employment. Educational decision-making within these communities was also strategically related to considerations such as whether it enabled an understanding and participation in the forest economy (which provides an important source of economic security for Adivasi communities); issues of land, livelihoods, rights and state policies, and so on. Like in the case of Bihar, anganwadis were seen as spaces for socialisation, whereas schools were considered to be spaces for formal learning.

Though widely different in contexts, reiterating the inadequacies of adopting uniform policies, the two sites also presented certain similarities - a primary one being around the conceptualisation of childhood. In both contexts early childhood was in fact articulated as a period loosely extending up to the age of 10 years, during which time children were seen to learn through immersive experiences within the community, with no formal differentiation made between learning, play or work. Together, parents’ understanding of childhood and socialisation practices across the two sites also helped identify the depoliticised and limited understanding of children’s development envisaged within policy. The findings from the two contexts have allowed us to draw insights on certain key factors such as marketisation, caste-class inequalities and curriculum and pedagogy that are important to making ECCE provisions more responsive.

The findings around marketisation pointedly show how parental investments in private ECCE options are linked with securing caste-class mobilities and advantages, rather than for

children's psycho-social development alone. With even low-cost schools affordable to only the dominant land-owning caste groups in Gajwa, and inaccessible to the large majority of Adivasi communities in Gudalur, marketisation in ECCE is leading to stratified access and outcomes, similar to what is observed for the elementary years in India. While regulation of private ECCE institutions and enforcement of developmentally appropriate norms for curriculum (which is currently lacking), and strengthening of state-based preschool education services (which currently receives only 4% of the total ICDS budget), have been the predominant policy solutions offered, what remains unaddressed are community expectations for ECCE to provide an equal start. Though parental demands for English medium education and formal learning in the early years run contrary to the norms set by dominant developmental frameworks, they signal the pressures faced by poor and marginalised communities to ensure similar learning in the early years for their children, as that available to children from elite homes. Parental anxieties around investing in early forms of formal learning in English comes from the positioning of ECCE as a foundational stage of education, and considerations of 'school readiness' that measure children's preparedness to enter primary school. With private schools in particular using 'entrance tests' to admit students, contrary to the RTE norms, investing in privatised ECCE programmes becomes critical for poor parents in order to secure seats within private schools in the primary years.

Thus, responsive models of ECCE need to pay attention to the political economy of education within which ECCE has been positioned as a foundational stage for later learning. Addressing these concerns requires not only a reduction in the emphasis placed on ECCE for school readiness, but also needs to consider an upward extension of the ECCE curriculum, to counter the effects of the downward extension of the primary school curriculum that is predominantly seen today. The state's efforts in mediating the distance between good quality preschool facilities and primary school education can also play a significant role in reducing marketisation and privatisation, as was observed in the Gudalur context.

Related to the point on curriculum and pedagogic practices of ECCE and its narrow conceptions of development as 'school readiness', are the implicit assumptions made about children's universal developmental trajectories. As illustrations from the Gudalur context showed, conceptualisations of responsive models of ECCE need to be attentive not just to significant concerns such as language and the medium of instruction, and the representation of community knowledges within the curriculum, but also need to go much further than addressing these

issues in a tokenistic manner. This includes attending to differences in developmental milestones in children that may be linked to specific ecological affordances (e.g., advanced motor milestones that result from navigating and traversing difficult terrains, opportunities for play structured around these environments, etc.). Contextualisation of curriculum may also require paying attention to social values (e.g., learning interdependence rather than individualism taught through the formal schooling system). Similarly, it may require attention to pedagogic practices and features such as opportunities for immersive and experiential learning rather than rote methods; designing spaces and activities in line with community expectations, and so on. Finally, curricular and pedagogic contextualisation must also pay attention to the larger expectations from education that communities have – for example, to enable survival and knowledge of resources and rights around alternative (forest-based) economies and social structures.

The data from the two contexts demonstrate that development cannot be seen in isolation, as located within the individual biology and psychology of the child, as is assumed within much of ECCE literature. They emphasise the need to view children's development as a social phenomenon, affected by broader social-political and structural factors such as caste relations, inequities created by market processes, and the limitations of technical-managerial solutions of developmentalism in ECCE, which presuppose the possibilities of equal participation without taking into account these fundamental structural differences. What this implies is the need to deepen discussions on responsive ECCE models, by attending to the tensions between achieving parity in the context of markets and wide differences in provisions of ECCE; the nature of institutionalised provisions, which are narrowly tied to visions of school readiness, future educational and economic participation; and outcomes of schooling which remain poor for many marginalised communities, and so on. These tensions also raise questions on how to balance concerns of rights-based development with freedoms for differential participation; or for relativism within responsive models with the need to ensure accountability and scale.

The costing exercise (See Report II) undertaken as part of the study has attempted to provide some directions for addressing these dilemmas that emerge in planning for responsive models of ECCE. The exercise has pointed to the need to develop an enabling institutional framework and facilitating costing principles first and foremost. The framework for a responsive model of ECCE must consider the processes or components that contribute to improving the quality and responsiveness of models (e.g., teaching, training, monitoring, curriculum development, and so

on) rather than adopt cost heads to plan for programme (e.g., buildings, salaries, food, etc). Adopting processes (rather than heads) for planning can allow for models that have a common set of features but that are designed differently (or specifically) attending to different contexts. A 'quality framework' must link the compulsory and desirable components of ECCE with non-negotiable cost-heads, based on non-negotiable principles for ECCE practice. More significantly a quality framework must adopt similar cost and quality principles for regulation of the private and public sectors to reduce variability between models. Further, implementation of such models will require the adoption of cost-ranges instead of cost-norms, to allow for flexibility along with accountability, while ensuring that children's rights are protected and models remain socio-culturally relevant and sustainable. In the context of large-scale interventions (such as the ICDS), while fundamental basic norms may be decided at the programmatic level, its conversion into a responsive model will depend on the adoption of ranges that can allow for local variations, based on local knowledges, resources and capabilities.

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Appendix

	June	July	August	September	October	April
	Myself	Flowers	Vegetables and fruits	Dolls	Water	Plants trees and creepers
Idea Sharing	Topic covered: month, oneself, family members, places, environment	Classification of flowers, transformation of seed to flower, uses of flowers, fragrant and non-fragrant flowers	Naming vegetables and fruits, sourcing and consuming fruits and vegetables, Tamil activity song on vegetables	Describing dolls that are seen in the centre, identifying their colours, Golu festival	Water resources, uses, rain water harvesting, importance of water for life	Identifying trees, creepers around the centre; discussion on palm and plantain trees
Cognitive Development	Developing listening, observation and memory skills; concepts of big, small, shapes	Learning to match; concepts of shape space, short and long, number concepts	Learning to matching tastes, colour; concept of weight; number games and card games	Learning smells; problem solving skills; tall and short; group activities on dissolution	Concept of touch and feel, observation and memory games, colour concept, number games, using water for daily activities,	Identifying tastes, logical and scientific thinking, scientific, matching shapes, short and tall, Number song, structured games
Language skill	Focus on oneself, listening skills, creative thinking,	Use of storytelling, songs with activities	Use of songs, storytelling, games,	Use of songs, storytelling, sound expression game	Use of songs, storytelling, games such as find	Songs, storytelling, naming pictures,

	speech, through activities, storytelling, questioning and extempore	and gestures; speaking skills	odd one out and speaking activities	and speaking activities	the missing, prefix sounds, picture dominos, speaking and listening activities	identifying the same sounding letters,
Physical and motor development	Walking, jumping, matching, scribbling, finding places in the map, colouring, ball game, finding small and big	Crawling under/jumping over a rope, passing, throwing and dribbling a ball, zig zag game, shape identification, making a collage	Lemon on the spoon, little pumpkin and big pumpkin game, snow balling game, making handprints and vegetable prints, ball throwing,	Moving a ball, short and tall game, basketball, Jumping over a rope, threading the beads,	Filling water in a bottle, identifying places where water is available, balancing game, statue game, colouring, paper crafts, walking without touching a rope	Colouring, tree plants and creepers game, peacock and cuckoo game, cake-ice-cream game, arranging cups, statue game, building a structure, jumping over hurdles, understanding short and tall
Social and emotional development	Body movements, rhythm, creative thinking, good habits	Acting, gesture games, rhythm, creative thinking, questioning, good habits	Acting in a given setting, rhythm and movement, good habits, creative thinking, questions,	Acting, gesture game, rhythm movements, creative thinking questioning, good habits	Acting, gesture game, rhythm and movements, creative thinking, questioning, good habits	Acting, gesture game, rhythm and movements, creative thinking questioning, g good habits, questioning

Pre-school training	Tamil alphabets, identifying birds and their calls, parts of the body, colours	Number matching, picture matching, Tamil and English alphabets, identifying differences,	Shape-based, letter-based and number-based domino game, Tamil and English alphabets, similar sounding words	Tamil and English alphabets, prefixes, numbers game, cultivating reading habits, arranging pictures and dolls	Numbers, musical chair, joining dots, English alphabets, colouring	Writing, before and after, matching pictures, classification, number flashcards
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Table 4: Preschool education curriculum ('Adu Paadu, Vilayadu Paapa') in anganwadis in Tamil Nadu

	Motor activity	Cognitive power	Language	Socio-emotional	Creativity
2-3	Running a distance of 10 feet, holding crayons between the fingers, jumping, ball game, toe walk, turning pages of a book, filling sand in a vessel	Differentiating smell and the taste, using 'how' and 'when' questions, naming the colours, naming the body parts, concept of big and small	Answering to a call, matching 20-30 images with the names, happily listening to simple stories, answering to the simple stories, following two orders	Knowing their gender, dressing oneself without any help, attending when called, independently doing the activities and playing, telling about the natural calls, helping the elders	Playing with Clay, becoming happy after painting in the fingers, blowing bubbles, folding papers for tearing, colouring uneven on a big picture
3-4	Throwing a big ball using two hands, jumping with two legs from a place, getting self-ready, tearing pages according to the images, scribbling using crayons	Listening, identifying and making sounds on a situation, learning the difference between long-short, small-big, identifying, matching and dividing the vegetables, fruits, animals, colours, shapes, body parts,	Following simple instructions, listening to village stories and songs and repeating it, expressing your feelings, knowing your name	Independently going to the toilet, playing with the other children calmly, talking with AWW, washing hands before and after food, keeping oneself clean	Colouring without any help, building structures using a clay, group singing, dancing on one's choice
4-5	Running front and back, arranging beads in a thread, tearing a page on a given line, throwing a ball on a	Doing according to the sound heard nearby, distinguishing the shapes and the colour, finding the gap in a set of images, attaching the puzzle of 4-6, relating one to	Listening to the stories and songs and repeating it, talking about the family, birds, plants and animals, identifying the words that are close to the	Maintaining cleanliness of nails, hands, cloth, friendly with other children, waiting for the right chance, coordinating and helping	Drawing or making various colour maps and shapes, making structures out of clay or sand, dancing or singing

	given direction, kicking a ball on a given direction	one, counting numbers and objects, identifying and arranging the names and the numbers,	situation around, recognizing the prefix and suffix sound and making a new word, identifying the English letters and making a sentence, using a book	other children, expressing the feelings,	according to the song, making a human structure using colours.
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Table 5: Assessment schedule for preschool education in Tamil Nadu's anganwadi centres

	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3
	Myself	My family	Food
Language Development	free talk; telling one's names, address; favourite foods; rhymes telling 'This is me' (discussing my body parts); singing songs with actions 'Four friends' (poem about hands and legs); "good habits for me"; "my cat" stories using puppets	discussion on members of the family, names of family members, clothes worn by family members; stories and rhymes, using puppets (' my family', 'Telephone ' -conversation between daughter and father)	Discussion on food children have eaten before coming to the anganwadi, and why it is important to eat; discussion of stories and rhymes with pictures and actions ('Pakodi' - a savoury item; 'Alu, Malu, Kalu'- literally translated as Potato, Gardner, Black)
Cognitive Development	match similar items (parts of the body; everyday items of use such as soap, comb, mirror) ; match the following; classification based on types of body parts (e.g., upper body, lower body), objects used with specific body parts; completing puzzles/ pictures of body parts	matching similar pictures (of members of the family; daily use items, furniture)	Matching similar food items; naming favourite food items; sorting round food items
Gross Motor development	making pairs with children in front or behind, based on teacher's instructions; walking in a straight line	lifting pictures placed on a straight line and walking on it; Games ('Fly Bird, Fly tree...', where children are expected to lift their fingers only if the object can fly); finding objects in the colour of mother's sari ;	walking like a frog to cue (food items named); Lifting hands for food items that are red in colour; making groups of 2 or 4 based on food items called out; jumping with hands on hips, on cue

		jumping, clapping, shouting to cue (of family members)	
Fine Motor Development / Creativity	making hand prints using clay; tearing coloured paper; folding paper; colouring; making a collage out of bits of paper to fill up the picture of a hand;	Colouring (favourite clothes of family members); sticking paper balls on to fill up pictures of clothing; colouring the picture of a sari with hand prints using mud or tumeric balls; drawing and colouring mother's bindi	Making a collage/filling the picture of a plate using dal and rice; stamp painting with vegetables
School Readiness	Discussion on the first letter of children's names; completing pictures with dots (5+ yrs); counting matching equal number of body parts; identifying letters from picture cards using a game ('The wind is blowing on')	Completing dotted pictures; number identification using a game ('The wind is blowing on') ; counting and matching everyday kitchen items learning to draw with straight and sleeping lines on slate	identification of words using a game ('The wind is blowing on'); completing dotted pictures; matching numbers to objects (from 1-3); learning letter recognition through games (the teacher draws 3-4 letters on the floor and asks children to run to the letter she calls out)

Table 6: Preschool education curriculum ('Udaan') in anganwadis in Bihar.

Note: The table has been compiled using curricular plans for three months available on the Bihar government's ICDS website. Curricular plans for the remaining months could not be sourced, though topics for the other months are given

	TN	
SUBJECT	LKG	UKG
English	Alphabets (A-Z)	Revisions (A-Z) including vowels
	Stories (9)	Uses of These, that, those, in, an, a, this, near, behind, in front of, on, under

	Rhymes (6)	Rhymes (15)
	Uses and sounds of 'a', 'an', 'o', 'u' 'and'	Stories (8)
Maths	Numbers 1-50, concept of 0	Numbers 51-100 and its names
	Shapes	Ascending and descending names
	More-less, many-few, before-after	Addition and Subtracting (+1)
Nature Studies	Colours, Myself, My Family, My school, My classroom, My Body, Cleanliness, Good Habits, Politeness	Myself, My Family, Small Family, Large Family, Duties of Family members Living things, Non-living things, Plant life, Kinds of Plants, Parts of plant
	My house, Fruits, Vegetables, Flowers, Healthy Food, Eating Habits, Our helpers, Pet Animals	Uses of plants, Birds, Nest of Birds, Air, Water, Sources of Water, Types of Food, Sources of Food, Physical fitness, Safety habits at home, Road safety Sense organs, Clean surroundings
	Domestic Animals, Wild Animals, Up in the Sky Seasons, Means of Transport, Our festivals	Animals, Young ones of Animals, Cry of Animals, Homes of Animals, Useful Animals, Water Animals, Insects, Games we play, Home Appliances, Places of worship, Our festivals National Symbols

Tamil	Vowels – A to akku	Consonants (Ka to na)
	Fruits, flowers, good habits,	Story, sounds
	Singing and dancing activity	Letter tables, opposites,
		Singing and dancing (9), Fill in the blanks

Table 7: Preschool curriculum at St. Thomas School