**Ms. Nisha Cairae**

**Date of interview: 20 August 2021**

00:14

So as I understand from your emails and our exchange, you union staff member and not teaching at present.

00:23

No, no. Yeah.

00:25

Okay, great. Okay. So then we will move on to the first section of the interview. Questions that will help us understand the scenario in which you're working. within India also, we understand there has been a huge disparity in terms of what happened to school systems. We'll begin with those questions first. My first question is, did the schools in your area closed down during the pandemic?

01:00

Yes, actually, they were closed before the pandemic for the session break. Okay. So the holiday started from 10th of March, but during that, , they were supposed to reopen on 19th of March but this pandemic came. So from that 10th, March onwards, 2020 onwards, till today schools are closed for the elementary section where we are working. Our union is working with those teachers. Okay.

01:36

And schools have opened for Senior Secondary, is it? Yes, yes. When did that happen?

01:44

It's last year, they opened for a short time for over one fortnight. And now from 15th, August and this month only for the Senior Secondary, they have opened. Okay.

02:02

So what was the mood of teaching adopted by the schools during the pandemic,

02:07

see in the big thing, there was no teaching at all for at least for one and a half months and the beginning and then later on, they started this worksheet, models sending worksheets or calling parents provide worksheets class based, then online mode was started from the new academic session, which started in July. That was, okay.

02:39

Was the was there a transition made in the mode of teaching during the pandemic? And can you describe the process of this transition?

02:50

Yes, there was a transition and see in the government, schools were home we are dealing as a union, mostly the marginalized and very weaker economic section children come. And they were not able to know understand not having the proper gadgets, resources. And teachers were also not not trained in that way so that they can teach an online. So some started recording their own videos, then no children was not able to access because data and other facilities connectivity and the not even urban villages and rural areas, it was not there. So suddenly changing, no parents were also not very, you know, clear how to they will little make children learn. And there was no training actually provided to teachers. So they were not in a position, how they should not proceed with all these kinds of technology use of technology in teaching. That was the biggest .

04:09

So you, is your union only working with the government schools?

04:14

Yes, we are working only with government school teachers and from class one to eight. Okay.

04:20

Not from class nine to 12.

04:23

No, that's a separate union. Okay.

04:26

Is that union part of your union or is that a separate union altogether?

04:31

No, it's a separate union altogether, but they are also affiliated to education International. Okay.

04:42

I just wanted to understand in terms of decision making, so government schools, teachers involved in any of these decision making in terms of how the teaching will be done, after the schools had closed

05:00

No, that's the saddest part that they were never consulted, it was just a decision by the government that they will provide they have to know there were no resources nothing was available and feedback was also never taken by the union or by the teachers in the classroom. Okay.

05:25

Okay. So, as you work with the teachers now, do you hear from them? any sort of solutions that they suggest that you think would have been better than what was being done by the government?

05:41

Yes, we had wrote to state governments as well as to know center central government that neither or no proper training is provided to teachers so that they can effectively use these technology and reach out to children and major issue with our children where we are targeting , it was they are not, they cannot afford online education, because family members do not have smartphones or not gadgets so that they can access education. So access and affordability was the two main reasons and be no proposed that if like for secondary , lower classes, also school should be open, reopened and then with small groups, or maybe some open spaces can be used, where the proper covif related guidelines are followed with a social distancing and knowledge. Okay.

06:54

So these solutions were coming from the teacher ?

06:58

Yes, we as a union, and in fact, I know from the grassroot teachers, we had consultations with them. So they suggested it will be much better to go in the offline mode. Okay.

07:11

That means having children coming to school in smaller groups, yes. Okay. Okay. Okay, now, a few questions regarding the experience of this transition to the online mode. Do you think there have been differences in the way male and female teachers have responded to the situation?

07:40

Yes, See male teachers were? No, they didn't have much problem because of timings and all. But female teachers, they were more systematic in reaching out to the their students, but they have to face different kinds of challenges. Like, suppose no child does not own a smartphone or some device. And then they were calling the parents were answering, and sometimes even abusive languages, and unwanted comments were passed that this is not the time to teach or all kind problems but women teachers performed more systematically with preparation of lessons , than male teachers. Okay, okay.

08:42

Do you think there have been differences in the way private schools and government school teachers have responded to the situation?

08:50

Yes, there was major divide, because they are digitally. And they were strong in the private schools, they having a smart classes and all from the beginning also. So they were doing well, and that their success rate was cited by various media reports was 70% to 80%. Whereas in case of government schools, which are either in rural or remote areas, their success rate was even not even 10%. And children, children lost track of interest in the education itself, because so they were not even joining those who had access, but they were not joining because that's not making them, you know, anything fruitful for them. ,

10:28

In what ways do you think the pandemic has impacted teachers work and their working conditions?

10:36

First of all, they were no extended working hours, because there was no limit to working from home teachers also then, and delay in payment of salaries, cutting down their salaries, without any no rationale, then, and they were made to work on different tasks, which were never related to their profession, like, because the schools were closed, and they are the government employees. So they were posted at airports and distributing food and all this kind of work from the teachers. And, again, they were not enough trained in those kind of like, thermal scanning at the airport, or managing the quarantine centers. So this kind of things have really, you know, created dissatisfaction among the teachers

11:37

 so, but you mentioned a great deal about other kinds of work that were outside the scope of teaching profession that teachers had to do during the COVID. Can you throw some more light in terms of within the teaching profession? How did the working conditions change? So one, you shared that they were working at odd hours? Yes. Other you shared is that community did not respond very well, when the teachers tried to approach the students.

12:09

 Are there any other such examples that you would like to share with us? Yeah,

12:14

there was no, salaries were not paid in times. So financial crunch by teachers, and then No, they were not treated at par when they were performing duties, which are like other health professional or anything. They were not provided with any kind of security documents or safety measures.

12:46

In terms of teaching itself, did the teachers work change? So what was the change in terms of teaching itself?

12:58

 More clerical,or office administrative work was assigned to them, like, prepare this worksheet, fill up these records and more administrative jobs they were asked to do because teachers were called in the schools. And they were there for there for the school time, but not teaching but they were performing and various managing records of pandemic related dates or anything in the school time. Okay. So that was more administrative routines by government, which were asked by teachers.

13:35

So in your location, the schools were not using digital technology before the pandemic, that's where we know. Okay, is it the government schools only? Or is it also the private schools,

13:50

even private schools, they were using some smart glasses and all but that was a note recorded by teachers. And very rarely, it's not that otherwise, face to face teaching was going on in private as well as in public school.

14:08

Okay. Could you share with us what are the new digital technologies that have been introduced in the school system during the pandemic in your area?

14:35

One was, of course, government sponsored TV, that's doordarshan. And then zoom, WebEx and team., Cisco many platforms were used and Google class , one particular started google classes.

15:03

Okay. Now, there are a few questions regarding teachers access to resources and training. So, do you think teachers had access to personal device or gadget and internet connectivity that was required for doing their work?

15:20

Yes, they were using their own devices okay yeah

15:26

okay. And they had a like fairly stable internet connection most of them

15:35

Oh, no, because see at homes if they do not have a Wi Fi or broadband connection, it was difficult and Indian situation and the remote areas even no connectivity or the network is not very good. So, even if they are imparting education, the no no networks are like, in some areas are still no Bihar and Jharkhand, where 2g or 3g networks are there. So, they are not working well with the no online mode of teaching. Right, right.

16:17

So, these were the teachers in the rural areas and also teachers in specific states, which states mostly have 2g and 3g connections, where it was difficult okay.

16:29

 So, do you recall any instances where in such a thing happened and teacher was not able to go to the zoom call or you know, teach as per the requirement. So, what were the alternatives that were being adopted?

16:48

Yeah, in Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, this kind of a not a happening stop place where they not assigned a particular time. There was no electricity or no network so they could not make it. And then they were asked to go to homes or visit homes of different students in one particular day or after like, suppose in eight hours or six hours of school. Second half or part of the day was are located that they have to visit families, give them the printed sheets for the assignments and then and then next visit they can collect and give the new ones. Okay. Okay. Okay.

17:41

So that's a very important observation, that you're sharing with us? is there is there any sort of documentation of this that we can refer to in our report? Any newspaper clipping or any circular from the government in which teachers have been asked to do it do this

18:06

There may be some media reports, but I can ask no directly the teachers if there are any, no instruction by the government, because the states are doing in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand. even in Delhi. State like Delhi also, it's there. Okay. Okay. So that will be very, very useful for us. Yeah, I'll definitely try to get to know and there are government orders or something. Yeah. When they were asked to visit forms.

18:38

Next question is what challenges have teachers faced in accessing and using devices, as well as accessing the internet? And how did they deal with these challenges?

18:50

The challenges was like, no support from the government or anything for getting data connection or paying for that data connection, which requires heavy data use for taking classes, and even printouts of those no worksheets, and no commuting and all these were the things which government never considered and know how they will be managing from their own pockets they were spending and they cannot claim from anybody.

19:29

Even the printout of worksheets could not be done in the school

19:33

schools because the schools are no government schools in most of the cases hardly have in our system, a printer or internet connection. They may have no, maybe into secondary schools, but elementary schools are really in a very bad shape. Okay.

19:56

Was there any monitoring system to monitor as to Whether the teacher is actually visiting the homes, was there any system of monitoring in place?

20:09

Yes. Because they were supposed to know fill up or no, give a selfie with the location and all submitted to the Department of Education. So that kind of monitoring was there.

20:34

So we're moving to our next section, which is dealing with the well being of teachers during the pandemic and work. So, what are the ways in which teachers work have changed compared to the pre pandemic period, in terms of like, when you mentioned that the time duration of work has really become very flexible and more stressful? Are there any other changes in terms of their work?

21:02

The nature of work also has changed. Because more administrative work they were supposed to perform.And less of teaching. Okay. And , they were not. workload has increased during the pandemic, which was not so much before that, okay. Okay. Okay,

21:30

what are the current major concerns of teachers with regard to their work,

21:35

they want their schools to reopen, so that teachers have their work, which is their profession, because now everywhere teachers can be posted or asked to do any kind of job. So, they their main concern that and no, there is a challenge of this, like, children were promoted without exams. And they are worried about their learning also, because see, the child who was in class one has been now come to class three, and these 18 or 19 months, but he has, or she has not even learned a class one properly, you know, so learning, assessment and learning criterias and no examination, reducing curricula, all of these challenges will have an impact on later on, when they go for the jobs or go for the secondary education. So these are the some challenges which are

22:43

okay, are there any specific factors that have caused stress amongst teachers?

22:52

That said, again, concern for the children, okay. And their health also, because the online classes and all has adversely affected their health, they are not even the nutrition, no midday meal, it was money, which was transferred for the midday meals, and long duration of spending in front of mobile or laptops. So health, mental health as well as physical health of children and teachers both as a specific area with Yeah.

23:33

So whom did the teachers reach out for support in such scenarios,

23:39

sometimes known to the local media's and then the local media raised, then unions also they were opposed. Some states were very specific in reaching out to their unions, if we can jointly, you know, put there no pressure on the government. And never union also has a no contest nervously, you know, getting the feedback from the teachers, classroom, teachers and men, writing to the constant authorities, maybe government departments or secretaries. So we can know if you're interested, you can share the whole advocacy work during this one and a half years.

24:25

Yeah, definitely. That will be very useful. Is it in the form of a report or?

24:34

Yeah, it's in the form of a report. Okay. Yeah,

24:37

we can definitely have a look at that. Is it? Do you have a website or a Facebook page or something like that?

24:47

We have a website, but it's not updated from last one and half year because we lost know, the manager who was updating and I'm not changing okay. There was no changes and then leaving okay no problem so we can take it through the email we can they can our documentation base we can give you Yeah.

25:19

Okay Oh

25:24

okay during the pandemic and this transition to remote or online mode, how have teachers benefited from being a union member? If you could share some examples

25:37

Yes, they go benefited because then government also media also reported all these issues and then there was a change as government suspended online classes are limited their duration and their salaries were released through pressure on the government. Okay.

26:01

Are there any specific states that you're referring to when you talk about salaries?

26:07

Delhi, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh these these were the three states Delhi has been the worst affected delay in payment of salaries. Okay, okay.

26:20

That was last year or this year as well

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it is still continuing till May they receive up to salaries up to December only five months six months delays were there and then in the state of Uttarakhand they were supposed to pay one day salary throughout the one financial year

26:48

Sorry, I didn't get to one day salary for

26:52

 throughout the year their salaries were detected one day in one year they all contributed for the PM funds that gathered but in Uttrakhand know we have a letter everything is that then they cut the salaries of one day one financial year from now no 20 April till 21 March. So, no rations, less funds are there for Corona fight. So they deducted.

27:32

without informing and taking consent of the teacher?

27:36

no consent but was just an order that your salary will be deducted for one day during a month.

27:49

just one clarification I need to make Is it one day salary for each month or one a salary what what one day salary per month?

27:59

Yes.

28:10

It was in Uttarakhand specifically Okay. And then I know in Andhra and Telangana their salaries was slashed to 40% 50% during this pandemic, it was last year only of course not in this phase. But last year it was done till further order. So that kind of notification till further order and we don't know whether they have a no revoke that order or not.

28:46

Okay, so I'm sure you will be having all all documentation.

28:54

Yes, yes.

28:55

Yeah. For the Uttarakhand and Telangana, Andhra we have Okay, okay.

29:05

what role does the union play in such scenarios?

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They we could not have a protest or anything we cannot discuss with government face to face but we kept on writing to the concerned authorities. Okay. But it's very, you know, unfortunate that we never received any positive reply is from the government side. But they revert or they ignore your letters. They ignored and in fact, in Uttrakhand author per month per day salary was deducted, our state union also in Uttarakhand. I know I had a lot of campaigns. In the media that this is not fair and you have already frozen our DA and increments. So this kind of torture is not acceptable but still a not much success in that case and they were deducted and not worthy.

30:32

has your union advocated for any policy changes during the pandemic

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policy changes of course, know that we promoted use of this technology with the all justified and thing and then offline classes are better. So, and then we also know requested that if not teacher training curricula can be upgraded to take notice new changes recent developments into account and upgrade this particular

31:16

You mean to say the in service teacher training, correct, right.

31:20

Right. In service and pre service, also, because many issues, which came during this pandemic, you know, like gender, of course, is not very much in the Teachers Training, pre service teacher training curricula or no child labor issues or other issues. So we are still no advocating and in process, that if these changes or use of technology, and teachers training, because now, we are not against the technology, but it should be in a justified and acceptable manner, which is not a no, like completely forgetting the teachers, teachers do not exist only in our technology can replace the teaching. So if that changes, we are still in process.

32:18

I just want to go back to my question and discussion that we were having before this question, when you when you raise some of these concerns of teachers to the authorities, has there have you experienced any, any sort of differentiation in the way particular states respond? I mean, to say, Are there states that are more responsive or other states that are more aware and supportive of teachers?

32:53

Yes, few states were supportive. And now, we received at least the acknowledgment that we have not received this and then we will not see what action can be taken or something. Okay. Okay. But accepting that there, it's union has written they responded to the media reports. And we were sending it to media, also media houses, national dailies and on so they were consolidating and putting different aspects and then no, then government was responding but not directly to the union letters and all.

33:50

So has your union provided any support to teachers during the form of pandemic? And when I say support, I mean to say, support in terms of device or internet connectivity or training?

34:05

No, unfortunately, , ours is Federation. I'll just explain a little bit about structure and our own states and in All India, primary Teachers Federation is present in 24 states of India, and they have their own union. So those a state unions have organized programs with support from government or other organizations. Okay. But directly we were because we were not able to invite anybody. Physical meetings were banned. So within a state, of course, we know our counterparts they are in the states have done this kind of training. Okay.

34:55

Is it possible for you to link us with any one of the states unions, which can help us understand this particular theme of what exact support was being provided by the unions to teachers.

35:10

Maybe when you interview Mr. Digvijay Singh, is Uttrakhand president of the Union. So he will be able to guide you and he can also explain about this one day when? Because his state, and they were very vocal about it, okay. Okay. And he's also a teacher, if I understand system, yeah, he's still working, and maybe next month or next year, he will be retiring, but still a working teacher and a union official.

35:44

Okay. Great. Yeah. I'll ask him to elaborate on this. Yes. Yeah, he can explain it. Yeah. Okay.

35:53

 Now, a few questions regarding the future of teachers work and unions work, given the pandemic situation. So, what kind of support will the teachers be needing for their work in future?

36:09

First is , like in service training, in the changed scenario with use of technology and knowledge is one main thing.

36:21

And know, their working conditions and all should be protected, so and their rights are safeguarded as speeches? So this kind of areas where we'll be focusing of our work, okay. And

36:45

Are there any instances of teachers you know, wellbeing of their health and their mental well being for which Union have been supportive?

37:00

Yes, we are conducting, different programs for them, like professional development of teachers. And then, of course, mental well being so far we have not taken but we have no identify, it's one of the concern during this pandemic period in discussions with teachers that maybe we can have some kind of one day program for them, it can be online and offline, whatever is possible, because mental well being is more important. Okay.

37:48

Does your organization have any specific plans for supporting teachers in future?

37:58

 See, we have not yet no finalized we are still unknown, because then after one year, we thought we can have no identified certain issues. But this year's second wave also have a changed many things. Otherwise, we will know pressurizing governments that see those teachers who died due to COVID on duty during election or other duties, they should be you know, compensated, you know, like other employees or other part of it, health professionals and all and no a job can be given to one of the dependent if there is any such need these and their dues and all are cleared in time by the government. So, this is right now it's and then of course, education for the children is another area where we are pressurizing governments are our own teachers, we are asking them, how innovatively they can reach out in such crisis .

39:25

What are your main concerns with regard to teachers work in the future in the scenario of this change in the mode of teaching, which includes teaching online and the increasing use of technology in teaching?

39:47

See, we are not very supportive with the increasing use of technology and teaching because one of the classroom teaching has much more impact and for the holistic development of child's So, we prefer to use technology where it is very necessary where a human relation is not lost or human thing and no interactions are not missing. So that kind of approach we have for the future. Okay.

40:31

Okay, in what ways you think, given the situation that we are in now, in what ways you think teaching profession will change in future 10 years down the line, what changes will be there in teaching profession?

40:48

Mostly, I think most of the teachers will be losing their jobs through that this technological devices this new education policy, which is there last year, it also know envisions that, you know, with the use of technology, those children who are in child labor or left out the because of certain reasons, they should be taught through openness school learning or through digital mode. How can they learn or how teachers can go to them. And then , creating a school complexes, there's an incident in the Madhya Pradesh that children were no admitted in the school without any documents. Otherwise, government schools they're supposed to know, verify the Aadhaar card of child and other documents. And during this pandemic, children were admitted without any card documentation. Now, when they are no further entitlements like free books and free uniforms, then government is asking to support these admission with these evidences. So some children who have all the records, they were getting these entitlements and others who admitted and migratory population and all who were not having their domicile in that particular state. So they were lacking on these entitlements. So we are dividing the society dividing on base of this documents. so that's no very dark future for this. government schools and all. Teachers all as well, because they will be appointing, they are appointing already in Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand, thes volunteers to teach 2 hrsin the morning. No, maybe a class 10 students can go and teach to class two and three and two hours in the evening and they will be paid renumeration of 5000 or so. So they are replacing those teachers. But quality of teaching quality of learning will be having a very adverse impact. So these are the challenges which we are now requesting government lobbying with our states. But it's very unfortunate because the policy also never involved any teachers union representation when it was formulated. Teachers perspective, it's completely lacking in that.

44:00

Are you referring to the current education policy ?

44:04

It's not that our elementary education teachers were not invited even the higher education sector and all they were also never consulted in formulating this policy and even implementation during this pandemic restrictions No, just authoritarian approach, know that they are supposed to do they cannot raise their voice, they cannot protest they cannot do anything. So follow and once it is in practice, you can't change it so easily.

44:40

So Have there been any attempts where unions have come together like you mentioned that the departments don't easily respond to the union But they do respond to the media.

45:03

Yes.

45:04

 So has this issue of non inclusion in the national education policy? Has this been ever raised in the media space?

45:16

Yes, we know our president and our own union wrote many articles in consultation with state unions, that these are the provisions which need immediate attention of teachers or the government, they are not going to provide like they are merging aganwadis which are just healthcare centers, to the primary schools. And the staff of these anganwadis or childcare centers is more trained in health care or nutritional needs, but not in the education. Right. And now, there will be no part of this schools where a school where teachers have a proper training to teach that particular class and more. So how this merging or bridging of these two things will lead to a better future for the children as well as the teachers?

46:40

Do you think that digital technologies, the digital learning technologies will continue to be used in the future in your area?

46:49

See in some of the states, I don't think they will work well. Okay. Like, mostly northern states, and in government schools, I don't think it will be a success once no schools are reopened.

47:10

Okay. And that is because of the internet issues.

47:15

And yes, yeah. Okay.

47:29

So I've broadly covered all the questions that I had in my schedule. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me regarding the future of teachers work that we've not covered in the discussion so far?

47:47

I think changes in curricula and all teachers training, and no, bringing more qualified respect for the teachers and the society. What is needed because with negative campaign against the teachers, that, Government teachers are well paid, but no work or anything. And then it's not that teachers are not interested for working. It's they were assigned other non teaching assignments. So they know, those who are interested to teach a bring out the results are also forced, and they are government servants. So they cannot deny government orders and other kind of harrassment they face.

48:44

You said it very, very nicely about the negative campaign against the teachers. Can you elaborate a little more on this?

48:55

See,for everything and not if children fail, or if children don't perform well. Then they are always you know, that teachers are not teaching , teachers are absent from their work. But we also conducted not now but about 10 years ago or research on teachers absenteeism. world bank said , teachers in governemnt school are absent, but it was found they were engaged in the other tasks which were assigned by the government like polio campaign, or election, rolls update and all kinds of things. And single teacher schools are there. Suppose something happens to that teacher? If that teacher is not there, of course, the school, nobody is there to look after the children. And then how can you compensate with the learning thing achievements or learning skills All those children with one person managing five classes.

50:06

Right. And contractual employment is another thing. No, they are appointed for eight months, nine months or 10 months, and then their contract is not renewed or not renewed. And they do not get benefits and no other facilities, like other government employees. So then they also have a frustration among them. Once their needs are not taken care, they will be interested in teaching all ,so both ways.

50:44

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Thank you very much. It was very insightful, interacting with you.