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ARTICLE



Parallel partnerships: Teach for India and new institutional regimes in municipal schools in New Delhi

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade the Teach for India (TFI) organisation has emerged as a prominent non-governmental organisation (NGO) involved in Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) with ailing urban municipal government bodies across select cities in India. An off-shoot of the Teach for America (TFA) programme, TFI aims to improve quality of education in under-resourced municipal government schools through English medium education. Through in-depth interviews with members associated with TFI, some municipal school teachers and information accessed through Right to Information (RTI) applications, this article delineates the modalities of the PPP arrangement within municipal schools in Delhi. It examines how the intervention is institutionalising parallel governance structures, accentuating class-based tensions and exacerbating pedagogical inequities within these long-neglected schools.

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Introduction

The landscape of public provisioning and management of school education in most cities across India is characterised by poor quality (Banerji, 2000; Nambissan, 2017). Schools administered by municipal bodies in cities are at the lowest rung of the government schooling system hierarchy and are dominated by children from the poorest sections of society (Nambissan, 2017; Ramachandran, 2006; Teltumbde, 2013). In a study examining schooling of children of the urban poor in Mumbai and Delhi, Banerji (2000) suggests that more than economic considerations of work, the deteriorating quality of the municipal school system is leading to higher drop-outs and non-completion of primary schooling. One of the concerns she points to is that municipal schools in these cities are plagued by periodic teacher shortages. Systems of teacher recruitment are highly bureaucratised and teachers have little or no support from the municipal corporations in these cities. This leads to most government teachers

operating in highly constrained environments with high pupil-teacher ratios and working largely towards system driven demands of completing the syllabus, administering exams and engaging in other mandatory administrative work. The poor working conditions of government teachers have also been compounded by increasing contractualisation and appointment of para-teachers (Beteille & Ramachandran, 2016).

Over the past few decades non-governmental organisations (NGO) have facilitated innovation and provided support to state-funded schools for the urban poor through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) (Batra, 2006; Jagannathan, 1999; Nawani, 2002). While some NGOs have increased the accountability of the government towards underprivileged children and have involved their family and other community stakeholders within processes of education, there is still a pressing need to formulate better institutional regulations between NGOs and the government sector.

This role of NGOs as primarily providing modes of support to mainstream state institutions has also seen a notable change over the past few decades (Kamat, 2004). In 2010, the Dasra organisation, a prominent collective of corporate philanthropic foundations and non-profits based in Mumbai, brought out a report observing how non-profits over the past 40 years have moved from managing independent programmes outside the school system to working within. The Dasra 2010 report marks three important transitions in the trajectory of NGO engagement with state bodies in Mumbai. In the first phase through the early 1990s, NGOs created institutions independently as alternatives outside the government school system. This relationship then matured to partnerships with the government where NGOs operated in select pockets of the school system offering services such as teacher training, after school remedial programmes, community mobilisation and curricular innovation. During this phase NGOs began to be actively supported in differing capacities by corporates, foundations and international aid organisations. The third phase which begins in the early 2000s marks a shift as discourses of efficiency and management enter PPP arrangements. Logics of reform emphasising Build-Operate-Transfer models popular in infrastructure-based PPPs begin to enter the domain of school education management in this period (Vellanki, 2016).

The earlier dispersed PPP arrangement between NGOs and government bodies became imbricated within a larger infrastructure of governance where several aspects were to be surveilled to improve school quality (Ball, 2016; Jain, Mehendale, Mukhopadhyay, Sarangapani, & Winch, 2018). This led to corporates channelling their attention and resources into NGOs that offered scalable and efficient solutions (Dasra Report, 2010). An aspect towards improving school quality was the rising demand for English medium education from socio-economically disadvantaged

parents whose children studied in municipal government schools. English medium education in India is linked to both its colonial and postcolonial legacies. In the context of globalisation, these demands are also shaped by instrumentalist perspectives of English competency for economic development (Milligan & Tikly, 2016). These aspirations have fuelled the unregulated growth of low-cost private schools¹ whose selling feature is English medium education (Nambissan, 2012).

While scholars have expressed much reservation on the quality of education within low-cost private schools, the emergence of these schools has led government schools catering to the poor to reorient their pedagogical processes as well (Nambissan, 2012; Sarangapani & Winch, 2010). The poor pedagogical resources and training of government teachers has led to a greater reliance on NGOs to manage and support the provision of English medium education within these under-resourced schools (Dasra Report 2010; Erling, Adinolfi, Kristina, Buckler, & Mukorera, 2016). It is within this larger context where local state bodies are increasingly devolving financial, managerial and pedagogical responsibilities of school education to a network of NGOs that I seek to examine one such intervention – the Teach for India (TFI) programme – and the modalities through which it reorients administrative and teaching-learning arrangements within a segment of municipal government schools in New Delhi.

I begin with outlining a theoretical framework for situating the new modalities of governance that increasingly advocate PPPs as a panacea for social sector reform, notably in school education, in India. This will be followed by a discussion on TFI where I map its entry onto the education scene, its spread across the country and specifically its functioning within municipal schools in Delhi. The third section discusses the process of fieldwork and methods employed. Finally, I examine two key themes – the creation of parallel institutional structures and the pedagogical divisions that operate within a segment of municipal schools in Delhi.

Institutionalising parallel structures of governance: theoretical framework

Scholarship on the transition of the Indian state from the developmental state of the post-independence period to the regulatory state of the late 1980s underscores the increasing privatisation of the public sector (Gupta & Sivaramakrishnan, 2011; Sharma & Gupta, 2006). Neoliberal reforms led to the substantial devolving of state responsibility onto a network of NGOs and individuals who were not traditionally a part of the formal state apparatus but became ‘instruments through which strategies for governing populations and communities, and fashioning proper selves, are deployed and legitimized’ (Sharma & Gupta, 2006, p. 9). Public-Private Partnerships

emerged as conduits of reform through which the Indian state attempted to restructure itself and transform its social relations of provision and service by subordinating them to the 'discipline of the market' (Kumar, 2014, p. 6). These new logics of reform that privileged the 'discipline of the market' intersected with a gamut of New Public Management (NPM) discourses that emphasised privatisation, competition and the outsourcing of services to the best cost-effective organisations to improve the quality of performance in public sector institutions (Clarke, Gewirtz, & McLaughlin, 2000; Kumar, 2014).

The thrust of these discussions that mapped these new regulatory reforms reiterated pertinent macroeconomic global shifts and their repercussions on national and local state spaces. However, the modalities through which these ideas gained traction within the Indian state apparatus and how they got translated within local sites have been examined by very few studies.

The Indian state is an amalgamation of local, regional and national entities organised along a scalar hierarchy operating not only within differing spatial and linguistic geographies but also inflected by varying rationalities (Kaviraj, 1991). Transnational discourses of education reform that emphasise NPM move through tiers of state-spaces fractured along differing material, social and ideological axes that influence how they are interpreted and translated at the local level (Ghertner, 2011; Mukhopadhyay, 2011).

The import of these ideas as solutions to the malaises of the Indian education system as Mukhopadhyay and Sriprakash (2011) observe undergo a series of 'translations' to meet 'local contingencies'. Quality of education in these discourses of NPM-led school reform emphasise elements of cost-effective decentralised management as well as choice in the aspects of teaching, curriculum and school administration (Kumar & Sarangapani, 2004). Language or medium of instruction also becomes a determinant of quality as will be examined in the later part of this section.

These logics of reform seek to embed privatisation both 'endogenously' and 'exogenously' within the variegated school system in India (Ball, 2007). 'Endogenous' privatisation refers to government organisations internally shifting their modalities of functioning to cater to principles of competition, choice and decentralised management linked to performance. 'Exogenous' privatisation calls for actors and institutions to fill in a series of voids perpetuated through decades of neglect by the Indian state at the regional and national levels (Ball, 2007; Batra, 2012; Kumar, 2008).

Non-governmental interventions that operate through PPPs have to negotiate with terrains of national and local policy frameworks governing standards of teaching, curriculum and management to operate within certain weakly regulated sites in the hierarchy of the schooling system (Mehendale & Mukhopadhyay, 2018). The subordination of regional bureaucracies to the

central government in India draws attention to the differential access to economic resources and the varied socio-economic demographics of the populations that utilise services – such as schools – administered by these two distinct but inter-linked state systems (Ghertner, 2011; Kaviraj, 1991; Kumar, 1996; Mukhopadhyay, 2011). Upward academic mobility along the sequential tiers of the education system is mediated through a knowledge of English (Jayadeva, 2019).

English medium education, where English is not merely one of the school subjects of study but a particular pedagogical process which structures all aspects of classroom transactions, has emerged as an important demand from socio-economically disadvantaged parents whose children study in municipal schools (Erling et al., 2016; Kumar, 1996; LaDousa, 2014; Vaish, 2008). ‘Exogenous’ interventions such as Teach for India speak to these demands to provide quick-fix, cost-effective solutions that bridge the gap and help students move up the academic ladder.

Medium of education here does not operate independently from discussions surrounding quality of teaching. Government teachers working within municipal schools are also subjects of reform who are seen as ill-equipped to deliver on these demands for English medium education (NCERT 2012). As Erling et al. (2016) observe, teacher training in India largely remains theoretical and most government teachers lack pedagogical expertise and necessary support for the development of language and cognitive skills in English.

There is very little research in the Indian context that has mapped the cultural, socio-economic and educational differences amongst teachers and their occupational experiences across different types of government and private schools in light of these NPM reforms (Sarangapani, Mukhopadhyay, Parul, & Jain, 2018). However, drawing on studies on NPM and its influences on school teaching in Anglophone countries, one finds similarities in the larger experiences of government teachers in the Indian context (Gupta & Ahmad, 2016; Jain & Saxena, 2010; Menon, 2014). New Public Management discourses increasingly call for deprofessionalising school teaching and advocate PPPs as a suitable means of improving the quality of education. There is a concerted demand to direct school teaching to cater to specific demands of the labour market (Gewirtz, 2002; Maguire, 2010).

The Teach for India programme, an off-shoot of the Teach for America (TFA)/Teach for All (TFAll) network, subscribes to certain transnational metanarratives of addressing social inequities in school education through a PPP model of short-term teaching aligned to discourses of leadership. In the niche urban socio-economic geographies where it operates in India, the intervention operationalises ‘exogenous privatisation’ (Ball, 2007) and

seeks to eradicate social inequity through a provision of English medium education.

Teach for India and school education: mapping the landscape

The entry of Teach for India (2015) onto the landscape of school education in Mumbai was facilitated through its association with Akanksha Foundation (n.d) and its founder Shaheen Mistri. Prior to setting up Akanksha Foundation, Shaheen Mistri was involved in a series of informal engagements to teach children from the slums as an under-graduate student in St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, in the late 1980s. She mobilised like-minded college friends, acquaintances and members from slum communities to work as volunteer-teachers in these efforts (Gupta & Mistri, 2014).

In 1991, she founded the non-profit organisation Akanksha Foundation to offer after-school support for children from low-income communities. The focus of academic engagement that has gradually evolved over the years today emphasises three areas: English, Mathematics and Moral Values (Ibid). The coming of NGOs such as Akanksha Foundation as intermediaries to support the schooling of poor children in under-resourced government schools in the city coincided with a larger shift in economic policies in the country where the Indian state was withdrawing from the social sector. This devolving of a range of pedagogical responsibilities to a network of education NGOs was primarily to support the Indian state's measures in school education during this period. The supportive role of NGOs also sought to bring innovation into a school system plagued by rigid and monotonous learning environments (Batra, 2006; Kamat, 2004; Kumar, 2008; Nawani, 2002).

As Srivastava (2010) observes there was a greater emphasis on PPPs through the early 2000s without fully defining models of partnership between the Indian state and private actors, roles of engagement or effective regulatory frameworks for the private parties involved. In the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007–2012) document the corporate sector was also explicitly mentioned among the group of private entities that the Indian state could engage with for the delivery of social services.² While prominent corporates have run charitable foundations for a range of social issues including education, contributed towards welfare measures in limited capacities and funded select NGOs, this move signified an expanded role for corporates in participating in PPPs (Srivastava, 2016, 2010; Sundar, 2013).

These developments also connected to the prescriptions of the National Knowledge Commission (NKC), a central government think tank focused on advocating reforms to develop India's competitive edge in the global economy. The NKC stressed the growing need for English language and

technical skills for the country's Information Technology (IT) and IT enabled service industries. Investment in education was seen by a number of corporate players as a valuable route to build a workforce with requisite soft skills and technical skills (Chakravarti, 2013). These discussions also gained greater currency with the notification of Section 135 and Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013. It called for a greater involvement of companies in corporate social responsibility (CSR) measures in the social sector (Goswami & Tandon, 2013).

The larger shift towards corporate support for grass-roots NGOs altered how social goals in education came to be perceived and consequently affected approaches of reform in the sector as well. Corporate actors were keen to promote business models that generated economic returns while supporting social causes (Ibid). Education reform emerged as a top priority for most corporates but the focus was largely limited to English language-based literacy, Maths, vocational and technical skills.

These policy shifts were reflected in the growth of Akanksha Foundation in Mumbai as well. In 2000, the organisation expanded its network of schools to Pune through a collaboration with the Thermax Social Initiatives Foundation (TSIF). Akanksha Foundation began its first in-school intervention in 2003 by adopting English medium sections in a few municipal schools in Mumbai. These English medium sections were run by teachers trained at Akanksha Foundation. Four years later, the organisation made in-roads into Pune municipal schools as well through a collaboration with the Pune Municipal Corporation and TSIF (Akanksha Foundation website: www.akanksha.org; Gupta & Mistri, 2014).

In 2007, Shaheen Mistri entered into talks with Wendy Kopp, founder of Teach for America, to bring the programme to India. Through collaborations with select Indian corporates and global foundations, a blueprint for the Teach for India fellowship was developed and the programme was launched in 2009 (Gupta & Mistri, 2014, p. 72). The programme selected 87 Fellows (as the participants of the programme are called) to work in a segment of municipal and low-income private schools in Mumbai and Pune (Gupta & Mistri, 2014; Subramanian, 2018; Vellanki, 2014).

One of the key differences between the models of TFA and TFI is that the former programme came into being within larger policy developments in the US that created a space for Alternative Teaching Certification (ATC) routes (Hohnstein, 2008; Maloney, 2012). In TFA, it is mandatory for Fellows to be enrolled in an accredited formal teacher education institute during the course of their two-year fellowship. This meant that TFA Fellows had to complete certain formal requirements of teacher education apart from the organisation's five-week training programme. There are several critiques to how ATC courses dilute formal teacher education programmes and focus only on practice-oriented concerns in pedagogy

as opposed to more theoretical, historical and philosophical foundations of teacher education (Hohnstein, 2008; Labaree, 2010). Keeping these limitations of ATCs in mind, TFA still operated within a formal apparatus of teacher education in the US.

In India, however, TFI remains outside the purview of the formal teacher education system. Fellows receive training and mentorship only from the TFI organisation before being placed to teach in government and low-income private schools. While teacher education regulations in the Right to Education 2009 (RTE) mandate that only those with recognised diplomas or under-graduate degrees in Education can teach in government schools, TFI operates through certain local government PPPs that allow much leeway to NGOs to work outside these policy guidelines. These freedoms indicated measures by lower tiers of the Indian state to allow for privatisation and in turn compromise on state investment in formal teacher education (Mehendale & Mukhopadhyay, 2018; Subramanian, 2017). Teach for India Fellows are trained for five weeks at the organisation's training institute in Pune after which they are placed in government and low-income schools. During the course of their two-year teaching stint they are mentored through their respective city-based TFI organisations.

When TFI first began its programme in Mumbai schools in mid 2009, the organisation's curricular objectives for English and Mathematics were aligned to the US Common Core standards.³ Fellows utilised texts and resources largely utilised in US classrooms. However, the expansion of the programme over the past decade has also resulted in the organisation making some cursory attempts to adopt Indian national curricular norms for teaching (Subramanian, 2017). As of 2015, TFI had 1,084 Fellows enrolled and teaching close to 60,000 students across a segment of government and low-income private schools in Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Ahmedabad (Teach for India website: www.teachforindia.org). Most candidates came from upper middle-class backgrounds who had completed their under-graduate and post-graduate education from prestigious educational institutions in prime cities across the country. Close to 50 per cent of the applicants were mid-career professionals from technical and corporate management backgrounds looking to shift into careers in the social sector. Around 40 per cent of the applicants were University graduates keen to experience opportunities that enabled them to directly engage with issues in education (Subramanian, 2017).

The programme operated in a larger proportion of government schools vis a vis private low-income schools, government aided schools and NGO schools. As of 2015, it was in Delhi that TFI was functioning within the highest number of government schools and had the largest number of Fellows enrolled across schools.⁴

Field of study: methods and analysis

The field-work for this research study spanned from July 2014 to October 2015. The research protocols for this study were approved by Jawaharlal Nehru University's Committee for Advanced Studies and Research (CASR). I was denied permission by the TFI Delhi team and the respective intra-regional education departments of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to conduct an ethnography of the intervention operating within a municipal school. I approached members associated with TFI individually and selected participants through a snowball sampling method.

I conducted in-depth interviews with close to 40 members associated with TFI to understand various aspects of its PPP model, its spread across cities in India and the modalities of its operation within municipal schools in Delhi which was my primary field-site. My participants included 15 TFI Fellows from two cohorts (2013–2015 and 2014–2016) teaching in Delhi; five TFI program managers and three administrative team members working with the organisation in Delhi; eight alumni members who were working in the social sector in Delhi and six members from the TFI city teams of Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Chennai and Ahmedabad. Each participant individually consented to be a part of my research study, fully aware that the TFI Delhi city team and the MCD had denied me permission. Pseudonyms have been used to maintain the confidentiality of my participants.

My interviews were conducted using a detailed interview schedule that focused on a range of themes such as socio-educational background of the TFI Fellows, organisational training practices, organisational support structures, modes of operation within schools, engagements with government staff and pedagogical processes. Participants based in Delhi were interviewed in person over the course of two sessions, where each session lasted up to two hours. Interviews with TFI participants based in other cities were conducted over the telephone and over Skype.

In order to understand the Delhi government's perspective on the programme, I approached some municipal school teachers for interviews. Four municipal school teachers individually consented to be interviewed outside the school sites where they were employed.⁵ I followed a similar process of interviewing the municipal school teachers as the TFI members.

Apart from in-depth interviews, Right to Information⁶ (RTI) applications were also filed at the respective intra-regional education departments of the MCD to procure relevant information on the PPP arrangement between TFI and the Delhi government. In the context of this research study, the RTI was an important tool for the researcher to gain information on partnerships between private organisations and the government

that are not available in the public domain. The RTI responses provided me with information on the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between TFI and the Delhi government, evaluations of the intervention by more than 30 municipal school principals and other related correspondence between the organisation and the Delhi government.

Information from the in-depth interviews and the RTI responses was transcribed, coded and organised across various cross-cutting themes to situate the organisation's history, its vision of education reform at the national level, spread across cities and specifically its modalities of operation within municipal schools in Delhi.

Parallel institutional regimes: Teach for India in Delhi

The government school system in Delhi is demarcated along different levels of schooling and management. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) administers the largest number of schools (1,795 schools) providing primary education, that is from class I to V. Trifurcated in 2012, the MCD has three regional divisions: the North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC), the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) and the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC).⁷

Due to the growing demands for English medium education from the parents of students studying in municipal schools, the MCD selected close to 300 municipal schools in 2010 to start separate English medium sections for each grade. Each class, from Class I to Class V, was to have a separate English medium section. Better infrastructural facilities, maintenance of teacher-pupil ratios at 1:40 according to the RTE 2009 guidelines and government teachers with high English language competency were some of the special provisions outlined for this select tier of municipal schools (Commissioner's letter 2010).

The partitioning of classes into English and Hindi medium sections, however, was not a new development in the government school system in Delhi. A tier of relatively better government schools, called the Sarvodaya schools, which were administered by the Delhi state government had introduced separate English and Hindi medium sections in the 1990s to cater to the growing demands of English from the middle classes (Vaish, 2008). Thus, in order to address similar demands from disadvantaged families whose children inhabited the lowest tier of the government school system, the MCD decided to follow a similar mode of intervention.

However, there were significant points of divergence in how the MCD sought to address these demands for English medium education. The guidelines for teacher qualification and recruitment were subverted to allow for a greater informality that set the precedent for entry of NGOs, such as TFI, into the MCD school system. Another point of departure was

that the TFI English medium sections were to be financially self-sufficient and have relative pedagogical autonomy vis a vis the government-run Hindi medium sections (MoU MCD and Teach to Lead 2011).

In April 2011, negotiations between TFI and the South Delhi Municipal Commissioner led to the signing of an MoU. Sadhana, a member from the Government Relations team of TFI in Delhi, noted the reasons which allowed TFI to enter MCD schools in Delhi:

“I think municipal corporation was selected because I think they did not have a strong bar of teacher accreditation . . . we are not telling our Fellows are teachers, but they are additional ‘teaching resources’.”

Her comment articulated the legal loophole through which TFI Fellows despite not having any formal teaching qualifications as mandated by the RTE 2009 were permitted to teach in MCD schools. A reading of the MoU emphasised the modes through which the local government institutionalised a number of special privileges to TFI in government schools. Apart from TFI classrooms maintaining strict teacher to student ratios of 1:40 as per RTE 2009 guidelines, Fellows could also bring in volunteers to help them with their work. In the upper-primary grades where class sizes were large, TFI could appoint two Fellows in one classroom to teach a class of 75 students. All Fellows were exempt from the administrative work that government teachers were mandated to perform in government schools and had autonomy to use different pedagogical methods with the aim of preparing students for standardised assessments. They were to focus only on the teaching of English, Maths, Environmental Studies (EVS for primary) and Science (upper-primary) subjects in their classrooms. Government teachers (of the Hindi medium sections) were assigned the extra task of teaching languages such as Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi to the children in the TFI English medium sections at the primary level (MoU MCD and Teach to Lead 2011).

While Fellows were answerable to school principals regarding classroom discipline, attendance of students and seeking official permissions, TFI Fellows were not regulated by the administrative structures of the MCD. TFI Fellows were paid through the funds generated internally by the organisation and were provided support and mentorship through the TFI city team throughout the course of their two-year teaching stint. The MoU called for Fellows to engage in community development efforts, raise funds and a range of resources for their English medium sections. Fellows also had special privileges to take their students for varied extracurricular activities and excursions provided they secured the respective school principal's permission (Ibid). This was a special privilege for TFI Fellows as municipal school teachers got permission and funds from the MCD for only one excursion annually.

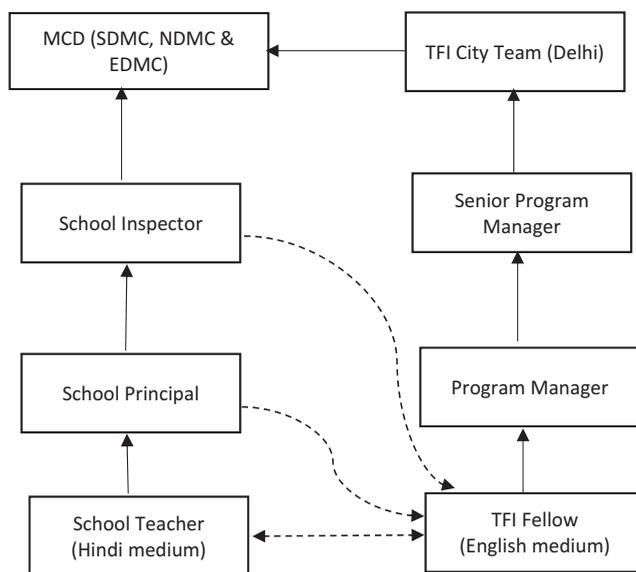


Figure 1. Parallel institutional regimes.

The entry of TFI created two distinct institutional regimes within the MCD school system – the government school regime and the TFI regime (see [Figure 1](#)). In the government school system hierarchy, school teachers were answerable to the school principal who was in turn governed by school inspection officials working under the respective MCD department. A similar parallel administrative hierarchy existed for TFI with Fellows at the bottom and the TFI city team at the top of the system.

As [Figure 1](#) elaborates, the governmental ambit of regulation over a TFI Fellow's classroom was largely weak. Fellows classrooms were open to being inspected by the school principals and the school inspectors, but these visits were largely superficial in nature. As long as Fellows adhered to rules of discipline in their classrooms and completed the required school syllabus irrespective of the pedagogical methods used, school principals largely did not concern themselves with the TFI classrooms. Most Fellows described a cordial relationship with their school principals.

Fellows' interactions with their government teacher counterparts in the Hindi medium sections, on the other hand, were marked with distance and tension. This was because the entry of TFI into the MCD schools altered existing hierarchical relationships and professional structures in complex ways. School teachers found that their administrative work had increased as they had responsibilities not only for their classrooms but also the TFI classrooms. While the MoU expected government teachers to take regional-language related subjects in the TFI classrooms, in practice the English and Hindi medium sections largely operated independently of each other

with some interface regarding administrative matters. School teachers expressed a sense of insecurity and resentment as they believed that school principals were giving Fellows preferential treatment because of their privileged backgrounds and their special emphasis on English language teaching. School principals had to walk a tightrope to balance their relationships with government teachers as well as with the TFI Fellows who they believed were key agents who could bring more material resources into their respective schools even if it was being channelled largely to support only TFI classrooms.

New divisions: amplifying material and pedagogical inequities

The creation of the English medium sections accentuated class-based tensions that were shaped by the social and material position of English within the MCD school system. Mahesh, a municipal school teacher, discussed how the intervention posited English and Hindi medium children differently:

“Hamari Principal sirf TFI bacchon se assembly karvati hain.wo English bolte hain. isliye (Our Principal only gets the TFI children to conduct the [school] assembly. It is because they speak in English)”.

This perception of TFI as improving the English language speaking skills of children was dominant in the evaluations of the programme by more than 30 municipal school principals in 2013. Most school principals emphasised the Fellows’ teaching of English language skills and the range of extra-curricular activities that students from the English medium sections were exposed to. In these evaluations, some school principals also underscored the tensions that were emerging within their schools due to the imbalanced provisioning in TFI classrooms that were stocked with extra English language readers, teaching-learning aids and multimedia devices. This was linked to the special autonomy that Fellows had in raising funds for their classrooms through social media platforms and through their personal and professional networks.

The intervention not only amplified material inequities between English and Hindi medium sections but also aggravated class-based insecurities among government teachers. Amit, a TFI Fellow, reflected on how the government staff perceived him:

“They think that we come from posh backgrounds, they think that we’ve come here to achieve, use this as a stepping-stone and then go to greater heights and they feel aggrieved that they never had this option [...] Having said that itna class farak hai bhi nahi, with a lot of teachers. So I mean, for me maybe, because I used to go in a car, and I would always bring in a lot of things. Like I bought the whole football ka kit for the school ... So they knew that I am doing and raising and spending my own money and doing a lot of things”.

His observations emphasised how the school largely viewed Fellows as privileged individuals who were teaching temporarily and would then use this experience to gain a foothold in other opportunities outside the municipal school system. This aspect which allowed Fellows to enter and teach within the school system temporarily also evoked a sense of envy from the government school staff who according to Amit ‘never had this option’.

Within this observation was embedded a larger point of discussion which alluded to tensions between an older bureaucratised school system vis a vis a more flexible managerialistic intervention (Qureshi, 2015). Through TFI, individuals entered teaching to build leadership skills, learn about the school system and use these experiences in their own individualised ways to either enter the social sector or pursue other professional trajectories. Teaching as a profession was not at the centre of TFI’s project of educational reform (Subramanian, 2017).

Amit’s observation also indicated how he embodied certain overt markers of class vis a vis the government school staff. References to how he drove to school using his own car and also raised funds for a range of extracurricular projects for his English medium classroom indicated his privileged class position. This was in stark contrast to the government school teacher who worked within the confines of a traditional government job circumscribed by a scarcity of resources and a range of administrative responsibilities. The intervention created two teacher figures within the municipal school system: the new entrepreneurial Fellow and the older bureaucratic government school teacher. School principals primarily acted as mediators between both groups and supervised the work of Fellows only with regard to administrative matters. These institutional separations had pertinent pedagogical repercussions for students in TFI classrooms.

Fellows largely focused only on the teaching of English and Maths in their classrooms, with very limited teaching of EVS in primary grades and Science in the upper-primary grades. Regional languages were rarely taught in TFI classrooms which led to a fractured linguistic acquisition of English. Payal, a TFI Fellow teaching in a second-grade classroom, reflected on the pedagogical underpinnings of language and learning:

“My problem was they don’t understand ABC so they don’t know ABC. But I was very sure like somewhere I thought ka-kha-ga toh aata hi hoga, so I thought okay let me use A-ey, B-ba toh unko ey-ba-ka toh pata hi hai. So agar Hindi aati hai toh dusri language I can really relate to Hindi and then I can tell them. But when I saw them learning Hindi is what I’m realizing that they don’t know ka-kha-ga also. So that’s what I’m saying, both the languages are like second language. So they are like first time learners to both the languages”.

She assumed that the young children in her second-grade classroom would have a basic understanding of the Hindi alphabet. It was only when she made attempts to see whether they could relate to phonics in Hindi did she realise that her class children had not been exposed to any language formally and were first generation learners. Payal's observations also alluded to the TFI model's pedagogical limitations as well as her own struggles in teaching disadvantaged children who were first-generation learners. These dilemmas were also echoed by some school principals in their evaluations of the programme to the MCD. They noted that children from TFI classrooms had poor Hindi language comprehension and Fellows were only focused on subjects that were linked to the organisation's cyclical literacy and numeracy assessments in English. These processes were leading to an undermining of indigenous linguistic resources to further narrow goals of national competitiveness that were inextricably connected to academic performance in English. Teaching disadvantaged students in English medium in postcolonial contexts, as Tikly (2016) notes, requires pedagogical strategies that build on indigenous languages and are facilitated through adequate linguistic support for teachers within these school sites. The intervention provided a quick-fix solution to the demands of poor parents for English medium education but did not seek to engage adequately with larger questions of language and learning within under-resourced schools.

Conclusions

There has been a distinct shift in the nature of PPPs in the landscape of school education for the urban poor. Public-private partnerships are increasingly becoming imbricated within larger transnational discourses of NPM emphasising efficiency and quality. These logics of reform circulate through varied tiers of state spaces and are consequently shaped within particular socio-economic geographies. Through a case-study of TFI, an off-shoot of the TFA programme, this article examined the modalities through which the organisation infused logics of NPM within under-resourced municipal schools in Delhi. Quality in this PPP model interfaced with an instrumentalist vision of English medium education to cater to the rising demands of poor parents whose children studied in these municipal schools.

Teach for India created a 'new bureaucratic field' emphasising 'flexible organisation and efficiency' in place of the 'traditional bureaucratic proceduralism' characteristic of state systems (Qureshi, 2015). The programme coalesced privatisation with English medium education bifurcating an under-resourced school system into two distinct spheres. These processes institutionalised parallel structures of governance, fragmented teaching-learning and further

weakened the status of the government school teacher. Studies on TFA and its international off-shoots have highlighted how the programme undermined professional teacher education and advocated school choice measures to resurrect under-resourced public-school systems across the world (Straubhaar & Friedrich, 2015).

In the context of India, the intervention operated completely outside the purview of formal teacher education. The programme subverted teacher education requirements mandated by the RTE through local governance loopholes to function within weakly regulated government schools catering to the urban poor. The MoU between the MCD and TFI provided a number of special privileges to Fellows within schools. Government teachers, as Ramachandran and Bhattacharjea (2009) have discussed, work within highly resource scarce contexts and are burdened with a range of administrative responsibilities. Teach for India increased the administrative responsibilities of government teachers further and relegated them to being regional-language teachers for the TFI-led English medium sections.

The partnership entitled TFI Fellows to greater pedagogical autonomy and special privileges to engage children from their classrooms in a range of extra-curricular activities. These dynamics led to class-based tensions between Fellows and government teachers, exacerbated material inequities and reinforced the symbolic power of English within school sites where government teachers themselves had poor pedagogical support (Erling et al., 2016). These observations corroborated studies on language and quality in formerly colonised countries where the continued preference for English was linked to enhancing global competitiveness through economic development (Milligan & Tikly, 2016). Introducing English medium education within under-resourced schools catering to disadvantaged students requires robust pedagogical strategies supportive of multilingualism within the school ethos (Tikly, 2016). Due to limitations in accessing the school site, this article drew on in-depth interviews and information from RTI applications to illustrate how PPPs such as TFI reoriented local modes of governance and defined quality of education in reductive terms. This research would benefit from an ethnographic enquiry of the programme within the school space to understand the deeper pedagogical underpinnings of the model, socio-cultural translations of learning within local contexts circumscribed by particular regional demographics and the intricacies of its interaction with government staff and students.

Notes

1. Low-cost private or budget schools operate with a minimum of infrastructure and resources. Teachers in these schools are largely unqualified and are paid a fraction of what tenured teachers receive in government schools (Nambissan, 2012).

2. Post-independence, economic development in India was facilitated through centralised planning articulated through five-year plans under the Planning Commission. This process ended in 2014, when a think-tank National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog replaced the Planning Commission.
3. The Common Core state standards Initiative is an educational initiative in the United States that details what students from Grade 1 to 12 should know in English and Maths at the end of each grade. The initiative seeks to establish consistent educational standards across the states in the US and ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to join college programmes or the workforce (Common Core standards website: www.corestandards.org).
4. Information substantiating this argument was provided by a senior TFI management member based in Mumbai.
5. Government employees are regulated by strict rules that forbid them from giving interviews at their place of employment unless researchers have secured official permission.
6. The Right to Information is an Act passed by the Indian Parliament in 2005 that mandates a timely response to citizen requests for government information (www.rti.gov.in). The Act, despite certain limitations, seeks to empower citizens, promote transparency and accountability in the functioning of the government.
7. The Delhi Directorate of Education (DoE) manages schools providing upper primary, secondary and senior secondary education. Most students who complete primary education in municipal schools move onto feeder schools administered by the DoE in their respective regions. As of 2015, TFI was teaching students up to class VII in Delhi.

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