"It is as if They are Taking Advantage of a Bad Situation": Female School Teachers' Narratives About Care Work and Online Teaching during Covid-19 in India

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This exploratory study analyzes six female school teachers' narratives of navigating increased care work at home with online teaching during COVID-19 in India. A theoretical framework of decolonizing feminist research, with an emphasis on moving beyond Anglo/Eurocentric forms of feminist knowledge-making, frames the study. Based on the interviews, the study reveals that the home emerged as a site for resistance to the gendered division of care work in marriages via the use of the tactical strategy of relying on family members other than the husband. Within the limited scope of the study, the schools emerged as sites of institutional betrayal manifested in administrative actions and inactions such as removing contractual teachers, scheduling meetings outside work hours, increasing surveillance, and not providing digital support. These administrative decisions were perceived by the participants as motivated by profit-making, displaying complete disregard for the teachers' well-being. The findings advance our understanding of how emergencies such as COVID-19 exacerbate the exploitation of female members of the labor force who are already marginalized through contractual undervalued work or the inordinate burden of caregiving. It also offers important suggestions for policymakers concerned with creating safe and inclusive working spaces for female teachers in the global south.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, care work, teachers, India, decolonial theory

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had an overwhelmingly negative impact on marginalized communities across the globe such as people of color, working mothers, people with disabilities, poor people, and informal workers. Female school teachers with children were particularly affected because they had to simultaneously cope with exacerbated gendered inequities linked to care work at home (Borah and Das, 2021; Chauhan, 2020), and challenges linked with online teaching from the home such as digital divide, limited professional training, less attendance, and salary cuts (Kumawat, 2020). Despite the fact that teacher well-being is a prerequisite for providing students with a safe and quality learning atmosphere, especially in the context of humanitarian crises and emergencies such as COVID-19 (Falk et al., 2019), limited empirical research exists on the lived experiences of female school teachers in the Global South. This qualitative exploratory study addresses the research gap by presenting a narrative inquiry of six female school teachers' experiences of negotiating care work at home with online teaching during COVID-19 in India.

India represents a critical site for investigation because of the abysmally low rates of female labor force participation even before the pandemic (Kumar, 2021), the inordinate burden of caregiving on women that includes looking after children and the extended

family (OECD, 2018), and the nationwide digital divide (Modi & Postario, 2020). The specific research questions that the study seeks to answer are:

a. How did female school teachers in Delhi (India) navigate care work at home with online teaching during the pandemic?

b. To what extent did they feel supported by family members and school personnel in seeking to address these responsibilities?

The research is guided by a decolonial feminist framework that places emphasis on moving beyond Anglocentric/Eurocentric epistemologies via collaboration between the researcher and the researched. Participant narratives, verified by them before publication, thus occupy center stage in this article. A narrative approach to inquiry was deemed suitable because it privileges the voice of the participant, recognizes the importance of personal stories as generative tools for social transformation, and involves the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the researched (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Ballantine, 2022). A specific method of narrative inquiry called episodic narrative interviews (Mueller, 2019) was employed to elicit bounded stories from six female school teachers about their experiences with care work and online teaching during COVID-19.

I begin the article by providing a brief overview of COVID-19 in India, along with a review of the empirical literature on gender disparities at home and schools during COVID-19. This is followed by an explication of the theoretical framework and the research methodology. Participant narratives, which have been verified by them before publication, are then placed at the center of the study. These narratives can be seen as possessing both *intrinsic* and *instrumental* value (Ballantine, 2022). Their intrinsic value lies in participants' opportunity to own and control their stories (Ballantine, 2022), and their instrumental value in deconstructing decontextualized and static understanding of female school teachers' experiences during the pandemic. The first-person accounts will prove valuable for scholars and policymakers interested in developing situated socio-structural theories, policies, and interventions around the issue of teacher well-being and gender equity in emergency contexts.

Two heuristic notions of 'tactical strategies' (Lugones, 2003) and 'institutional betrayal' (Freyd and Smith, 2014) have been used to frame the findings and analysis, where the former refers to seemingly small acts of micro resistance enacted by marginalized groups that can prove subversive in the long run (Moya, 2006), and the latter refers to institutional actions or inactions that bring harm to those dependent on them for safety and well-being (Freyd & Smith, 2014). I interpret teachers' reliance on family members other than their husbands to cope with increased care work as a tactical strategy of resistance (Lugones, 2003), and the school administrations' actions/inactions, such as lack of teacher professional development and removal of contractual teachers during COVID-19, as a form of institutional betrayal (Freyd & Smith, 2014). The article ends by drawing attention to the implications of these findings for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners in India and globally.

Covid-19 in India: An Overview

On March 24, 2020, at 8:00 pm, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced to a population of 1.2 billion people that the country would shut down in exactly four hours,

leading to one of the strictest lockdowns globally. Educational institutions swiftly closed and moved to online teaching, with approximately 320 million school students affected by school closures (Tandon, 2021). The digital divide in India, coupled with limited prior experience with technology, raised serious concerns about the feasibility of online teaching nationally (Modi & Postario, 2020). Even private school students from urban areas faced a host of technological issues, with parents reporting low speed of internet data or not having any technological device at home at all (Vyas, 2020). And while India experienced what some call a "relatively mild first wave" of COVID-19 (Chandra, 2021), the second wave of COVID-19 caught the nation completely unprepared, unleashing a tragedy of horrifying magnitude. India accounted for more than half of the global COVID-19 cases during the second wave that lasted from March 2021-June 2021, and the nation set a global record at 40,000 deaths a day (What to Know about India's Coronavirus Crisis, 2021; Zirpe et al., 2021). Emerging research demonstrates the looming impact of COVID-19 in the Indian subcontinent in the form of learning loss for children, drastic plummeting of female employment, as well as increased levels of poverty, starvation, and income divide (COVID-19's Lasting Impact on Education, 2022; Gururaja & Ranjitha, 2022).

Gender Disparities in Care Work at Home During Covid-19
Care work refers to the unpaid labor carried out by individuals inside households and includes direct care of people, as well as indirect care, such as cooking, cleaning, or fetching water (Moreira da Silva, 2019). This work, done by millions of women across the globe, helps sustain the formal economy and has an impact on women's ability to undertake paid employment (Addati et al., 2018). Scholars have referred to the additional burden of care work for professional women as the "double burden" (Hochshild, 1989, p.4) or the "motherhood employment penalty" (Addati et al., 2018, p. xxxiii).

Poverty, war, and/or emergencies like COVID-19 have the indirect effect of altering the already skewed power relations between men and women, typically leading to an increase in women's workloads and further negatively impacting their participation within the labor force (Moreira da Silva, 2019; McLaren et al., 2020). Compared to earlier epidemics and pandemics, the public health measures implemented to curb COVID-19, specifically the stay-at-home orders and closure of schools, had a more severe impact on women's care work responsibilities than men's, irrespective of their work status (Sevilla & Smith, 2020). Subsequently, many women were either pushed out of the workforce or had to reduce their work hours, thereby exacerbating the existing gender gap in the labor market (Alon et al., 2020; Sevilla & Smith, 2020; Sugawara & Nakamura, 2021).

Despite increased contributions by men globally, the gender division of household labor continued to remain unequal during the pandemic (Carlson et al., 2020; Farré et al., 2020; Fodor et al., 2021; Jessen et al., 2021). In the US, women with young children reduced their work hours four to five times more than fathers (Collins et al., 2020), and in the UK, the pandemic led to an approximate increase of forty hours of additional childcare responsibilities for families, most of which was borne by women (Sevilla & Smith, 2020). Married professional women working from home in India also experienced more stress than their male counterparts due to increased domestic responsibilities (Beri, 2021; Borah & Das', 2021; Sharma & Vaish, 2020).

Chauhan's (2022) study with thirty dual-earning couples in India revealed that while time spent on unpaid care work increased for all participants during the pandemic, for men this unpaid care work was in addition to recreational activities, whereas for women the increased care work replaced the recreational activities, leading to exhaustion and stress. While emerging research highlights the possible positive impact of flexible work arrangements for working mothers owing to increased contributions of male partners at home (Alon et al., 2020), this can only occur when organizations and societies change the work cultures and gender norms in the post-pandemic era (Chung et al., 2021).

Gender Disparities at School During Covid-19
Beames et al. (2021) refer to school teachers as "the forgotten frontline (workers) of COVID-19" (p. 1); they had to take up new roles and adapt to online teaching with little notice and limited professional training. During the pandemic, school teachers internationally reported an increased feeling of burnout, a sense of frustration and inadequacy, reduced communication and non-authentic interactions with parents, a lack of institutional support, and a lack of spontaneity when teaching online (Niemi & Kousa, 2020; Onyema et al., 2020, Pellerone, 2021; Pressley, 2021). Female school teachers with children and elderly dependents could be seen as doubly disadvantaged, since they also had increased care work responsibilities at home.

Studies have illuminated work-family conflicts faced by female school teachers internationally even before the pandemic (Erdamar & Demirel, 2014; Noor & Zainuddin, 2011). While teachers were somewhat able to separate the demands of professional paid care work and unpaid care work before the pandemic, the blurring of the personal and professional lines during COVID-19 made this separation extremely challenging. Several studies within the Global North draw attention to the differential impact of COVID-19 on male and female school teachers in terms of increased stress, anxiety, and depression in the workplace (Oducado et al., 2020; Lizana et al., 2021; Santamaría et al., 2020). Within the specific context of India, female school teachers in joint families reported facing an added layer of responsibility, since they had to look after the elders as well as children (Dogra and Kaushal, 2022).

Santamaría and colleagues' (2021) study in Spain revealed that not only did female school teachers manifest significantly more symptoms of stress and anxiety than their male counterparts, but those who had children displayed more depressive symptoms than those who did not. Similar findings come from a survey of 200 academics from universities in Europe and the US (Yildrim and Ziya, 2020). Female academics also reported experiencing additional pressures linked to providing students with emotional and psychological support (Górska et al., 2021; Winnington et al., 2021) and increased feelings of frustration at home and work (Parlak et al., 2021). Despite the significant additional burden placed on female teachers during the pandemic across the globe, the bulk of empirical literature about the gendered impact of COVID-19 on teachers focuses on schools and higher education institutions within the Global North. The study seeks to address the research gap by foregrounding the lived experiences of six female school teachers in India.

Theoretical Framework: Decolonizing Feminist Research
There exists a widespread tendency within feminist research to view the category of "women" and their experiences as homogenous across the globe. In her seminal work, Mohanty (1984) highlighted the production of the third-world woman as a "singular monolithic subject" (p. 333) within certain Western feminist scholarly articles that "discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of lives of women in the third world" (p. 334). Her definition of colonization is a *discursive* one, where feminist researchers make use of specific analytic categories (third-world women as victims of male violence, universal dependents, victims of the colonial process, and victims of kinship structures) instead of careful and focused local analysis. Lugones (2010) similarly notes how categorical, hierarchical, and dichotomous logic in modern and colonial ways of thinking about gender, race, and/or sexuality tends to eschew the complexity and diversity of female voices and experiences in favor of generalizations.

Decolonizing feminist research goes beyond the analytically binary models of subordination and subversion, victimhood and rebellion, passivity and agency, and repression and freedom that predominates Western feminist thought to account for the multiple identities that women from the so-called third world, and globally negotiate with (Saini, 2022). To quote Manning (2021):

> Many Global South women live in an in between world, a world full of uncertainties, ambiguities, and contradictions…Using a decolonial feminist framework to understand the everyday ness of these in between worlds identifies the complexities of the women's lived experiences. (p. 1204)

A decolonial feminist framework enables the researcher to engage with this "everydayness" of the participants' lived experiences by moving beyond Anglocentric/Eurocentric epistemes to produce new forms of knowledge-making. It foregrounds the voices of the participants, involves collaborative and reflexive research via positioning of participants, not as subjects/objects but as equal participants, and demands from the researcher constant questioning of her/his assumptions (Agboka, 2014).

Within the specific context of COVID-19, this framework has been employed to explore a diverse range of topics such as the gendering of violence against women (Segalo & Fine, 2020), Pakistani migrant women's lived experiences in the Netherlands (Salim, 2022), and the experiences of female faculty in academia (Abhaya, 2022). However, this is one of the first studies that employs a decolonial feminist framework to analyze the interactions between gender, care work, and school teaching during the pandemic; and it is hoped that the findings will contribute to a situated and non-essentialized understanding of female professionals' experiences in schools in India.

Research Methodology
Narrative Inquiry
In narrative inquiry (NI), researchers collect stories from their participants about a significant event in their life and/or social context (Jovchelovitch et al., 2000) and use them to understand the informants' experiences. NI prioritizes the storyteller's perspective instead of imposing a more specific agenda (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016,

p. 632) and involves the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the researched, thus serving as a useful methodology for scholars working within the decolonial feminist framework. A specific method of NI called 'episodic narrative interviews' (Mueller, 2019) was used to elicit bounded stories from six female school teachers about their experiences with care work and online teaching during COVID-19. Within episodic interviews, the researcher requests the informants to share small stories that are targeted and focused in nature, which helps mitigate the "anything goes" approach standard within narrative research (Davis & Dwyer, as cited in Mueller, 2019, p.2). The first round of semi-structured interviews, conducted via Zoom, lasted between 60-75 minutes, and the video recordings were saved with the participants' permission. A follow-up interview lasting approximately 30-35 minutes was conducted virtually again after 2-3 weeks to clarify details about specific aspects of episodes shared in the first session.

Identification and Selection of Participants
The participant selection criteria devised for this study required that prospective participants be a) female, b) school teachers at private schools, c) married with children, and d) their school transitioned to online teaching during the pandemic. I shared a recruitment call at six different private schools in Delhi, India. I had worked as a schoolteacher in Delhi for eight years before pursuing a Ph.D., and the six schools were selected because I knew at least one employee at the school who agreed to share the recruitment material (flyer, text message, email). Initially, four participants from four different schools agreed to participate, and snowball sampling was used for the recruitment of two additional participants. The reluctance of teachers to participate despite guaranteeing confidentiality was a major obstacle in recruiting participants, and contributed to my decision to frame the research as an exploratory study with a small sample set of six participants (see Table 1 for detailed backgrounds of each participant). Strict confidentiality and anonymity measures were followed to safeguard participants' well-being and minimize the possibility of harm. Pseudonyms selected by the participants have been used throughout the study and at the time of being interviewed, all the participants were working remotely at home and teaching online classes.

It is important to note that due to the small sample set, the findings cannot be generalized to India, let alone globally. The insights of the participants are linked to their specific circumstances, which may be different from those faced by teachers from different socio-economic backgrounds, castes, states, and types of schools. However, the exploratory nature of the study presents a useful foundation for developing more elaborate and extensive research on the topic of care work and online teaching during COVID-19 involving a larger and more diverse sample of participants. Additionally, a thick description of the "time, place, context, and culture" (Mertens, 2010, p. 259) has been provided to assist the readers to determine the extent of transferability – the qualitative parallel concept of generalizability – of the findings to other contexts (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

Table 1
Overview of the six research participants in the study

Private School	Participant No.	Name (Pseudonyms)	Grades	Nature of job, Work experience	Age	Approximate Annual Income & Classification	Children	Extended Family living together	Type of School
No. 1	1.	Manasvi	XI & XII	Contractual, 22 years	43 years	INR 1,000,000 *Low-Income Family*	Two sons (15 &18 years)	None	Private, Recognized & Unaided
	2.	Geeta	X- XII	Permanent, 10 years	35 years	INR 2,000,000 *Middle-Income Family*	One daughter (12 years)	Mother-in-Law	
No. 2	3.	Akanksha	XI & XII	Permanent, 14 years	38 years	INR 3,250,000 *Middle-Income Family*	A son (14 years) and daughter (17 years)	Father & Mother-in-Law	Private, Recognized & Aided
	4.	Niyati	VI-X	Permanent 23 years	45 years	INR 2,650, 000 *Middle-Income Family*	A son (21 years)	None	
No. 3	5.	Disha	IX & X	Permanent, 9 years	32 years	INR 1,000,00 *Middle-Income Family*	One-year old baby boy born in June, 2020.	None	Private, Recognized & Unaided
No. 4	6.	Yami	I-V	Contractual, 5 years	29 years	INR 2,000,00 *Middle-Income Family*	1.3 months baby boy born in March, 2020.	Father & Mother-in-Law	Private, Recognized & Unaided

Narrative Analysis of Transcripts

Once the interviews were transcribed, I conducted a narrative analysis involving the reduction, synthesis, and reconfiguration of the interview data (Kelly & Howie, 2011) to produce six separate stories. A specific process called *emplotment*, which requires the researcher to identify key subplots (significant events) in each interview and organize them chronologically in the form of a story, was followed (Emden, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1995). The first step in the process involved the identification and isolation of all events that dealt with the participants' experiences with care work and online teaching during the pandemic. In the second step, the events were arranged chronologically to create a coherent story with a beginning, middle, and end. The final stories were returned to all the respondents via email, who were asked the following two questions: "Does it ring true?" and "Do you wish to correct/develop/delete any part?" (Emden, 1998, p. 35). While four teachers replied to the email saying they were satisfied, Manasvi requested me to remove references to the subjects taught by her for fear of being recognized, and Yami requested that I acknowledge her mother-in-law's help in the story. In the final stage, I made changes to the stories based on the feedback from the participants and analyzed them via a six-step inductive approach to thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). Post-analysis, I conducted member checks with four participants (Manasvi, Yami, Disha, and Akanksha) to ensure the credibility of my findings (Birt et al., 2016), all of whom seemed satisfied with the analysis.

Teachers' Voices from India

This section contains condensed versions of the final *emplotted* stories of four out of the six participants. While I had hoped to foreground the stories of all six participants, Niyati and Geeta were not comfortable with the verbatim publication of their narratives for fear of being identified. I honor their decision by keeping their stories private and referring to excerpts from their interviews in the discussion section. The published stories have been verified by the participants and make exclusive use of their words.

Manasvi

Manasvi is a 43-year-old mother of two school-going children. She was employed on a contract at a private school in West Delhi that charged an average monthly fee of INR 8000 (USD 100) and catered to students from high-income families.

"During the first phase of the pandemic, we were asked to start online teaching from the very next day, irrespective of whether a teacher knows how to do it or not... The day the lockdown was announced, we had a meeting at 9 at night. Sometimes, we would have meetings at 10:00 pm... So, it was very chaotic in the beginning; schools provided little support. The new study of techniques and teaching from home in a small house like ours was also a challenge. I have a one-bedroom apartment, so ultimately all we had was two rooms and a kitchen. And we had strict instructions that when you teach, there should be nobody else in the room. How is that possible?

Technology was also a big challenge for me... I was always lagging in technology even before the pandemic... The schools did not do much in helping us. But I thank my husband who taught me, and a colleague's husband...I don't think of technology as a burden now.

Then without a maid, everything was a big challenge for me. The entire family [was] at home… and when everybody is in the house, then the number of meals also increase from 3 to 4… and the tendency that since mother is at home, we can eat hot and fresh food. Every other household work was earlier done by others, I had a cook, I had a maid… Now I had to do everything… and then homeschooling the younger one. It was a mess!... But my kids really helped me… they learnt how to use the mop… they washed utensils also, they did everything, like drying clothes… Those women whose family members helped them, life must have been relatively easy for them during COVID. I received a lot of help too, as much as I could get, I received from my children.

All the contractual teachers were removed because they were not needed. Whether a teacher teaches one student, or sixty, that hardly matters, they just wiped them off and combined classes… I was always scared initially… That time when we did not have a proper connection, I felt every day that I would definitely lose my job because the principal used to enter the class anytime to check on me… and then the second wave struck, that was the worst time… the passion to cook, try new things at home, that was totally killed. It was all about survival at the time.

It is not good, the school is getting fees every month right? Still, they are saving on AC, they are saving on security, on transportation. They are saving on so many things! And they are removing teachers, so I think they are not doing good. It is almost as if they are taking advantage of a bad situation; this is what I feel."

Yami
Yami is a 29-year-old mother of a baby boy born during the pandemic who was on a contract at a school in West Delhi. The school charged average monthly fees of INR 9000 (USD 110) and catered to students from high-income families.

"When the pandemic happened, I was on [unpaid] maternity leave and when I went back in July, 2020, they did not hire me back as I was on contract. I felt bad when they asked me to leave. I was devastated. I got to know later that my principal kept two teachers in my salary, she was getting more manpower, not quality, and quality hardly makes a difference in the online classes. [So] I was out of job for a year.

Luckily, I was offered the [contractual] job again in March [2021], and I really wanted to prove myself…When I rejoined, I was very new to online teaching. The very first day of my online class, I was not given any demo about teaching online, any strategies… Just a team of students was made, I was told this is my class, and I was expected to teach them without any guidance… and the principal could enter any time to check my teaching. It was scary… School did not play any kind of role in teaching us, neither will your colleagues help you here because everybody feels that it is a competition.

But I told the school just give me half an hour, let me sit in front of the laptop, I will learn everything on my own. I wanted to prove myself. I was very nervous… I remember telling myself 'Yami, you are done with your profession. Yami, you cannot go for it.' I took each day as it came, and as more and more days passed, I learned new strategies on my own. And it was challenging to learn everything on my own with a child.

But my mother-in-law helped me a lot. She used to take care of everything… like cleaning the house, washing clothes, feeding my baby. When I teach now, I am sitting in a closed room and my mother-in-law is the one who takes care of him, so (my) child is not an issue for me presently. I go to him in between my breaks, quickly feed him and come back… If I were not staying with my in-laws, I would have had to quit my job after the baby during the pandemic."

Akanksha
Akanksha is a 38-year-old mother of two school-going children who was employed as a permanent teacher at a government-aided private school in East Delhi. Information shared in the interview revealed that the school caters to students from middle- and/or low-income families

"When I go back, at that time I was very tense because it was all new to me. I didn't think I will be able to survive actually… such a massive lockdown… Firstly, no domestic help! I couldn't imagine life without them. When I had to clean the home during the pandemic, it was like endless cleaning going on. It is like I am working throughout the day; we have two floors, not much support from the family or in-laws… It just did not end, everything… And I have a son, so obviously, the quality of online teaching was not that great at his school. So, the majority came on to me… My husband helped me and did what he could, like I asked him to clean the first floor, but you know how it is? He works at an MNC [multinational corporation] and is so busy… [So] without maids, it was actually torturous.

Also, a single teacher could now teach 100 students and schools wanted to save money… so, our school merged classes and removed all contractual teachers… So, the burden of many [permanent] teachers increased. And then we would have meetings any time; nobody is bothered in the school that these are not work time, they might be cooking [time], so do not keep a meeting now… It was confusing for me, whether I should take care of my home or my work. At times, honestly, I had to make an excuse that there was no network, because I simply couldn't manage… I would give students some work that you do this and left a message to principal that network was not coming. I mean probably it is not right, but I had no option.

It was also very difficult to teach online because I am not that technologically good… I felt so exhausted. I was going through a lot, every day was a learning experience… My daughter actually taught me to change the settings, identify the problem makers, and stuff like that. Now it is all good, now I don't need any help and support… but initially it was a challenge."

Disha
Disha is a 32-year-old mother of a baby boy during the pandemic who was employed as a permanent teacher at a private school in North Delhi. The school charged average monthly fees of INR 3500 (USD 43) and catered to students from middle-income families.

"My baby boy was born three months after the lockdown happened. And when I joined the school after my maternity leave, one could fit together 200 students in one class. So, that is the policy school followed… while I was not worried about removal because I am

permanent, I have friends in other private schools, and they tell me that they have sacked people who have worked for them for five years, which is heartbreaking.

I did not have any paid help [at home] due to lockdown and needed all that time to take care of household chores. However, as time passed, it became increasingly challenging to manage the non-teaching work online, such as making lesson plans, keeping records, etc… and classes also increased. While I learnt how to teach online on my own, correcting papers online was a very big challenge for me… it was very stressful, like there were days when I used to sleep for only 2-3 hours at the night… With a baby who just started crawling and walking, it was even more challenging… There are senior teachers, some 4 or 5 teachers, very good teachers, efficient teachers, they have resigned due to technology. It was heard that they were not able to overcome the pressure.

My husband was supportive [during online teaching]. Like he would feed the baby, get up in the middle of his work, you know. But still, when you are at home, your attention is divided, no matter how supportive your husband is… Like there was incident when we had a mock exam and I made a mistake. I never did that before because I cross-check everything. But then while I was conducting the exam, my baby was in front of me and I had to see him… So, I made a mistake. I was crying because I never expected it. So yes, because of my household responsibilities and with a small baby, who has just started crawling, it has been difficult. But what can you do?... as a mother, you do not have a substitute, but as a teacher, you do, right?”

Discussion

Analysis of the six stories generated seven codes (exacerbation of care work, varying degree of support by family, technological challenges, financial precarity/unstable jobs, the COVID second-wave as a quest for survival, increased surveillance, and blurring of the personal and professional boundaries), that were collated into two overarching themes of 'tactical strategies and limited help by husbands' and 'institutional betrayal'. I discuss these themes in detail below.

Tactical Strategies and Limited Help by Husbands

The narratives revealed that all the participants had female domestic help before the pandemic, who would come to chop vegetables, clean the house, and even run errands for them. All these responsibilities were transferred to the participants during COVID-19 due to lockdown restrictions. In India, the patriarchal logic of “care work” as a woman's domain is often passed on to the household help in economically advantaged families, who become the “labor substitutes of their female employers” (Basnet & Sandhya, 2020, p. 283). Since domestic help alleviates women's double burden of handling professional work and care work, all participants reported a substantial increase in care work responsibilities during COVID-19. Moreover, those who had school-going children also faced additional responsibilities of home-schooling.

All the participants relied on the assistance of their family members (children, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and husband) to cope with the increased household burden. Manasvi's sons learned to use the mop and helped with the laundry, and Niyati joked that thanks to the pandemic, her 21-year-old son could now cook the choicest of Indian dishes with perfection. Both Yami and Geeta shared that if it were not for the support of

their mother/sister-in-law, they would have had to quit their job to look after their children. To quote Geeta:

> So, she (sister-in-law) was actually very supportive with my daughter… she stays in a flat close by and is a housewife, so I would leave my daughter with her… She would feed her, also help with activities in class… I would often joke and ask her to keep my daughter on weekends too.

I interpret participants' sharing of care work responsibilities mainly with children and mothers/sister-in-law instead of their husbands during COVID-19 as encompassing 'tactical strategies' of resistance (Lugones, 2003) to overcome the unequal gendered division of care work within heterosexual marriages. Lugones (2003) introduced the notion of a 'tactical strategist' to highlight how forms of resistance enacted by marginalized communities in the short run may pose a potent challenge to unequal structures in the long run. Such acts may include a person from a lower caste calling attention to themselves when they are expected to be invisible, a person labeled as mentally ill refusing to be cured (Moya, 2006, p. 199), or like in the study, a mother engaging her sons with care work responsibilities in a deeply gendered society. While such small and subversive practices of everyday micro-resistance are often not understood as 'political' within the dominant Anglocentric/Eurocentric world of sense, Lugones views them as political "insofar as they involve intentional interfering with, refusal of, or resistance to the unitary logic of the hegemonic common sense" (Moya, 2006, p. 199).

The hegemonic gendered common sense in India dictates that the mothers or daughters-in-law should shoulder all the care work responsibilities at home. Manasvi and Niyati undercut this patriarchal expectation by asking their sons to help, an act that poses resistance to the patriarchal expectation that men be socialized from a young age to perform their role as providers and not caregivers (Berrich & Romich, 2011). Yami and Geeta resist the gendered division of care work in marriage by relying on the other female members, which draws attention to the strategic coalition women create to overcome inequality. However, it also demonstrates how care-work responsibilities within families are often transferred from one woman to another, thus perpetuating the gendered division of care-work.

The remaining two participants (Akanksha and Disha) had no option but to rely on their husbands to cope with increased care work, since Disha was the only woman in her family, and Akanksha did not receive any help from her mother-in-law. Neither of them felt adequately supported, adding to existing empirical evidence about the inequitable distribution of care work between married professional couples in India despite increased contribution by the male partner (Beri, 2021; Borah & Das', 2021; Chauhan, 2022; Sharma & Vaish, 2020). Since the help from their husbands was minimal, they experienced a blurring of their personal and professional lives, which further burdened them with guilt (Power, 2020).

It could be argued that while the teachers in the study resisted the gendered inequities linked to care work via the use of tactical strategies, the scope of the enactment of the strategies was limited to family members other than their husbands, thereby

highlighting the persistence of traditional gender roles within heterosexual marriages (Power, 2020). These findings contribute to growing evidence about the tenacious nature of social norms and familial expectations from women in India concerning care work at home (Nikore, 2022), and the subsequent need to inculcate gender-equitable attitudes related to domestic responsibilities amongst Indian men from a young age.

Schools as Sites of Institutional Betrayal
Institutional betrayal occurs when institutions act or fail to act in ways that bring harm to those dependent on them for safety and well-being (Smith and Freyd, 2014). Emergencies such as COVID-19 create a situation of greater reliance on powerful organizations such as schools, churches, and the government because of their unprecedented nature. While scholars have identified several manifestations of institutional betrayal during COVID-19 by the healthcare system and government leaders (Adams & Freyd, 2021), less research exists on teachers' experiences with institutional betrayal, especially within the global south.

The narratives revealed that the schools in the study failed to perform even their most basic duties towards their female employees during the pandemic, such as safeguarding the teachers' livelihood in precarious times and providing them with the training to teach remotely. The schools fired contractual teachers, increased the class size, imposed unrealistic expectations (e.g., that no family members should be in the room when teaching), scheduled meetings at erratic work hours, and increased teacher surveillance; actions that had a particularly detrimental impact on female teachers, who were burdened with inordinate care work at home. These decisions not only fostered workplace inequities but also created panic and fear in the lives of teachers who were already grappling with the devastation of death and loss during the pandemic. For these reasons, they could be seen as sites of institutional betrayal.

The flexibility of the online platforms meant that schools could now have one teacher teaching 80-100 students at the same time. The schools in the study saw this as an opportunity in adversity, which was associated with the removal of contractual teachers even as they continued to charge fees from all students. Manasvi and Yami, who worked on a contract, shared harrowing accounts of the anxiety and stress that they endured over the constant fear of losing their jobs. Yami, who had a baby during the pandemic, did not get re-employed until a year after she was to return from maternity leave. Because she wanted to safeguard her job by 'proving' herself, she had to learn how to teach online without any support from the school, which was a constant source of stress for her.

The precarity of Yami's employment combined with the motherhood penalty (Budig & England, 2001) – where employers discriminate against mothers by removing them once a child is born– increased her exploitation by the school administration/owners. Manasvi also talked at length about the anxiety of being removed and the constant psychological toll it took on her. Due to the threat of removal and the devastating second wave of the pandemic, she no longer found enjoyment in things that previously gave her happiness, such as cooking and looking after her home, as "it was all about survival" then.

The fragile mediation between indispensability at home and expendability at the workplace experienced by contractual teachers such as Yami and Manasvi placed them at a disadvantage when compared to their male and female peers with permanent jobs. The removal of contractual teachers also increased the number of students in each class, amplifying the workload of continuing teachers and impacting the quality of learning. Niyati, a permanent teacher and the head of the Math department shared:

> "It was so sad, that they fired teachers… some had been teaching for many years you know, and those who were safe also felt guilty… and then I had to create new timetables… It was very confusing… I had to teach extra classes too [in school], but what could I do… at least we have our job right? So honestly…that is what we felt mostly."

The sole beneficiary of the decision to remove teachers seemed to be the owners of the schools, who now had to pay fewer teachers while charging the same tuition to all the students. As Manasvi said, "it was as if the schools took advantage of a bad situation" to reap financial gains. The indiscriminate firing of teachers also created a sense of fear and insecurity among permanent teachers such as Niyati, who were scared to speak up about the challenging work conditions. The absence of any teacher's union, a consciousness of their labor rights, or government intervention meant that schools could make a windfall profit at the cost of their worker's physical and mental health with impunity, raising critical questions about issues of organizational responsibility and ethics required to govern during emergencies such as COVID-19 (Özkazanc-Pan, 2020).

Conclusion and Implications
The study set out to explore six female school teachers' experiences with care work and online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic in India. The use of a decolonizing feminist research framework helped foreground the complexities of each participant's personal and professional experiences during the pandemic. For the teachers in the study, their care work responsibilities increased at home during the pandemic, and those who relied on family members other than their husbands felt adequately supported. I interpret this reliance as a tactical strategy (Lugones, 2003) of resistance as it involves intentional interfering with the hegemonic gendered common sense. However, the limited help by the male partners demonstrates that care work continues to be viewed as a woman's domain in India, a reality that school administrators/owners in the study did not give any consideration to. This disregard manifested in several ways, such as scheduling meetings outside school hours, providing little professional development, and increasing the class sizes of all teaching staff. I interpret these institutional actions and inactions during the pandemic as manifestations of institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2014), that served to further disadvantage those female teachers who were already marginalized in the system due to the burden of inordinate care work at home or the precarious nature of employment at school.

The gendered inequities in the households of the teacher-participants, the institutional betrayal by the schools in the study, and the tactical strategies of resistance employed by the participants should not be viewed as developments peculiar to the pandemic. Even before COVID-19, Indian women were spending maximum hours globally on unpaid care work (OECD, 2018), private schools were being run with minimum checks and

balances (Ali, 2015; Carr-Hill & Sauerhaft, 2019), and women were practicing strategies of negotiation within the patriarchal settings of their families (Kohli, 2016). What the pandemic did was exacerbate and expose the fissures and inequities already present within the private school system and the heterosexual family system.

The experiences of the teachers in the study demonstrate how emergencies such as COVID-19 can provide an opportunity for the exploitation and disempowerment of those women in the system who are already marginalized. To mitigate the negative impact of such emergencies in the future, I argue that workplaces should operate from an ethic of care that involves an intentional focus on empathic concern for the physical and emotional well-being of employees (Weare, 2010, p. 13). Such an ethic should involve, inter alia, "structurally contextualized wellbeing provisions" (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021, p. 1) that recognize teachers' preexisting pressures, and encompass family-friendly policies that encourage the reduction and redistribution of care work responsibilities (Nikore, 2022). A few examples of such provisions include fostering democratic decision-making, providing stronger collective bargaining rights to teachers, organizing gender-sensitization workshops for the administration, and access to free mental health counseling for school teachers (Chudgar & Sakamoto, 2021; Weare, 2010).

Even as the pandemic draws to an end and schools reopen across the globe, those who suffered from it will continue to carry the wounds of loss and devastation with them. The narratives revealed that this loss involved not only the havoc wrought on the lives and livelihood of teachers, but also the loss of faith in powerful institutions that are expected to protect the most vulnerable. The narratives also illuminate how men's tokenistic contribution to care work at home did little to alleviate the stress of those working women who had to rely solely on them. Despite the limited scope of the study, the findings provide emerging evidence of how several schools in India may have been complicit in exacerbating the gendered impact of COVID-19 on their female employees. The voices of these teachers tend to remain peripheral in global academic discourses and policy-making due to their censorship at the local level, their hesitation to come forward for the fear of being reprised at the national level, and the focus on teachers in the global north at the international level. It is hoped that the findings will provide the foundation for more extensive and elaborate work on the topic in the future, work that will also incorporate the voices of the spouses of the female teachers, as well as, the male teachers, and the school administration.

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