

**THE WORLD AT HOME: EXPLORING CHILDREN'S LIVES
IN AN URBAN NEIGHBOURHOOD IN ODISHA**

*A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

SOCIOLOGY

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research embodied in the present thesis entitled, **“The World at Home: Exploring Children’s Lives in an Urban Neighbourhood in Odisha”** is carried out under the supervision of **Prof. Sasheej Hegde**, Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an original work of mine and to the best of my knowledge no part of this thesis has been submitted for the award of any research degree or diploma at any university. I also declare that this is a bonafide research work which is free from plagiarism. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET.

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This Ph.D. is my father's dream come true, my mother's precious pride, my sister and brother in-law's steady support, and my niece's unquestioned acceptance. More than any of these, it is my grandparents' blessings. All my cousins have participated in my work, whether in helping me with the computer, online resources, or becoming the springboard on which I could practice how to improve my communications with children. As for my remaining uncle and aunts, in showing their support for my cause, they have become vastly kinder to surveyors, bachelors staying alone, unmarried girls working outside, students living on scholarships, and especially to any Ph.D. scholar they meet. My friends assumed the role of 'Mitras' by giving me ready and constant feedback, helping with reading materials, and the much needed cathartic chatting sessions. Steady friends can make any problem short-lived.

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Ph.D. students. All these make for a lifeline for a research scholar. The campus and its green life was a rare gift during the Ph.D. days.

I gave 13 kilos of myself to this Ph.D., and, as it looks like now, never to gain again. Hopefully my pages here will compensate. I must acknowledge Guruji and Swamiji for saving my health and the day for me. I will never forget the words, “Nature will never give you what you cannot handle”, “Your consciousness can heal your body”, and “Don’t try, Do. Both your actions and inactions affect your life”. Their presence made my life a miracle.

Ph.D. is like a garden in which many people sow seeds out of generosity and curiosity. The guide and the scholar get to tend the garden in their own perspectives and perseverance. This thesis holds insights, suggestions, and observations of people ranging from the age of 3 years old to 93 years old, belonging to all walks of life. Finding a common space was methodologically challenging. Nevertheless, I am heavily indebted to all my field people who allowed me to narrate something that is so personal and singular in nature - their family life, indeed aspects of their world at home! Being able to enter hundreds of strange houses, serving no purpose of their benefit, and yet strike a chord, and be welcomed was an eye-opening experience. What made the families and children accept me and my work in their lives? For me, these were the evidence of trust, innocence, belongingness, and the ability to love in our everyday realities. Staying in the neighbourhood, sharing the Odia householders’ lives also made me every bit more Odia, helping me to see its belief systems in a broader perspective.

And lastly, my infinite gratitude to each and every child, whose candid wisdom is professed in this thesis. I never went to children for finding out ways of making them better human beings. Once I saw children in the home setting, I wanted to understand, ‘If children are so immature, so vulnerable, then how do they manage to have their way and yet be loved?’ While parents believed in parental instincts, neighbours believed in larger social compassions, I found, as Sri Sri Ravi Shankar says, “Children take each object and make it totally personal ... when you remove emotions, even people become objects”. These emotions had varied colours and strongholds on people’s social lives.

‘Belongingness’ (or ‘*Aapanapana*’) emerged as an important clue. These insights that I obtained were simple, yet profound, and took me to newer questions about individual and social relations.

I feel greatly fortunate for the rewarding opportunities and the learning experiences that I received during my pursuit of Ph.D., and hope it helps me to do something better for people. As the then child actor Daniel Radcliffe commented while sharing his experience of shooting the second movie in the Harry Potter series, “I think, even the adults have developed.”

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Turnitin Report

Part One



Locating the Study: Object, Method, and Context

Chapter 1



Debating the Research Object: Of ‘Children’ and Childhood Studies

Senior: I don’t understand, where do you see children?

Me: You mean how I will access them?

Senior: No, there are all these burning issues we are facing. There is State; there is gender; rural change. Where do you see children in these?

Retired Professor: What is it about children that you expect to find out and how will you use sociology? Do you have any answers? Don’t expect them to give you interviews sitting across the table, you making sense to them and them making sense to you. Are you seeing my point? *It is very difficult to enter the mind of a child* (emphasis added).

One of my favourite videos of Shri is the one taken when she was striking a conversation with her grandma over the phone. Shri was little more than one year old. She stood straight in front of a laptop on a low table pressing the keys rhythmically with one hand and holding a cordless phone receiver in the other. Her grandmother’s voice was on speaker and we could hear what she was saying from the other side. Grandma called out to Shri lovingly asking her what she was doing and if she had eaten, without really expecting any reply. Shri held the receiver tightly pressed to her cheeks, her big popped baby eyes peering into space as if conjuring up the figure of the speaker in the very room. Shri was all attention. But she did not stay quiet. She responded with equal flurry matching her grandmother’s chatter. Interestingly, Shri had not yet learnt to mouth words! So all we could hear from Shri was a form of blabber which went ‘*Tcha Tcha Gyan Kyan kpla bah ha ...*’. In an obvious sort of way, all this was drivel. It was very amusing to see how Shri did her best to match her grandma’s tempo, pitch, halt and emphasis of speech. Grandma paused and asked, ‘What is she trying to say?’

Once the video ended, I turned to my friend who was watching it with equal amusement. Without any invitation, I exclaimed: “Shri is catching up with the music of human

conversations, if not the words”. My friend nodded, while adding that “she (Shri) is imitating”. I argued: “Certainly not imitating. She is not interested to repeat what her grandma is saying. She is responding, she is attempting to participate; striking a conversation”. My friend quizzed me: “She is not saying anything, but she is conversing. Are you sure?” I was reminded of some discussions about processes of early Childhood education teacher training which I had observed. Building upon it, I defended:

Toddlers imbibe the structure of human-to-human verbal exchanges in day-to-day life and try to participate in it. It’s a social act. For example, what do you think you hear when two Chinese ladies are speaking to each other in Chinese? And if you are to participate with them in their language, what will happen to you? You would blabber.

My friend immediately interrupted me with a yawn and narrated one of her memories to me. She recalled: “One of our new-born cousins used to smile in her sleep. My mother used to tell us that angels came in dreams to please the baby. Babies are pure beings who need to be loved and pleased”.

Taking offence at my ‘knowledge’ being slighted so bluntly, I attempted to defend it. But my friend continued:

You understood that baby (Shri), and I understood you. Today you say a baby’s blabber is social, and then you will say a twinkling star is social. Babies are happy by themselves, let them be. Babies don’t need new theories for that. Now you will publish a book on this and people will talk about blabbering, more than all babies put together can ever blabber. And then markets will come up with new kits on how to make and stop baby blabbering. Common people will follow blindly and make a mess of babies.

I felt speechless as I could not ignore the density of her insight. My friend had shifted from a village to the city, and her unadjusted views were often spot on. I had no defence in front of her candid and resonant articulation on the congenital problems of epistemology and politics in pursuit of modern-day knowledge. In writing about children, authors and observers, redolent as they may be, end up constructing the issue through their very act of viewing and describing of it; and that too with no guarantee if the end knowledge would add any more to the child’s already happy state of mind or become a part of misplaced commercialization risking dismissal of all folk knowledge.

However, between our parleys, I got a glimpse of the differences that existed between me and my friend in our imagination of the child.

Between Separate Worlds: On Why I wanted to Study Children A Personal Story

Studying children came almost naturally to me. Though I cannot pinpoint when it entered my mind, but it had made its way even before I got acquainted with ‘academics’ or sociology per se. I had many cousins and, mostly on summer vacations, we spent long hours by ourselves. We had games, haunts, skits, experiments, talks, teasing, showing off, pranks and injuries. Most of it was collaboratively kept out of our adults’ notice. Round the year, this was a time together which we all eagerly awaited. In my neighbourhood, besides, we were a group of 15-20 children who got together to play various games, decide on outings, conduct internal competitions and so on. These were fraught with continuous squabbling and peace-making. Daily there would be bickering on the plan, on fouls in the process of games, or simply on feeling left out. Playtime disputes were rarely taken to parents. But then around middle school, this came to a stop as most of the children started going for tuitions.

Around this time, my family shifted to another neighbourhood, where children were extremely few; and, given that our houses opened to a broad busy road, we children were mostly not allowed to venture outside. Evenings felt bizarre, which were mostly spent standing by the window or moving about in the terrace peeking at side-plots in search of another eager social soul, but all we could see were mute gardens, tended lawns, designed walls, and, at best, a resting old man in a rocking chair or an old guard watering the plants. In my juvenile mind, the active world of children lingered on in face of gloomy boredom, and then found itself in the realm of children’s books. In reading of the children books by R.K Narayan, Enid Blyton, Mark Twain, and Rudyard Kipling or for that matter stories from the *Panchatantra*, *Baal Gopal* (the childhood exploits of Sri Krishna) and the later Harry Potter series, I often connected to the theme of children as peers having their noticed and unnoticed engagements in and around the house, street, school etc. And these wonders were further boosted by numerous children television

serials like *Phulwari Bachonki*, *No Kidding*, *Small Wonders*, *Boy Meets the World* and so on. Strikingly these books and serials took the child as ‘first-person’ and the story zoomed in to the lonely moments and encounters of a child and how children spent those times or faced those circumstances until the situation opened up to the adults around them. These imprinted in my mind the impressions of a child who is an individual around whom the world unfolds as they start the day somewhat hesitant and somewhat happy, bringing forth and opening up to expected and unexpected situations and people. That children have their own moments of learning, feeling, realizations and ways of becoming, conveyed a sense of importance to my own childhood.

But more than anything, I guess it is the Walt Disney (and subsequent animated movies) and Barbies that stood for the most remarkable separation between the worlds meant for children and that for adults. Cartoon time was our (children’s) time! It was our basic right, especially in a time of dwindling playgroups. Not only that, cartoons like chocolates were not something that adults were supposed to indulge and understand. I remember a time when I got sucked in by cartoons and nothing in the world could buzz me out of it. My parents grew anxious and, in an attempt to understand what made me so serious about it, my mother started watching them alongside with me. Although after a few days she gave up having ‘known’ the real content, I cannot forget the amusement that it sparked in my family. My mother being an adult was not supposed to take interest in cartoons. She got to be teased by others: ‘What do you get from these children programs? Why are you behaving like a child?’ Adults, however, had their own TV time, mostly given, in my eyes, to news and some soap opera and cricket. All the same, there was no restriction on children watching them (provided that they had completed their homework). These situations were ‘family time’ and ‘family show’.

More at home

At home, as a child, we moved between moments of pampering and disciplining. My paternal grandfather was extremely liberal. All it mattered to him was that we were happy and never scolded or put to task. This made my parents’ jobs very difficult as my grandfather stood as a shield between them and us. He almost had me spoilt, and I feel I carry that spirit of freedom to date. However, my maternal grandparents were

disciplinarians. During our annual vacation days at their home, our maternal grandfather would teach us moral etiquette and good manners and design tasks for us to hone our critical thinking, essay-writing, and public-speaking skills. He would take us on exposure trips and in evenings organise discussions amongst us. My maternal grandmother epitomized an extreme degree of hygiene, duty, the glory of labour, saving and recycling, gardening and pooja and satsangs. She made us by heart the adage in English ‘simple living and high thinking’ since we were toddlers. As far as my other relatives were concerned, the discussions were mostly about our (children) health, education and our ‘basic personalities’ or natures (broadly ‘*mula prakruti*’). I feel these discussions about ‘personality’ were coming both from local cultural views of childhood as well as from the institutional doctrines emanating from child psychology that had become popular through mass media, modern teacher training, and schools. The culture of narrating childhood good deeds and ‘habits of great men and leaders’ (*Bada Loka*) to us, the children of the family, was abundant in my locality and would be impressed upon the child meticulously. ‘*Tulasi dui patra ru base, Bichuati dui patra ru kundi huye*’ (Tulsi [holy basil] spreads aroma from the very beginning and *Bichuati* [the Indian stinging nettle] itches from the very beginning) was a common saying, which alluded to the folk belief that the signs of a good character revealed itself from one’s childhood time (*chua bela*). This local wisdom, in a manner of speaking, found its scientific resonance in the discovery of IQ (‘intelligence quotient’, coming from psychology). As was held in the terms of the latter, it is possible to measure the IQ at an early stage; and ‘intelligence’ became the trendiest intellectual yardstick to predict a child’s potential. Significantly, the measures of ‘intelligence’ though commonly continued to be seen as memory, vocabulary and mathematical aptitude, and this was true as much of folk wisdom as ‘scientific’ psychology.

Nevertheless, children were objects of love and affection, especially for relatives. Disciplining was mostly the job of the immediate household. Whenever relatives came over for a stay the most prominent and distinct gifts were brought for the children of the house. It was a customary practice that relatives gave us pocket money before they left our home (which was, of course, discouraged by our parents, while ultimately the latter would decide how it was to be spent). At all the celebrations, new clothes had to be

bought for the children, and the latter took a prime role in helping in the arrangements of the festivals. It was almost our birth right to go for ‘firecracker shopping’ in the event of Diwali (the Festival of lights which generally follows a fortnight after Dusshera) and dummy boat shopping for Kartika Purnima (a month across November-December which is celebrated as pious by most Odia Hindu families). It was children who were expected to distribute the customary food prepared at home to the neighbours and relatives and seek their blessings on such festivals. On these visits, we were greeted with much warmth, praises, and cajoling.

During my early childhood days, I remember, we enjoyed the liberty to barge into our neighbour’s unlocked doors to call our friends for evening games; we were merely cautioned to be safe and never bothered by adults. Health, food habits and education were some of the constant conversations among adults about their children. While parents were at the receiving end for the former two, when it came to education the child was the direct target. In this regard, like most of my peers, I detested one of the common adults’ habits: with schooling becoming universal and to schoolwork having become a sort of childhood vocation, the adults started naturally assuming the role of a teacher at any place, at all times. Whether it was in feasts, shopping, park, roadside meets, or the bus, the adults promptly made us answer questions that they thought we must know. Questions would range anything from multiplication tables, number systems, to names of the state capitals, names of dynasties, names of current ministers or to just reciting the literature poems.

Measures of ‘schooling’

Now, even as these were happening at home and the informal outside world, the phenomenon of ‘modern schooling’ presented a very different experience for us children. I think children of my age were exposed to the ‘universalisation of education’ like no other preceding generation. ‘Schooling’ became synonymous with ‘childhood’ and it defined ‘normalcy’ for a child’s life. Learning in school became synonymous with ‘growing’ and ‘becoming’ of a child (and, as I see it with the children of my fieldwork, it is true to this day). No matter what is going on in life, if schooling is at pace for a child, then the child’s life is secured and on the right track. To be a normal child is to be

in a school in the age-appropriate standard. Schools added new designs to a child's life. Firstly, children were set apart from the adults (the teacher, staff, management and so on) both formally and structurally. The world of teacher, staff, and management was to be kept outside the reach of children and kind of tabooed. The teacher's common room, principal's chamber, and staff rooms were prohibited areas. Children were to meet these adults with certain ceremonies and codes of conduct that marked the 'adults' as structurally and symbolically different from them. Teachers were to be greeted every time we saw them and utter obedience had to be maintained by children in the presence of teachers. Children were not allowed to be their own selves in front of the teacher. They could speak only when asked to or only as much as they were allowed to. Constant permissions were to be sought from the adults for anything 'we' (that is, children) wanted to do. The words of school adults were final on school children.

To be sure, on an everyday basis, the separateness of the adults and children so constructed created two different worlds. I remember in school seeing teachers sharing their lunch would be a matter of some gossip among us children – 'teachers' packed tiffin!', 'teachers' giggled as they shared lunch!' - or just seeing a lipstick in a teacher's bag would lead to a hush-hush among us. It would surprise us to think of teachers as having interests and concerns similar to ourselves. Adults had to be imagined separately. Secrecy and closures were a major demarcation for maintaining the separateness on an everyday basis. Children were not allowed any knowledge of the inside world of teachers and staff. On the other hand, there were umpteen 'mischiefs' (*badmasi*) and forms of rule-breaking among the students that were never to be reported to the teachers. There were secret missions of bunking class, of organizing cricket tournament and smuggling in wickets, bats and balls, of hiding make-up items and costly watches in bags, of passing answer sheets in the exam hall, of love letters, of exchanging comic books and many more.

Secondly, and more interestingly (strangely enough, somewhat understudied) is what schooling and tuitions and coaching classes did to the world of children within; that is to say, the forming of a new world among the children. Children's worlds were not merely a homogenous plane which could be studied along the axes of student-hood and learning.

Rather now children were junior and senior, bright and poor, strong and sickly, frontbencher and backbencher, obedient and trouble-makers, winner and shy, studious and athlete, boys and girls. The children now found themselves in a 'society of peers' which they had to deal with. Children in their own right became 'significant others' for one another. With the increasing importance on childhood and a growing children's population, these 'societies of children peers', as it were, are assuming a site of dominance in the collective public life of our days.

One passing incident in my childhood alerted me to this world of children acutely. In middle school, I started falling sick and had to mostly keep to my home. My friends called me over the telephone and updated me of the school work, and sometimes those who stayed nearby paid a visit. Nevertheless, on my rare visits to the school, I found myself cut off. Friend circles revolved around sharing and keeping a secret and only those who promised to hang out with one another loyally were to be privy to the secret. Obviously, I did not qualify these conditions because of my long absences and limited mobility where I was mostly confined to my seat while at school. Thus I missed out on most of the flow of the events and the exciting slices of gossip, which made me feel quite alienated and lonesome. The space of the school, from its inside as it were, was highly dynamic with some or other novel and unexpected happenings obtaining each day. Outside school, on the other hand, I found the world quite dry, repetitive and mostly too familiar to enjoy. Once back in school after my treatment, I found that things had changed beyond recognition. Groups had changed, people had changed; there were new teachers and supervisors. A few classmates had left school, some who were backbenchers had become top-scorers and some sober ones had given into 'bad-habits' (smoking, drinking etc.). Even the school grounds and the rules of assembly had changed. I lacked the experiential attunement to feel at home with the changes. The shared journey that my friends could invoke subconsciously was not available to me. Their articulations and behaviour did not resonate with me. I failed to understand the many implicit and explicit rules that structured the school peer culture. My present presence was always overshadowed by my past absence. Symbolically speaking, this affected my social life and make-up immensely. On the one hand, I roamed through the lanes of my 'peer society' somewhat like a stranger not completely involved in their

‘inside’ worlds. On the other hand, I had more insight into the world of home, roads, shops, offices, hospitals, banks, and other public events in the course of school hours by virtue of my time spent out of the school. I could perceive how locked up and cut out these worlds were as presented to the childhood of my time.

Over to college/university and beyond

During my graduation, when I was asked to pick a topic for the class seminar, I instantly chose the topic of the ‘generation gap’ between parents and children. During my Master’s when I opted for the sociology of education, it was my greatest disappointment that ‘*Emile*’ (Rousseau 2009 [1762]) was the only child that was ever mentioned in the course; and that too as an imaginary child. I wondered, privately, how it was possible to have an entire course on the sociology of education, its theories, its agendas, social trends, with no reference to the ‘lifeworld’ of the participants – specifically, the teacher and the taught. Apparently, these were to be dealt with by ‘Education studies’ under the subjects of ‘pedagogy and curriculum development’. Sociology, it was reiterated, had to look at ‘education as a social process’ that served the purpose of building and breaking social structures through various symbolic practices. I had felt then, and I do so even more fervently today, that in my course, society and social processes were pitched at a high level of abstraction, where different aspects of reality were rendered as disembodied forces operating on some (shall we say) ‘platonic’ formula. I was thus forced to doubt the view of ‘society’ and ‘social membership’ that sociology seemed to imply. At least in the realm of children, the definitions of sociology were yet to be tested and accommodated. The question lingered: how does sociology propose to deal with children as ‘social members’?

Thus, when I had a job offer in an institute that funded innovation and research in teacher and children education, I joined it readily. My interest got a major boost during my office days, where I got to spend long hours observing children, classroom teaching and school activities; especially in the alternative education schools. I came under the influence of Jiddu Krishnamurti, David Horsburgh, Maria Montessori and the like. The child as an active learner, ideas of peer-learning, self-paced learning, learning-by-doing (activity-based learning) and taking into account the pre-knowledge (experiences and context) of

the learner became important coordinates of my understanding of teachers and children education. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 and its ‘focus papers’ had laid down the need for and the principles of a child-centric school and teacher education system. This was a document that I often carried with me to teachers and teacher educators, and had long discussions exploring its possibilities and difficulties.

Very quickly, I would now like to touch upon an issue that I did not pay much attention in those days, but now I sit here thinking hard about it. The state as indeed the civil society (in the form, primarily, of NGOs) and the corporate realm through CSR (‘corporate social responsibility’) were overshadowed with the influence of ‘a separate childhood’ culture. Significantly, this was not only a standalone phenomenon in education. In health, childcare protection, work, delinquency etc., the picture of children worlds and the need for special attention to them had been growing in India. This may well have been part of a global trend. However, what I could see and want to point out about the practices of other sectors and that of education per se is the difference in the onus and credibility granted to children as knowers and participators (in a word, the ‘subjective’ child). While other sectors invested hugely on the child, it was still one where adults continued to think and speak on behalf of the child, thus framing the child as an ‘objective’ phenomenon. There was a visible lack of interest in these sectors in taking into account children’s experiences and perspectives of the new developments introduced around them. The concern necessarily was with the implications that their practices and provisions had for the ‘making of a progressive society’ and accommodating childhood within it from the adults’ point of view. Children were thus a population to be administered; a demographic entity to be accommodated to be able to make the state more developed and the society more egalitarian (see Kumar 2005 [1991]; also Naik 1997). I may add that it is likely that at that time I was to some degree affected by the ‘Child right’ movements that I was getting exposed to in my work sphere.

However, I would also like to submit that my experience of childhood and its practices in sectors other than education was coming from readings of various texts across formats (popular, political, academic, literary and so on) and peripheral discussions with practitioners; it was certainly not from my experience as a kind of insider in those sectors.

As far as I was concerned, in all of these shifting contexts, what appealed me most was the turn to the ‘child’s mind’ that I found in the discussion and application of the alternate education practices and innovations. During my workdays, some of my most pleasant memories are of those hours which I spent in observing such education classrooms and teacher training workshops on ‘child-centric education’. There is a snippet of one such memory of a district-level government teacher’s workshop that I would like to share here:

Resource person: What may a 4-year-old child know?

Teacher participants: Language (*bhasa*), he can talk ...; he can make out his family members from strangers ...; he can spot his house road ...; if he sees the money he will point to go to the shop to buy things ...; he can know alphabets if you teach, can count ...; he knows animals, birds, trees, flowers ...; sometimes, they know it if you are lying ... and they know where things are kept in the house ...; they can make a scene if demands are not met ...

Resource person: Is the child’s mind a blank slate?

Is the child’s mind a blank slate? What goes on in a child’s mind? Is it only filled with psychology or does there exist some kind of space for sociology? What is a befitting frame to conceptualise children and their activities in sociology outside of psychologism? And more importantly, how do children perceive and conceptualise society and social life (in a word, the world) around them? How does sociology propose to study children’s experience and what does children’s experience have to offer to sociology? Thus, when I decided to pursue a Ph.D., I had two things in my mind. Firstly, I wanted to study children, their day-to-day life experiences. Secondly, I wanted to study it from the children’s own narrations and understandings. Thus I came to the sociology department with a proposal on studying children’s peer groups, most probably in a school-setting where I might get a regular group in the form of classmates, looking at their association patterns and role formation. Furthermore, I wanted to do my study in an urban setting as I already had too many visits to rural schools during my working days. Once I started my research work, my study gradually underwent reformulation and re-imagination, following the unfolding of the field setting and its contexts and a deeper engagement with the Indian context.

Keying into Childhood Studies: The Western Backdrop

I. Initial Trends

“In 1909 the Swedish reformer Ellen Key claimed that the 20th century would be the ‘century of the child’” (Montgomery 2011: 11). Further on in the century, the American anthropologist Margaret Mead, in the context of compiling the ‘theoretical setting’ of childhood studies in 1954, admitted that although all histories have had some notion of childhood, it had often been “something that one took for granted, a figure of speech, a mythological subject ...” (Mead and Wolfenstein 1955: 3). Historically, in the West, one may say that there have been three dominant ‘cultural images’ of the child - the innocent child, the evil child, and the miniature adult – each of which acted as a subtext to early scholarship and policy measures for childhood (see Sorin 2005). In fact, around the 16th century, the works of Comenius, Locke and later Rousseau had prompted the attention on children and their training in the making of a healthy society. In 1976, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to declare the year 1979 as the ‘International year of the Child’. Furthermore, in 1989, the United Nations Convention on the ‘Rights of the Child’ was concretised asserting the child’s right to survival, development, protection, and participation. Without any doubt, ‘children’ and childhood studies have had a chequered past. This realm has been experimented with by philosophers, historians, psychologists, educationists, policymakers and popular media in their own right, conjuring before us multiple images of childhood and children. While this created a situation of a conceptual anomaly, sociologists further contributed to the pell-mell by their reluctance to address children and childhood studies outside the macro frame of modernization and social order. Indeed, as Pia Christensen and Alan Prout have opined:

Four ways of seeing children and childhood have been identified in research on children: the child as object, the child as subject and the child as social actor ... and a nascent approach seeing children as participants and co-researchers. ... These perspectives coexist; they do not form a neat progression ... [and] sometimes practices stemming from one orientation become mixed together with the practices of another ... (Christensen and Prout 2002: 480).

Now, without necessarily detailing these perspectives here, our aim will be to trace selectively a few of the major debates in childhood studies across disciplines that have

supposedly influenced the recent ‘reconceptualization’ of childhood and children in sociological research.

Traditional ‘child development’ paradigm

The modern-day popularity of children and childhood studies owes its credit to psychologists; psychoanalysis, more particularly, to begin with and later child development as part of ‘scientific’ psychology. It is important to understand the psychological models as time and again they have structured the sociological perspectives on children and childhood studies. The psychological model brought ‘development’ as a key concept to study childhood, where the concept was understood along the axes of ‘rationality’, ‘naturalness’ and ‘universality’ (see James and Prout 2005 [1997]). Childhood, accordingly, was seen as a natural process of growth from an incomplete, ‘irrational’ condition to a complete, ‘rational’ state of adulthood; and, in the interim between these two states, dependent, attended and obliged to the adult (parents, the family and/or other formal institutions as the case might be). Childhood as such was a distinctly biological and universal phenomenon that every individual experienced as a ‘pre-phase’ to adulthood (see Jenks 1996). To be sure, this ‘essentialisation’ of childhood as a physiological phenomenon and its standardisation across time and culture has been heavily challenged by various anthropologists and sociologists.

Traditional ‘culturalist’ framework

In cultural anthropology specifically, this generalization of western model of childhood as a biological reality was challenged by studies conducted by the ‘culture- personality’ school which claimed, on the basis of ethnographic work, that different societies tended to respond and treat phases of childhood differently and that hence ‘childhood’ was a value dependent, cultural category (see LeVine 2007; and Nieuwenhuys 1998). In 1960, Philippe Aries, the French historian, published a monumental work on childhood in Europe, which was soon translated into English as *‘Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life’* (Aries 1962). In this work, he luminously traced paintings, memoirs, histories of games and skill, and the evolution of school education over four centuries in order to reiterate that the idea of childhood as a separate phase in life is a recent cultural development not to be found in earlier centuries. While noting that in the

10th century, artists were unable to depict a child except as a man on a small scale, Aries pressed the question: how did we come from that ignorance of childhood to the centring of the family around the child in the 19th century (Aries 1962: 10).

Aries work was one of the strongest testimonies to the culturally constructed nature of childhood and its practices. It also established a strong ground to look for the practices of childhood in the social, the collective and not merely in the individual life 'growth' trajectories. It, therefore, made 'childhood' critical to understanding larger societal values and social change. However, it is important to notice that although the cross-cultural and historical studies of childhood acknowledged childhood as a cultural category and not a biological phenomenon, they continued to categorise children as premature pre-social beings, sometimes comparing them with the 'primitive' and 'savage' state of living (see Mead and Wolfenstein 1955). The child still did not qualify as an active cultural being (Jenks 1996).

This kind of 'culturalist' framework had a tremendous impact on the sociology of childhood. The concept of childhood was now necessarily nestled in social units like family, school and policies wherein the major agenda was to 'manage childhood' for a better and desirable social order (see Jenks 1996). Accordingly, childhood came to be accessed through the frames of socialisation theories and/or 'delinquency' studies. In the context of these studies, children were seen as adults-to-be, requiring unilateral training and guidance to fit into various social roles. Even as this befitted the functionalist and social reproduction world-view of society, it nonetheless resulted in a mismatch with the realities of children's lives. Jenks thus pithily puts it: "A child's social and ontological purpose is, therefore, it would seem, not to stay a child ..." (ibid.: 36). Children were perceived as passive agents to be worked on from prescribed standards of adult society, in the process imagining children as evidently unbiased ready receptors of culture (see Froerer 2011; Alanen 1988).

This necessarily translated into a fundamental methodological and conceptual schism which allowed only for an indirect and secondary approach to studying children's lives, often conflating childhood research with research on families, schools, law etc. (see

Alanen 1988). Methodologically speaking, critics alerted that studying the conditions of children life and childhood practices by taking account of practices and designs of institutions around children (whether family, school, state homes and so on) may not transparently reveal the quality and conditions of the child; and, what is more, that from within the institutions, their cognitive and political structures may have differing implications for different members (see Parker-Rees and Leeson 2015; and Qvortrup 1990). All the same, within this sphere of work, there seemed to be an even deeper conceptual skew. Somehow the proponents of this framework had unwittingly niched out a social childhood in the wall of social studies, while keeping the active experiences of the social child out of its preview. The conceptual problem inherent was that, even as childhood was seen as a collective social instance, the child was still seen as a biological and psychological pre-phase ineligible for social inquiry. Thus it was a dichotomy of conflating the social with the biological being (see Moran-Ellis 2010; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; James and Prout 2005 [1997]; and Corsaro and Eder 1990). Such an indirect, apparently cultural approach to childhood studies, in its advanced stage, posed a threat to its own sustainability. In its craze to prove the ‘cultural pluralism’ in the field of childhood, the framework rendered the latter as a dependent function of other local factors with no scope of being developed as a sociological (inter-generational) category per se with scholastic value (see Alanen and Mayall 2001).

Institutional doctrines

Another significant reason for the intensification of the conceptual glitches in studying childhood emanated from the political sphere, that is the state policies (especially as it related to Western countries) and the policy-led ‘professionalization’ of childhood practices (in terms of doctors, lawyers, counsellors and so on). Thus it has been remarked that “the state applies a range of policies to children that swings, pendulum-like, from protecting them as the most vulnerable members of society to disciplining, policing or expelling them as a risk to the body of politic” (Hess and Shandy 2008: 767). The ‘institutional’ narratives promoted a view of a child which was at the same time an object of ministration, protection, correction, education and future assurance, thereby merging the ‘what is’ with the ‘what ought to be’ (see also Hess and Shandy 2008).

In the backdrop of a period of industrialization, urbanisation, and wars in the West, their social order and family lives stood disrupted. Children were seen not only as vulnerable and helpless, but also the object of care and protection, considering that it was the child who represented the values of familial love, innocence, human values and a possibility of a better future. A happy childhood was seen as crucial for a happy life and a better society. ‘Childhood’ became a site of moral responsibility where the state took charge of the children’s development and protection measures (see Venken 2017; also Venken and Roger 2015). Accordingly, Tara Zahra, speaking about the lives of war-affected children in various emerging nation-states of Europe, forcefully writes: “... so-called lost children held a special grip on the post-war imagination. ... These battles were linked in turn to emerging ideas of human rights, the family, child welfare, and the reconstruction of European civilisation at large” (Zahra 2009: 45). Likewise, Lewis W. Hine, an American teacher and social activist who had joined the National Child Labour Committee as an investigative photographer, captured numerous photographs of children on duty in various work settings like the mines, mills, factories, farmlands, construction sites, and bakeries, exposing the inhuman conditions of working and the horrors of child labour widespread across the country, thus sparking a public demand for prohibition of the same (<http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/artists/1566/lewis-w-hine-american-1874-1940/>).

The new modern states now became overtly active in protecting and monitoring their children’s lives. Children were removed from factories, streets, workhouses and put in schools, children homes, and foster families. While in the 19th century United States, it was acceptable to treat children as useful economic agents and for families to expect and depend on their children incomes, by the early 20th century family and childhood had acquired a sacred, sentimental value transforming them into prized and even priceless ‘emotional objects’ which needed to be loved, cared for, protected and invested upon (see Zelizer 1985). Childhood in a way became a site of rescue, relief, and future assurance, in which children’s lives had to progress through the designs approved by the state and ‘expert’ bodies. Childhood thus became a tautology where the present was prescribed by future ideals. The designs were continuously advocated projecting them

as scientific and objective needs of children, which were in fact highly embedded in the historical-cultural constructs of the West, especially of the 19th – 20th century period.

The traditional approaches to childhood studies have thus entailed a legacy of cross-purpose involving multiple frames of childhood. Interestingly, in tracing these variegated formulations of childhood studies, Shanahan (2007) points out that while these motivated agenda of childhood movements were taking over the field, sociologists remained slow to respond. She laments that not only sociologists were reluctant to respond to the conceptual anomalies emerging from historical, political, cultural, biological imaginations of children; they have rather fallen for it. As she goes on to pithily add: “And in the case of sociological research on childhood, when either children and childhood ... or hope and history ... are conflated, ambivalences often result” (Shanahan 2007: 415). Such ‘ambivalences’ in conceptualization across the sociology of childhood she formulates as “sociology’s own sleep of reason” (ibid.: 413). In more recent times, however, sociologists have increasingly involved themselves in arriving at a potential alternative conceptual framework to free childhood from the above mentioned theoretical anomalies.

II. Recent Trends: The ‘New’ Paradigm

The significant shift in the approach of childhood studies from an ‘adult-centric’ focus to a ‘child-centric’ one is symbolised by the ‘new sociology of childhood’ (Corsaro 1997). Towards the 1980’s, broadly, the scenario changed with the currency of constructivist and interpretative discourses on knowledge (owing to developments in ‘psychology’ and semiology). These discourses promoted a view of individuals as those who actively created their own experiences while participating in the world and that the meaning of these experiences was necessarily grounded in the cultural contexts of daily routines, belief systems, and social rules. This called forth the acknowledgment of the child as an active participant in various social processes (see Uprichard 2009; also Moran-Ellis 2010 and Alanen 1988). This necessarily meant ‘recognition’ of the children’s competence in taking an active part in the social processes which constituted their day-to-day lives. Thus it came to be affirmed: “[C]hildren are competent social

actors and people with informed and informing views of the social world” (James and James 2001: 29).

The overall perspective proposed that children as social beings are not only affected by culture, but also affect culture in turn along the course of their daily activities. Broadly, in keeping with this emphasis, a few scholars even explicitly recommended: “[C]hildren should be seen as competent, knowledgeable informants who can be involved in social research in order to learn more about the world” (Uprichard 2009: 9). Scholars of this school of thought primarily focused on research capturing the children’s standpoint and agency for acquiring an understanding of children’s narratives and the lifeworld in family, school, peer group etc. Childhood research thus became ‘child-centric’. The United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, created a movement around the world by recommending children’s right to ‘participation’ raising the issue of representation of ‘children voice’ in various decisions made around children and childhood. Broadly, for this range of scholarship, ‘children voice’ symbolized the phenomena of children agency and children representation in social science studies.

An integrating frame

The shift towards a child-centric approach created a need for a comprehensive framework, one that would systematise the basic principles of the new sociology of childhood in order to streamline the conceptualization and formulation of research. James and Prout (2005 [1997]), in their book *‘Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood’*, attempted to synthesize the various manifestations of this shift under one potential framework, which they called the ‘emergent paradigm’ of childhood studies. The framework proposed childhood as a cultural variable that was dependent on the values and practices adopted by a society at a given point in history around its children. Thus ‘childhood’ as a social construct was continuously being shaped and reshaped by those participating in the practices of childhood, including the children. Children in their day-to-day engagement with various social members, institutions, and processes simultaneously contributed to the creation of the space of childhood as much as by other social members and professionals (James and Prout 2005 [1997]: 8). The ‘emergent paradigm’ also advocated ethnography as one of the suitable methods to study children’s

lives and alerted that researchers too in the very act of building a body of knowledge on childhood are constructing the idea of ‘childhood’.

It is important to take note of the methodological novelties that the new approach introduced. Firstly, it offered to place childhood outside the adult-child dualism and rather view children as a ‘social category’ existing in relation to other social categories such as labour, class, gender, religion etc. (see Mayall 2002; Qvortrup *et al.* 1994). Toward this end, Alanen and Mayall (2001) proposed ‘generational perspectives’ as the conceptual category to access childhood in its relational and agential form vis-à-vis other social phenomena. Secondly, the stress was now on studying children empirically, with primacy being given to their own experience, conversation, and activities. Many studies were thus initiated taking children as the unit of study instead of families, childcare or schools as the unit (see Morrow 2011; James 2007; Corsaro and Eder 1990). This was seen as a shift from ‘looking down’ approach to ‘looking up from childhood’ approach of childhood studies (Mayall 2002: 4). Thirdly, the framework popularized the study of childhood not only in policies and professional practices, but also in mundane, everyday sites of home, street, neighbourhood, and playground. Fourthly, with the focus on children’s experience and standpoint, the framework was oriented towards capturing the issues in the ‘present context’ of the child’s ‘being’ as opposed to framing the research from futuristic values of a child’s ‘becoming’ (see Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; also Hood, Kelley and Mayall 1996). Fifthly, the paradigm extended the scope of studying childhood from strategic and pathological conflicting experiences to the study of children’s lives in a holistic context in terms of its coherence, comprehensiveness and reciprocal sensibilities too. This opened up inroads to studying children’s life experiences in the context of peers, family, neighbourhood, school, work, play, social identities, law, poverty etc. Most of the studies captured children’s accounts using multiple methods including direct participation methods, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic studies. However, as we will see presently, the scope of the paradigm yet remains to be fully embraced and explored.

Mapping the trends

Again, within the ‘new’ paradigm of childhood studies, one may trace a kind of diversity in the views regarding the scope and status of ‘children voice’. James and James (2001: 32-33) have attempted to map the different trends in the recent study of childhood under two principal categories - one that is interested in exploring children as active social actors following a more cultural and discursive approach and the other those interested in exploring childhood as a social space following a more global approach. Under the former, James and James locate two kinds of sub-trends, namely, the ‘tribal study’ approach and the ‘minority group’ approach. The ‘tribal study’ approach seeks to position the study of children within the relational context of family, playgroup, street, school etc., so as to describe various social interactions, exchanges and processes occurring in these contexts through the active participation of various members (including the children). The ‘minority group’ approach posited children as a ‘minority group’, mostly inspired by feminist theories and work. In keeping with this orientation, Alanen and Mayall (2001) proposed an analytical concept called ‘generational perspectives’ that would enable studying childhood, its formulations and issues, autonomously as well as in keeping with its ‘relational nature’ as found in class and gender studies. Here, in looking at the relational ‘minority’ position, the power dynamics that the child was placed in found special importance.

Under the second principal category, they again identified two sub-trends. The first of these sub-trends viewed childhood as social space based on their commonality in experiences and common realities of children as a segment of social reality. The definition of childhood and children was assumed and fixed in these studies. Studies under this sub-trend had a united discourse around children of the world concerning their nutrition, education, safety and so on. This approach, besides, was reflected in the large scale studies conducted by social scientists and other international organizations. The growing concern over ‘Child rights’ at the international level was seen as one of the drivers behind such researches in the form of commissioned studies. Following this, various programmatic studies were designed with children’s views taken as central to the collection of global data on issues of child protection, health care, work, organization of children’ world etc. (see Morrow 2011; King 2007; Hart 1992). The other sub-trend viewed childhood as a social space based on the dissimilarities in the cultural experiences

of children across communities. The definition of childhood and children were not assumed as fixed in these studies, focusing instead on the expression of childhood in different societies and times.

Having thus elucidated the two principal categories of work, James and James nevertheless assert that all these seemingly divergent studies conducted under the ‘new’ sociology of childhood have a principal emphasis of being ‘child-centric’. The differences between them constitute differences of emphasis rather than kind, with the major difference being the extent to which the commonality or diversity of childhood is acknowledged and revealed. As they maintain, “foundational to all of these approaches (whether explicitly acknowledged or not) is, we suggest, one rather more basic axiom: that children are not only shaped by culture but also help shape it” (James and James 2001: 30). Along these lines, we may say that researchers were now interested in building an alternative model of childhood which highlighted the child’s autonomous and distinctive experiences. However, critics have gone on to raise problems regarding the ‘protection versus participation’ and/or ‘vulnerable versus autonomy’ paradox that is taken to be inherent in the image of the child created by the ‘new’ sociology of childhood.

The problem of politics of childhood in the ‘new’ paradigm

Interestingly, critics have sought to identify a central problem in the aspirations and application of the new paradigm with regard to ‘children voice’; that is, the subjectivity of a child has been uncritically defined along with political measures. Thus, as one scholar has ruefully reflected: “The road from Rousseau to Dewey, from G. H. Mead to Bluebond-Langer, and from Freud to Coles leads respectively from the authentic, the conditioned, and the developing child fully into a political child construed as a subject participating in the social construction of childhood” (Ryan 2008: 574). Suzanne Shanahan further adds by way of clarification that the “agenda of much of these works echoed the twin concerns of the Progressive movement: child welfare and child delinquency” (Shanahan 2007: 409). This has created a newer paradox of seeing the child at the same time as weak, dependent and yet autonomous.

Importantly, it has been stated that the reason for this mismatch occurs because the ‘new’ sociology of childhood still remains trapped in the politics of childhood and fails to make a distinction between the child right’s movements and theories of childhood per se (King 2007: 194). In the guise of a constructivist and child-centric approach, advocates of child rights have encouraged childhood theories that frame children as a minority group ever faced with neglect and suppression (ibid.: 194-95). It is accordingly common to see that various studies and reports that identify with the ‘new’ paradigm of childhood studies refer to the United Nation Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) impetus on listening to children as a justification for the ‘child-centric’ approach in their research. However, it is important to keep in mind the contexts in which the UNCRC makes such allusions. The latter in its Article 12 provides the child with the “opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law” (UNCRC 1989, as cited in Indian Institute of Human Rights (New Delhi), Distance Learning Post-Graduation Programme in Human Rights, Reading material on International Provisions of Human Rights 4D.1, p.40).

Doubtless, extrapolating this form of elucidation of ‘child voice’ affected childhood research on a dual account. Firstly, in practice, this has resulted in a form of attention where the childhood research interest remained compromised by focusing mostly on the ‘uncommon or exceptional’ (Xiao 2008: 47) experiences of children in extreme or problem situation like street children, migrant children, children in broken families, and the like. Very few studies have concentrated on ordinary regular experiences like siblings’ relations, children share in household responsibilities, children and relatives, children and friendships or children and studies etc. Clearly, childhood studies remained under the shadow of studying ‘problems’ (see Moran-Ellis 2010). This has often led to a partial viewing of a child’s life. Secondly, there is a pressure to view the inclusion of the children in the research as a co-researcher who are out there to speak aloud their concerns and in doing so contribute to the larger understanding of social change. This to a great extent reduces the holistic understanding of the child’s subjectivity and participation in their life events.

The further problem of hermeneutics

Addressing the above problem in childhood research, the critics further reckon that this tilt in practice and conceptual paradox between ‘child as an object of knowledge’ and a ‘subject who knows’ indicates the problem of the imagination of ‘self’ inherent to the modern Enlightenment project. Acknowledging the child as a ‘being’ instead of a ‘becoming’ has led to another form of essentialisation, which consists of according the child a position of stable identity from which the child gains the ability to build autonomous sovereign knowledge vis-à-vis the society, and thereby enabling them to construct their own view. Researchers alert us that, by vilifying ‘developmentalism’ for its linear predetermined progression of child growth, the research community has also mistakenly rejected the phenomenon of ‘becoming’ entirely, which has made conceptualization in childhood research considerably inefficient. They clarify that there is a need to see the ‘self’, ‘identity’ and ‘agency’ as an emergent process without conscious predeterminations: “Rather than seeing actions as produced by conscious intentions of pre-existing subjects, we would suggest the reverse: that subjectivity is performatively produced through the continuous unfolding of action” (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008: 510). Thus subjectivity and agency are not to be traced to a singular personified and/or identified individual, but to the course of events and immanent meaning systems that are often personalized and improvised by the actor while participating in the events.

Researchers hence call for a review of the very meaning of ‘participation’ of the child in research as well as in daily life at large; for example, paying attention to ‘dialogue’ and ‘handling of things’ by the child as opposed to only recording what a child has to ‘say’. A stress on ‘child voice’ and ‘speech’ singularly, without doubt, excludes the non-discursive realm of social action and its interpretations, which could further mislead our understanding of children’s lives and situations. Thus, as a possible resolution, ethnography, ethnomethodology and multi-method studies with openness to the child’s point of view in its contexts have been increasingly recommended for studying childhood and children’s participation (see Warming 2011; Graham and Fitzgerald 2010; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; Ryan 2008; and Corsaro and Molinari 2000).

III. Locating Our Study in the Debate between ‘Traditional’ and ‘New’: Orientations and Reorientations

My research is necessarily placed in the ‘new’ paradigm of childhood studies which intends to explore children as social actors (with a particular focus on children participating in the construction of their everyday family life in the home setting). This involves capturing and describing children’s views and accounts of their day-to-day life activities and processes. My intention for doing so is to arrive at the underlying meaning system or value systems that children make use of in dealing with their everyday circumstances.

I find that the representation of children’s lives in anthropology and sociology through the lens of the children’s own viewing has been highly lacking. As I have indicted above, for various reasons such studies have generally been side-lined; instead, we have a host of ideas on children and childhood which comes from what others think or know on behalf of children. This remarkably hinders our progress in building a strong conceptual understanding of the ‘subjective child’. Thus I strongly feel the need to carry out my research with ‘child as the first person’, thereby viewing the social world and life through their eyes and from their perspectives. All the same, I would like to clarify here that I see my research as making a contribution to children’s ‘empowerment’ or ‘protection’ movements. I do not, however, approach children with any activist intention or nationalist agenda. Rather my work is motivated to approach a child as a ‘knowledge-making being’, who leads a life with a certain consciousness and awareness about his/her life situations. It is this ability to be conscious and aware that urges an individual to seek and discern meanings and intelligibility in and around life situations (see Luckmann 1989: 19-24). Very broadly, it is this awareness or understanding of life situations as experienced and made by children in their day-to-day life that I want to capture as an aspect of ‘everyday sociality’. Whether the story of such active performativity of children in various social processes is also the story of social reproduction or social change is not at the forefront of my research interest.

Furthermore, I would like to add that I do not assume to capture children’s narratives in any ‘exclusive’ fashion which is (or can be) posed as ‘fundamentally different’, ‘more

authentic' and 'revealing' of the social reality around them. Nor do I expect to thematise a world of 'differences of interest between the children and adult world'. In the context of my specific research, I rather come face-to-face and deal with the family life of children in the home setting that is lived by children collectively and connectedly with other members. But I do attempt to paint the picture of the home and 'family life' using data from my 'interactive viewing' (if not only active interviewing) with the children more than with any other family member. More importantly, I have attempted to frame my descriptions (whether of events, routines, processes, relations and 'sentiments') by highlighting the dimensions that appeared in my sustained interactions with children. Thus children do have the first say in my order of research. The grounds of this will be further clarified in the sections below, as also in the chapters that follow.

Another point I would like to stress is that our study focuses on children's everyday mundane experiences of affinities, aspirations and inspirations, embarrassments, associations and dissociations, moral rulings and defiance in the context of their daily family life. My priority does not lie in finding out incidences of social tensions and 'risk' faced by children in the family (in the mode of work aspiring to highlight children's 'agency' in the context of extreme conditions). Our study strives to explore dimensions of what the family life of children looks like in a home setting, as indeed the ways in which children render family meaningful and participate in the collective space of the family. In a word: the focus is on 'the world at home', with the intent to capture the ways in which children create and recreate their family life.

At Close Proximity: The Interspersed World(s) of Home and Family

I must admit that, in the absence of a strongly established alternative axis of analysis, it is easily possible to slip into the frames of looking at children's participation in the lens of 'victim' or 'agents of change' framework. Majority of childhood studies use this modern dichotomous understanding of society and child in their frame of analysis; and, while reviewing these studies in my work, I very likely run the risk of falling into the same trap. Moreover, the risk may look acute in choosing and organizing the description of the field data around children and their relationship with an emphasis on 'children

having the first say', as I have maintained above. However, this risk could be mitigated by constantly remembering the context and purpose of the study. Here I would like to bring to notice the context of India and trends in childhood studies thereon, which given its difference in cultural type in the form of 'adult-child proximity' in space and experience, 'familial body' etc. – notions that we will get to in due course in the subsequent section - offer us a chance to study children and childhood in a very different sphere of cultural signification.

As a standard of testimony, which bears on the critical parameters of our study, I would like to emphasise on the shared space of adult-child experiences that I stumbled upon in the course of entering my field, which also challenged my pre-imagined research concerns. The question, given the changed equations of adult-child, was necessarily: how was one to recover a story of 'children home-family life' with 'children having the first say'? Although theoretically the 'new' paradigm of childhood studies allowed and encouraged for such a study, I had no strong methodological support for grounding the study in the Indian context. When I started my study, I had two conditions in my mind for deciding my research setting. I was convinced of discovering a children's world that was set apart, in the sense that it had least adult presence and interference. In addition, I was determined to look at children's agency and perspective in ordinary situations where 'agency' was mostly seen as absent. Thus I set out searching for informal 'peer' or 'cohort' groups, with the intention of seeing how children managed friendship and developed association patterns among peers.

Searching for children 'outside' the home

In the urban setting where I wanted to conduct my study, finding a group of children all by themselves without adult supervision was rare. Such gatherings, if any, were highly short-lived and not regular. For instance, parks, hospital waiting-rooms and playgrounds provided for a free grouping space for children, but these 'groups' were momentary formations and hardly lasted beyond few days. I needed a more consistent grouping. School, tuition and coaching classes, on the other hand, were highly regulated, monitored and task-bound spaces; besides, the school setting especially had been over-studied. Thus I landed in a three decade old, highly populated and mixed urban neighbourhood,

hoping to find neighbour children as friends and siblings forming informal peer groups. However, to my disappointment, I found it otherwise. I was not able to get a playgroup or friends group (*sanga dalla*). Children were hardly to be seen on the street, and they moved outside mostly in the company of elders; they were seldom found in groups of peers on their own. For example, some evenings children and their guardian (mother or family elder) visited the municipality park in the neighbourhood. Children teamed up to play games, mostly cricket (boys and girls mixed), lock-and-key or running and chasing. The participating children changed frequently and everyday there was some new face, that is, such children who appeared once in a blue moon and then discontinued. Attendance in the playgroup was highly fleeting and lacked any kind of peer commitment on the part of children. [In my childhood days, playgroups had a high level of commitment. If a child failed to appear in time for the play, then peers would either go in search to the house of the missing child or reprimand (and even boycott) him/her for some time on the next appearance. A similar unstated rule prevailed for the 'finishing time'. A child wanting to quit before the agreed upon time was considered 'uncivil' and parents calling out for their children from the middle of a game were considered 'unfriendly'.]

In fact, among the visiting children in the municipality park, there was no obligation for the children to be part of any group. If a child just wanted to loiter around unaccompanied by friends fidgeting with his/her own toys, then he/she was allowed and not bothered. Though overall the duration of such gathering lasted anywhere between 1-2 hours, no single child stayed more than an hour; the elders had chores to finish or children had tuitions, weekly tests, extracurricular activities etc. to attend. Besides, it was not common for other adults to talk at length with children or to show much interest in other children's issues; interactions were mostly restricted to general greetings like 'Good that we could meet. Hope you are well?' (*Bhalla hela tike Dekha heigala. Bhalla achanti?*) or short compliments like 'The child has grown up well' (*Bah, kete bada helani*), or even a quick query, 'Why you look pale?' (*Sukhila disuchu kan?*). It is important to point out that no child visited the park or any other such recreation area alone. Children were always accompanied by a family elder, mostly mother, and were never left behind alone. As children moved about or played in the park, the elders sat

nearby chatting and keeping an eye on the children. Families were extremely protective about children and greatly monitored the movement of children in terms of where they went, whom they met and how they used their time.

All this meant that I was left to access children inside their houses in a home-setting where I had to study the child in continuous engagements with other family members, be it adults or other siblings alike. The children playgroup or friend circle, I found (very dishearteningly), was a compromised phenomenon in the neighbourhood setting studied.

Searching for children 'inside' the home

In search of a more durable engagement with children, I had to enter the houses and access the child in the 'home' setting. I hoped that this would grant me the opportunity to study children by themselves and get one-on-one interviews or conversations going. Once inside the home, I found myself in a very different situation. Initially, I thought that because I was a stranger, obviously the child was not left alone with me. I calculated that it would take some days of rapport-building with the family to open up, and, once the study and I as a person became familiar with the people, they would have no objection in my speaking to the children directly. But that one-on-one interaction and conversation with the child on its own did not come my way for a long time. This unsettled me quite a bit. Initially, I was not very perceptive of it as something 'cultural'; rather, I felt that I was unable to push my research forward for some technical flaw in gathering data, whether it be ways of doing observation, planning for interviews, developing a rapport with subjects, lack of sufficient readings on previous studies and so on. We will have more to say about this in my fieldwork chapter, where I discuss how the 'understanding of what is research' and 'what a child can say?' among my field subjects affected the momentum of my fieldwork.

At that time, only one thing was clear to me; it was that a family would have to show great trust before allowing their children to spend such a long time with me conversing about their day-to-day life. In addition, I also knew that children had to feel a sense of belongingness to be able to open up to me. This meant that not only I had to wait for the family and the child to find my study welcoming, but also that, in the meantime, I had to

learn to open up to their 'life-worlds'. [On the one hand, this needed enormous patience and perceptiveness; and, on the other hand, I was extremely worried about my research not moving ahead, as the probing questions 'what exactly of children life was I looking at now?' and 'how was it to be accessed?' pestered my mind.] In this state of mind, I allowed some time to pass just hanging out with the families (and in the neighbourhood) and moving along the ebb and flow of their family lives and routines.

During this period, a few observations struck me hugely. I often had a long conversation with the women of the house, and especially children's mothers' spent many afternoons chatting with me about their lives. This happened even as the child was present in the same room or vicinity. Fathers', besides, talked of their office politics, world affairs and voiced their opinion aloud in the presence of the child. Similarly, it was not uncommon for relatives to exchange views even about domestic fights and fallouts in the presence of the children. My senses took to these situations keenly. The informality, openness and shared proximity found in family life (and for that matter the day-to-day life) 'somewhat' blurred the lines of 'adult child separation' in a unique sort of way. To a great extent, family situations, events, and secrets leaked over to both sides. What did this mean for my research on 'children', quite apart from what childhood studies had emphasized or was highlighting?

The responses of the children, though not unfamiliar, suddenly appeared curious to me. As all this was happening around them, the children mostly moved about unaffectedly as if they had heard or registered nothing. Sometimes they just sat quietly without showing any expression; sometimes they continued playing on their computer or their gadgets, pretending a deaf ear. On a few occasions, the older children (especially of high school) silently moved out of the 'gossip' area. The very young ones sometimes wanted to pull their mothers away for something they desired or demanded that everyone join in games. I was intrigued by the questions, 'why did the children not venture into the discussions?', 'what made children sit silent as if not listening anything, though clearly, they were?' and so on. One such evening, I pointed out to a child who was playing by the window - as the mother and I sat gossiping about their family problems - and asked the mother: 'Does he know everything?' The mother looked at the child, and exclaimed smilingly:

“Does he not see all? He does. But what does he understand? Can he understand now? When he grows up, he will certainly think of all these and then he will know”.

What does a child understand of all that is happening? This became a compulsive question in my mind. What is more, this further gave rise to the question about the best ways of grasping this, considering the kind of situation I was in. How to define ‘child’, how to define ‘understanding’, and how to define ‘all that was going around’? And more than anything, as my supervisor by that time had started asking, ‘what could be a useful frame to understand all this?’ The frame, he insisted, not only had to give a consistency to my research, but had to add value to the data I had collected and contribute to the stock of knowledge on childhood studies. As I waded through my fieldwork and at last established contacts with the children directly, a cue that I was getting overall from my field ethos became clearer: most of my initial conversations with children revealed that they thought of their parents and family as ‘universal’, that is to say, as inseparable and ever existing. For these children, life was sort of anchored around the understanding of parents and family. Friends, future, schooling, and the virtual world (media, games, books and TV serials) did preoccupy children, but it was a child’s relationship with parents, family, and relatives that dominated the child’s understanding of self-identity, belongingness, and responsibility.

But, of course, in talking about the adult-child interspersed lives, I am not saying that any kind of conceptual partitioning is impossible between family elders and the children in an Indian family context. Indeed, it is possible to study the adult-child relation using axes like authority and responsibility structures, obligation structures, affection structures, age/maturity (immaturity) structures and so on, in the classical mould of ‘socialization’ studies. My attention, however, is more on the mutuality and the dynamism between the borders of adult and children’s lives which I was observing in the Indian urban families of the neighbourhood I was researching; and, specifically, conceptualizing the same from the children’s own descriptions. Accordingly, my questions became more about how children were shaping these domestic spaces or interactions, and in that process defining their own spaces as much as holding on to

others. How do children go about their relationships, given the context of an Indian family? What could be a relevant framework to study it?

Childhood Studies in India: A Critical Re-view

I. A Marginalised Approach

Around this period of my fieldwork, I decided to take a break and go back to the library and the department. I started reviewing the academic literature again. I searched for readings preceding the 1980's on Indian childhood in everyday settings, hoping to find some studies on local formulations of childhood in traditional contexts in India. It is here, in the midst of this re-search, that I came across a reference that showed some academic recognition of my field situation. But before going to the point directly, let me talk a little bit about the scenario of childhood studies in India, and my own ordeal in canvassing aspects of that very domain.

Childhood studies in India: a rare view

I must admit that my repeated attempts and hopes of garnering a comprehensive sense of childhood studies in India proved elusive, discouraging and tiring. It was not only the fact that such studies had very faint and sporadic appearances, but also that these were deeply forgotten, widely overlooked and strangely inaccessible. I invariably found these studies unheard of among academicians around me. The reason could be that many of the studies were more in the style of reporting and archiving; and thus methodologically conservative. Moreover, most of the studies were highly influenced by the traditional paradigm of 'adult-centric' approach, even looking at childhood as a social space for nation-building or cross-cultural comparison, while oblivious of the 'subjective' children who embodied the childhood; in this sense, it was not very helpful to what I wanted to do (Sahoo 2018). Noticeably, many of the studies were a by-product of, or appended as findings of, wider studies - whether it be into family processes, cultural changes, poverty studies, migration, rehabilitation, etc. - and thus were not sensitively contributing to the epistemological and methodological issues in childhood studies per se (an extended but lucid overview of 'Indian family and kinship studies in India' is by Patricia Uberoi 1993 and 2003; the readings listed here are also useful, and bear on my larger point, although

see also Karlekar 2003 and Trawick 2003). I feared that I would not be able to breathe life to the story of childhood studies in India as the domain seemed under-developed and ill-formed; and yet I had to do something about it.

“Childhood”, it has been rightly claimed, “is a latecomer on the social science scene in India” (Kumar 1993: 67). In fact, it was as recent as 2011 that the Indian Sociological Society (ISS), in order to mark the 5th decade of its existence, decided to bring out a series of 10 thematic volumes under the series title ‘Readings in Indian Sociology’. One such volume was on ‘*Sociology of Childhood and Youth*’ (Bhadra 2014). The volume’s editor has candidly noted:

Unfortunately, the institutionalization of the sociology of childhood and youth is still in its’ nascent stage in the level of university teaching and research in India. ... In actuality, sociologists have been caught off guard when the criticism started to pour about the fact that there has been very little sociological imagination regarding Indian children and youth (Bhadra 2014: xix).

The volume brings together articles published on childhood and youth in India in the journal *Sociological Bulletin* since its inception in the year 1952. Out of the 13 articles that find a place in the volume, six articles on childhood have been clustered in the first section. Three of these cover the topic of preference for male childbirth and practices around it; while two other articles trace the correlation of education with social class and political orientations in high school children using structured questionnaires and one article uses qualitative methods with adolescent deviants to look at the social context of their deviant behaviour. The rest of the seven articles, outside of the first section, are an even more mixed bag of studies and perspectives. Evidently, we can say that childhood studies in the context of the sociology of India has been seen mostly as a social category only in its capacity to reflect larger social issues and forces in play, with a concomitant view of society from adult concerns and ideas of the world. As Sarada Balagopalan has ruefully observed: “Existing studies on children in India have been a mixed bag of what we might now characterize as focused on socialization practices as well as on the working of the developmental state in these lives” (Balagopalan 2011: 294; see also her 2018).

A question of ‘biases’ borrowed from the West

Olga Nieuwenhuys (1998), in her interesting article on children in Kerala, reproduces an account of a 15-year-old Dutch boy on Indian children which she had got hold of during her fieldwork in India. The account highlights how the ‘adult-child proximity’ of Indian childhood got interpreted not merely as a different cultural form, but rather as an ‘absence of childhood’ in India when seen from a European lens. She quotes the Dutch boy’s account of Indian children:

They do know a lot about politics and adult matters, much more than youngsters in Europe do. Besides, they always work. They also care more about each other and feel more of one mind than we in the Netherlands. I wouldn’t say that they are unhappy compared with Dutch children, because they are satisfied with less. But I wouldn’t call them modern as children in the Netherlands are; they aren’t arrogant or assertive enough for that; they don’t have a world of their own, their own films, games, clothes, or music. I suppose that you could say that they don’t share a subculture, so, in a way, they don’t look like real children to me. ... They are actually hardly aware of what really matters in the world (Nieuwenhuys 1998: 269).

It cannot be denied that this is a keen observation. But I would like to highlight how the modern bias of ‘individual self’ is reflected in the phrases like “feel more of one mind” and “don’t have a world of their own”, which dominates the comparative glance of the Dutch boy and which leads him to conclude that “they don’t look like real children to me”. In fact, the unhindered dominance of this dichotomy between the ‘individual self’ and the ‘collective life’ is illustrative of how the emergence of a debate about an alternative frame of reference for the understanding of childhood in the Indian context has been weak and fraught with misrepresentations (which, incidentally, is all the more true in the early comparative childhood works commissioned by international organisations).

Indeed, in recognizing multiple lineaments of childhood, the ‘culturalist’ framework has often coloured childhood in the Third World as ‘the other’, ‘non-modern’, and ‘without a recognizable history’ of its own. Balagopalan (2011 and 2018) thus implores the need to carefully study the impact of a ‘normatively fixed’ childhood understanding as pushed by the 1989 United Nations Convention for the Rights of Child (and by other First World nations) on to the cultural paradigms of childhood found in other parts of the world. She emphasizes that the local cultures around childhood are often negatively evaluated by

the West and declared as a lack of awareness on childhood or as the absence of childhood altogether. Such cultural misappropriation gets further complicated when the cultural discourse of childhood is conflated with the study of problems like poverty etc. (see Balagopalan 2011: 291). This has obviously created an objectionable caricature of the story of Indian childhood. On the one hand, the realities of the children of poor in India have been used uncritically by these studies as proof of an Indian society that lacks any kind of cultural history or awareness on 'childhood' entirely. On the other hand, the story of the children of rich in India accessing the western institutions of childcare and development has been essentialized as a story of modernity (barring any allowance for the influences of local cultural and historical practices and its analysis). In practice, this has led to a preoccupation with childhood as 'an issue to be solved' in the third world countries; and thereby overemphasizing the research interest in children in extreme conditions like street children, child labour, child trafficking, juvenile delinquency, migrant children etc.

In this light, scholars feel strongly that there is a need to study the social reality, development, position and agency of a child with continuous reference to the local belief and value systems shared and reinterpreted by the child and immediate members around the child to be able to arrive at a picture of childhood, at once socially and culturally relatable and inclusive (see Nieuwenhuys 2009; Balagopalan 2002 and 2008; Bhist 2008; Kumar 2005 [1991]). More sharply, Padma Sarangapani (2003a) has alerted that the uncritical application of the 'liberal-humanist' universal order erodes the cultural values of indigenous childhood. She thus pointedly reminds: "There is also a need to recognize values in indigenous traditions that are not usually part of modern, liberal education theory" (Sarangapani 2003a: 257).

II. Questioning Familialism: The Dominant theme of Childhood Studies in Everyday Contexts

On the rootedness of 'familial body' and 'merged self'

I was now aware that Indian childhood studies could be approached through many frames - modern, colonial and traditional frame, international and indigenous frame, child right

and child protection frame, ‘familialism’ and separate childhood frame, and adult domination and child autonomy frame. Keeping my study away from the strong internationalist lineage, I started looking for studies resonating with the local culture and semiotics in the everyday family life-setting. One such reading (in psychology) that I had hurriedly collected from the Odisha state library had an explicit mention of ‘adult child proximity’ in space and presence, signifying the Indian mode of adult-child relations (see Kumar 1993). In the overall semantics of this ‘adult-child proximity’ phrase, it felt like I had found an academic acceptance of my field situation. However, the article on the whole indicated at the possibility of overwriting the boundaries of adult-child definition and relations by using ‘intersectionality’ principles like the influence of gender, class, sibling hierarchy etc. As I followed the cue, it opened up the Pandora box of a conceptual flux: consisting of a deep search for modern and indigenous identities in the garb of childhood studies. All the same, I also felt that nothing had struck the Indian child in a family as hard as the ‘relational self’ when blindly mapped onto the ‘modernity’ discourse (as we shall presently dwell in what follows, as well as the segments that come apace).

At any rate, I had found that the study of Indian childhood was not only scanty, but also brushed under the researches on family studies and the ‘Indian relational self’, which for the child in an everyday context got translated as the ‘familial body’. How so, I wondered? What was so obvious about it? Why did such empirical realities of children’s daily life like game-time, learning, sibling activities, hanging out with friends etc. never got covered in such studies? This made me think that childhood as a site of study in India had been, for the most part, used to answer questions of a different degree, not necessarily related or consequential to children directly. I decided to explore this frame more.

One of my childhood cherished memories is that of weekly movies on Doordarshan, the state-owned television network. In those days, people made a distinction between two kinds of movies: ‘action movies’ and ‘family movies’. The action movies consisted of fisticuff and fighting between the hero and villains, murder, smuggling etc. Interestingly, these movies were marked by the looming absence or a tragic loss of family (with

reference to the main character in the movie). In ‘family movies’, overall, the story often revolved around the home setting focusing on inter-generational relations. A happy home was marked by a shared space where elders were generous, respected and prioritised; younger ones were duty-bound, loved and cared for; and family rules upheld. I can remember a dozen of successful Hindi and Odia movies that dramatized the theme of old parents being unceremoniously abandoned by their own disrespectful grown-up children, reducing the old parents to a life of inconsolable sorrow, poverty, and disease. [The moral and sentimental undertones of the movies were emphatically relayed, often leaving the audience in tears, and they continue to invoke a sensitive chord in people’s memory.] Most of the movies ended with a gradual misfortune of the disrespectful children and timely realisation of their sinful act resulting in a revival of the older family relations, positions, and statuses (as marked by a scenic seeking of forgiveness by children from their elders). This was called a ‘Happy Ending’. We children were not only allowed, but encouraged to watch these movies. Here I am reminded of the social anthropologist John N. Gray, who made a comprehensive study of Brahman-Chhetri households in Nepal, where he pointedly observed that “... for Hindus, everyday life in world is domestic life” (Gray 1995: 26).

Even more emphatically, the above familial phenomena as captured in the so-called ‘family movies’ has been immaculately exposed by Lawrence Cohen (1998), albeit working with a very different segment of the population concerning problems of the old aged. In deconstructing the Western hegemony and developing an ‘Indian’ understanding of ‘old age’ and ‘ageing’, Cohen encounters (what he characterizes as) the ‘familial body’. He analyses that for Indians, old age problems such as dementia, Alzheimer’s, were attributed to one’s experience of ‘self-status’ in family life and its sentimental effect on one’s mind. That is to say, by and large, people of India believed that the intergenerational change in ethos, power, and authority within the family and the wider changes in family patterns (such as breaking up of joint families) were the results of old age disturbances and not old age per se (see Cohen 1998: 104-06). Going further, he elucidates the intensity of the ‘merged self’ when he asserts that, according to Indian moral standards, the situation of an old person in the family reveals the moral coherence of that family: “To address the body of the old person is to address that body as embedded

in a family and in the transactions that structure and maintain a family... the old body is not only embedded in its family, but is, in a very real sense, appropriated by and becomes its family” (Cohen 1998: 177). I thus conclude from this quick order of enumeration that, with reference to India as a whole, the individual’s body and ‘it’s state of being’ becomes the site of family, in the sense that the family, its culture and dynamics is to be perceived through the individual’s conditions and variations of conduct; and, what is more, this state of affairs was seen as one of the highest values of social existence in India, both implicating and forming the basis of the ‘relational self’.

Shweder and Bourne (1984) in their cross-cultural study on the ‘concept of person’, make a comparison between the Western culture and the Indian culture, pointing out to the ‘egocentric’ conception of individual-social relations of the West in contrast to the ‘sociocentric’ conception of the individual-social relationship of the Indian milieu. They assert that autonomy in an Indian individual gets expressed uniquely in the lives of the recluse who have renounced worldly relations. As they go on to observe: “What makes Western culture special, then, is the concept ‘autonomous distinctive individual living-in-society’. What makes Indian culture special is the concept ‘autonomous non-distinctive individual living-outside-society’” (Shweder and Bourne 1984: 191). Thus the Indian self is seen to be behaviourally conditioned to be ‘context-dependent’ and ‘occasion-bound’, often merging the understanding of self with the social ‘status’ that the individual occupies (see also Menon 2013b).

I would like to reiterate that the ‘adult-child proximity of space and presence’ frame in India as talked about in the context of Indian childhood studies was based on this underlying discourse on the Indian ‘relational self’. All the same, the cultural dimension of this frame has not been very crucial for the purposes of forwarding the claims of our study. Indeed, given that the framework merges the category of children and childhood experiences with culturally loaded pre-given definitions of categories like gender divisions, power positions, kinship status, and inter-generation issues, this leaves little room to explore children’s dispositions and agency as social actors beyond the cultural boundaries of gender, caste-class and kinship (as also the accompanying discourses of cultural reproduction and social change).

Family matters - 'We time to Me time'

Allow me now to make a quantum leap into the present and address a 'very different' expression of the 'familial body' as reflected in a recent newspaper article written by a homemaker. In an 'Open Page' article appearing in the Hyderabad edition of the widely circulated newspaper *The Hindu* (Tuesday, 27 October 2015, p.16), a Mrs. P. Mathur writes about 'Family Matters: "We time" to "Me time"'. She is a "non-working" homemaker who chooses to publicly reflect on a poignant change in her family life "after 19 years of parenthood". Mrs. Mathur talks about an instance where her children had decided to ditch the annual family vacation for their school and college works. Disheartened, Mrs. Mathur and her husband decided to cancel the trip. She then talks about how her elder son had advised both of them to go ahead with the trip on their own as a couple. Her son, genuinely pointing at the increasing study demands, had asked her: "So how long will you wait for four of us to be there together?" Accordingly, she and her husband had taken the trip without their children. Interestingly, even as Mrs. Mathur calls this as "adjusting to the void", she does not experience it as a 'moral degeneration' of relations or an 'empty nest syndrome' (as an unwitting modernist would have it). Rather, she looks at it as a "new phase" to look after oneself, and endearingly suggests: "we have responsibilities to ourselves as well as to each other with the family. Let's cherish these moments, adore ourselves and stay alive" (ibid.).

Now, clearly, when Mrs. Mathur uses the expression 'family matters', it stands for both the meanings, namely, family is significant in one's experiencing of oneself and imagining of one's life, as well as 'family affairs' as matters that need to be handled and worked out. It is important to note here that the realisation of self is not merely reduced to realisation of a shared family space; at the same time, the realisation of self is not seen as a rejection (or fall) of the family. It is seen in temporal phases of shifting priorities, attention and responsibilities.

Interestingly, the cultural anthropologist Usha Menon in talking about 'old age' - which she calls attention as '*Briddha Avastha*' (Menon 2013a: 115-19) - in the context of married Odia Hindu women's life phases characterizes the conception of self as the 'non-

interdependent self' (ibid.: 189-91). She expounds that 'old age' is a state where the individual sees her self-growth diminishing, and, while distancing from worldly responsibilities, she also learns to control her own emotions and actions with visible freedom from responsibilities and demands from others. The woman accordingly becomes the figure who is eligible for unconditional care (*seva*). Evidently, autonomy is not so much seen as gaining control over others, but over one's own actions. Menon, however, alerts that the woman in old age, having come to dissociate from family duties, may experience it as a state of 'rolelessness', even leading to a sense of loss of personhood especially in such households where old age care is bereft of proper sense and emotions - "she is almost a nonperson", as Menon formulates (ibid.: 191). Alternatively, Robinson (2014), while studying the middle-class Pune youth from a perspective of understanding globalization and social change, encountered a dual impetus among her young subjects for both asserting freedom, individual space, and autonomy as well as respecting and cherishing family connections and intimacy (Robinson 2014: 9). She in fact explains the youth's increasing search for independence as a function of western influences and market economy (ibid.: 8). Significantly yet, both Menon and Robinson urge to pay attention to the moral and aesthetic standards applied by society for defining individual authority and autonomy before taking on any analysis of 'self and personhood' or even the debate on 'individualism – collectivism' (see Menon 2013a: 5-11 and Robinson 2014: 152-58).

Amidst these lay and scholarly insistences, I am now faced with the urgency to address the question: Is 'Childhood' in India a modern creation, as Phillippe Aries had posited in the context of modern western societies, and that Indian society did not have a concept of 'childhood'? Or is it an epistemological problem, in that, given the conservative adult-centric state of childhood studies in India, no attempt has been made to find out about children's lives and activities in the society? One way of finding an answer is to make an appraisal of some prominent childhood ethnographies and look at the approach towards describing adult-child relations. Such a probing will help us to look at the assumptions inherent in these studies about the child, as indeed 'childhood' as an object of critical scrutiny in its own right.

III. Revisiting the Ground of Indian Childhood Studies

Critically re-engaging with child's 'relational self' within the family setting

Evidently, it is not enough to say that there is a fundamental identification of 'self-understanding' with the 'understanding of family', which also gets appropriated to explain the adult-child relation in the everyday setting of the Indian context (Chaudhary 2004: 67-75, 109). Rather, the interlinked processes need to be explored, exposing the nature of identification and its undercurrents especially in the changing ethos of modern life and living (for a discussion underscoring the latter point, see Robinson 2014 and Nieuwenhuys 2010). Towards this end, I realized that the box of 'familial body' needs to be opened up and re-examined both conceptually and empirically. Thus I have decided to look closely at the dichotomy of, as it were, 'familial body and the separate child' which has been implicitly or explicitly applied by scholars studying Indian childhood, while also placing the childhood study under the overall garb of 'familial body' and 'family studies'.

On the one hand, the 'relational self' and its popular form, the 'familial body', have been offered by scholars as an Indian alternative for social reality as opposed to the Western adult-child separation model (see Seymour 1988; also Trawick 1990). On the other hand, among the scholars, there has been an urgency to map the familial body and its relation to the individual self along the borrowed lines of modernity and power hierarchy of 'domination and subjugation', wherein the familial is seen as overpowering and all-imposing on the individual (see Kakar 2006). In Indian childhood studies per se, I see this as taking a collusive form of 'family and child' becoming coterminous with 'adult domination and child subjugation'. Some contributions especially in the recent scholarship – see, broadly, Saraswathi, Menon and Madan 2018 - have tried to challenge it by bringing in the possibility of an intersectionality perspective. This is largely reflected in the 'adult-child proximity' in space and presence framework which challenges this misplaced overlapping of 'adult domination and child subjugation' with 'familial self vis-à-vis individual self' framework. They attempt at elucidating complex dimensions of authority and subordination at play in Indian families like gender relations, marital status, financial authority, traditional roles etc., in deciding adult-child relation

and not simplistically fixing it by virtue of ‘generation’ and ‘age’ (see also Uberoi 2003, although the latter is not framed to the situation of childhood studies per se). Though this is a valuable contribution to breaking the monotony of the modernity discourse, it nevertheless puts into jeopardy the chances of developing an understanding of the ‘subjective child’ and its identification in the Indian social reality. To be sure, the journey of recognising the ‘subjective child’ has been slow in this country, until recent times. In what follows, I make an attempt to elaborate on the scenario that I have just discussed.

Adult-child proximity sans individuality: an initial outline

Sudhir Kakar’s book, *‘The Inner World: A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India’* published in 1978, is popularly believed to have spoken in great detail about the dimensions of childhood unique to Indian society. The book attempts to capture the formation of Indian character and identity (the collective psyche) by looking at the cultural practices of childhood especially in the upper caste Hindu males. It is a psychoanalytic interpretation of childhood practices as supplemented by myths, legends and ethnographic studies covering multiple dimensions at the same time - the individual, cultural, social and historical. Kakar identifies adult-child proximity as one of the basic features of Indian childhood:

We have seen that minimal demands are placed in the Indian infant to master the world around him and to learn to function independently of his mother. The main emphasis in the early years of Indian childhood is avoidance of frustration and the enhancement of the pleasurable mutuality of mother and infant, not encouragement of the child’s individuation and autonomy (Kakar 1978: 103).

Furthermore, for Kakar, this delayed differentiation of a male child from the mother (and consequently of ego from id, as the psychoanalytic vocabulary would have it) leads to domination of primary mental processes wherein thinking is representational (in terms of visual and sensual images) and yet affective and non-logical. Moving on, he describes that as an infant grows up to boyhood, he is ushered from this comfortable space to confront the larger sphere of ‘significant others’ - the joint family, brotherhood and the caste community. Poignantly, as Kakar opines, even in this sphere the child is not left alone but subsumed by the social authority and bonds:

(T)he psycho-social world encountered by the Indian children as they reach the 'age of accountability' is governed by the principles of the inviolable primacy of family, and secondarily jati, relationships. ... From the beginning, participation and acceptance in this world entail strict observance of a traditionally elaborate hierarchical social order and the subordination of individual preferences and ambitions to the welfare of the extended family and jati communities (Kakar 1978: 126).

More emphatically, Kakar sees these practices marked by adult-child proximity as hindering the development of autonomy and independence among Indians (especially, upper-caste Hindu males). For him, the Indian 'merged self' is also a marker of subordination and subjugation of the individual, sometimes seen as self-sacrifice. In Kakar's writing as a whole, the collective is shown to be in full charge of the individual, which in the case of childhood translates into the adults having full charge over the children. I would like to comment that the parameters of this interpretation is both self-consciously and evidently indicative of an assumed psychoanalytic frame of understanding, where the individual self is often repressed and in conflict with the collective consciousness. My contention is that this state of affairs need not necessarily represent the social reality around Indian children and childhood. Indeed, in looking at the cultural behaviour of children in India, Kakar is not concerned with childhood or children per se. He is rather interested in pinpointing those cultural processes that contribute to the future psychological make-up of an Indian male (upper-caste Hindu, as it were). It is imperative to note that Kakar's psychoanalytic approach, though focused on childhood, remains oblivious of children. Childhood, besides, is accessed in a mode of reminiscence through the stories (whether biographical or mythical) of grown-ups representing a selective collective consciousness.

Summarily, moving on towards the 1980's and further, one sees an increase in the volume of studies on Indian childhood, but these have been predominately the studies of child socialization, child-rearing, modes of parenting with an 'up-down' adult-centric study approach. Moreover, these studies have remained highly isolated in the mainstream sociology, and mostly housed in family studies, cultural psychology or sociology of education (see, for example, Anandalakshmy and Bajaj 1981; Misri 1985; Krishnan 1998; and Berry, Dasen and Saraswathi 1999).

Adult-child proximity and repositioning authority: further measures

In 1993, Krishna Kumar made a systematic review of the existing literature to reconstruct the nature of child-adult relation in the Indian family context and proposed - following Murphy (1953) and Anandalakshmy (1982) - that the child and the adult relation in India are marked by a continuity of social space and encounters. In other words, that the children's presence is not far removed or separated by design from the adult presence in day-to-day activities and living. As Kumar put it quite cogently:

In early childhood, this proximity to the adult is expressed in close physical contact, implied when the child is being constantly carried by elders in their arms. In late childhood, it is expressed in the acceptance accorded to children in places where adults are talking or are being entertained (Kumar 1993: 68).

He goes on to cite examples from various studies to show how it was common to find a continuous presence of children along with the adults in the description of putative Indian scenes in extant ethnographic writings. Kumar even explicitly presents the Indian agrarian joint family authority structure as a counter to the modern adult-child dichotomy:

After all, even, the grown up was but a child from the view of the head of the family and other senior people. ... In a social order in which 'who is in authority' is never in question, children's status is strangely undifferentiated from members twenty or thirty years older than them (ibid.: 70).

Evidently, Kumar is also alluding to the idea of a 'merged self'; but somewhere, in the process of his thinking, he has displaced the authority relation from the 'adult-child' and 'collective-individual' distinctions. He seems to have repositioned the authority and subordination relations onto the family role-status structure beyond the category of age. All the same, following his observations, it may be now possible to understand how in the context of Indian sensibilities as a whole it is not uncommon to find that adult members of the family, who might even be in their middle age, remain obliged and subordinate to the older members of the family. For instance, in my family context, as per kinship rules even if the ego's elder brother or sister's spouse is younger in age to ego, still they acquire a 'senior' position than ego in the family.

Kumar even alerts that this ‘proximity’ of adult children is to be seen in a social sense, and need not be understood as a form of continuity in a psychological sense as represented in the age-based psychological development frame. Besides, it is also important to note that the physical and social proximity need not necessarily mean an automatic acknowledgment of autonomy or competence to children. Of course, this is not to claim that there is a complete absence of any kind of patron and protégé relation between adult-child relations. In fact, the orders of such studies are replete with instances of disciplining, moral teaching and epistemic authority over the child by the adults (see, for instance, Sarangapani 2003a; and Saraswathi and Dutta 1987). However, the point of contention remains that age and adulthood is not the singular marker of gaining authority or autonomy and also that childhood is not bereft of social identities. Thus Swapna Banerjee (2015), in discussing the father-child relationship in colonial Bengal, builds her narrative based on people’s reminiscence of their childhood days which also incorporates in passing the memories pertaining to their young adulthood married days as well.

A further interesting example of this entanglement of child and the familial body, as it were, could be found in Ishita Pande’s (2015) discussion about ‘child/wife’ in the context of changes made in the Child Marriage Acts (although, it must be stated, that this aspect is not the main focus of her article). Pande uses Marathi novels written in the late 1890s using ‘child/wife’ as a protagonist to look at the journey from childhood and adulthood, analysing the same in the context of changes made to practices of child marriage through law. In the course of the examination, she remarks:

... the lines between ‘child’ (below the age considered capable of consenting to matters regarding the person) and ‘wife’ (‘belonging’ to the husband under both Hindu religion and Anglo-Indian law) remained slippery and uncertain in 1891. It was only in 1929 that the line was solidified, at least in theory with the passage of the Child Marriage Restraint Act that prohibited the marriage of a child. ... The figure of the Indian child/wife perched on the brink of precocious wifhood and precious childhood ... (Pande 2015: 36).

Clearly, Pande is a proponent of the modernity frame of ‘familial versus individual’, and accordingly locates the story of the novels she is using in the colonial reformist discourses (ibid.: 38-39; and 43). Thus one finds in her elucidation an inherent need to

disentangle the child from the wife, as inspired by the ideas of the ‘universal order’ of modern childhood. The novels, doubtless, trace the journey of ‘child/wife’ protagonist into adulthood, where the wife, no more a child, is placed in adolescent wifhood and finds her individuality and personhood instilled in a reformed Victorian family setting idealising child education, conjugal love, and equality. Despite critically looking at the colonial ethos of these novels, Pande nevertheless continues to operate from modernity’s dichotomy of collectivity versus individuality, and where the collective self is seen much as a problem.

Summing up, I would like to say that, in the course of our elucidation issuing off Kakar’s work, we have found that ‘autonomy’, ‘separation’ and a ‘distinct subculture’ of children and younger members of the family were seen as the deciding factor for assigning ‘individuality’ to the latter, as well as forming the basis for according a distinctive conceptual status to childhood. Some of the works surveyed above, such as Kumar, have however problematized this framing by displacing the orders of authority and autonomy from the adult-child relation to a more complex working of the family role-status order. The question, in this wake, is particularly whether in doing so, is the proposal that there is no such category as ‘children’ in India? Indeed, does Kumar’s ‘adult-child proximity’ in the Indian context imply the absence of childhood? Alternatively, should one accept Pande’s problematisation of the collective self and look up at modern individuality for reform?

More on adult-child proximity and recognising individual life

Urvashi Misri’s work (1985) challenges the above two perspectives on the issue of the recognition of childhood in Indian culture. Misri emphasizes that the individual child has an important cultural standing in Indian collective life; and furthermore that childhood practices have a substantial presence in Indian cultural space. According to her, the individual is not lost in Indian ‘familialism’. Indeed, in turning attention to her ethnographic data on Kashmiri Brahmins, she examines layers of beliefs, practices and events around the birth and life of children, so as to arrive at a conceptual framework, for constructing child and childhood. The framework is based on three axes of local beliefs and practices, each involving an antithetical relation, namely, the ‘divine vis-à-

vis human' axis; the 'collective vis-à-vis individual' axis; and the 'inalterable vis-à-vis transformative' axis. She argues that the inherent antithesis contained in each of the axes arises from the constant balancing of the 'idea of a child' as a merged collective self and a separate life in itself. According to Misri, the cultural ideas like child as a divine gift, child as embodying parental biological substance and child as a patrilineage link, including the child's previous life karma and purificatory rituals as rites of passage, could be used to develop a potential framework which enables us to see childhood as a simultaneous process that "while incorporating the new born child into the society of adults, it also individuates and separates it" (Misri 1985: 118). As she observes:

The horoscope, karma, the constellation of *ghraha* and *nakshatra*, the signs of the body, and naming express the uniqueness and individuality of the child. Simultaneously, *sapinda*, *gotra*, the physical and character resemblance establish the links of the child to the collectivity. Thus, the uniqueness of each child is counterposed against its collective nature (ibid.: 126).

While there is a distinctive caste connotation to these findings, I would like to add from what I observe around that the celebration of a child in a family is not uncommon in the Indian context. Children have been commonly referred as '*ghar ka chirag*' (the beacon of the house), '*jigar ka tukda*' (part of one's heart), '*ankhon ke tare*' (stars of one's eyes), and also as '*vansh*' (or lineage). The child is seen as one's future upholder of the family, and thereby completing domestic life, and also as an object of personal gratification through parenthood. Thus the child is expected to exhibit filial piety, obedience and submission, just as the child is treated as an object of love, affection, and care (as depicted, say, in the short stories by Rabindranath Tagore [Bengali] and Fakir Mohan Senapati [Odia], as indeed other languages). Often the word '*laad-pyar*' (cajole and love) are associated with child-rearing. In my field, the child is often addressed fondly as '*dhana*', which means 'wealth'. Children and childhood, although subsumed under the collective body of family, are also depicted as the centre of the universe of a family. A married couple, commonly speaking, is not seen to be complete as a family, until a child is born to the couple. A woman's life is considered 'complete' with her becoming a mother.

Thus we may say that, unlike Kakar who was interested in seeing the consequences of the culture of Indian childhood on the future personality of Indian men, Misri is more focused on the culture of an Indian childhood and its semiotic import for the conceptualisation of life around children in Indian culture. In fact, we can interpret the latter (namely, Misri) as bearing directly on the question about whether India has a culture of childhood and what could be its specificities. In addressing so, she is perhaps refuting both the Western portrayal of Indian culture as lacking a history of childhood and the psychoanalytic depiction of Indian childhood practices as discouraging individuality among its members. Doubtless, Misri's framework does not see individuality in an essentialised linear line of an 'autonomy versus subordination' spectrum as we find in the studies we reviewed in the foregoing sections. Rather, she broadens the understanding of individuation by giving it a multidimensional character, where an individual attains a definition not merely as an acquirer of authority but as an object of emotional, cultural values.

All the same, I would still like to contend that even though Misri is looking at the processes that give the individual a separate, specific image simultaneously with the processes that make the individual a collective appendage, there is still something which she shares in common with the earlier childhood studies. She continues to construct childhood as a cultural site building it from symbol systems as obtaining in beliefs and community practices of people. The 'subjective child' is rendered unrecognised as a result. Understandably, it does not seem to have come under the scope of Misri's work to reflect particularly on children's representations of childhood or, for that matter, to subsume their own life-world within the cultural-symbolic site of childhood.

Indian Childhood: Towards the 'Subjective Child'

The adult-child relation: a non-linear approach

The reflectively erudite anthropologist Veena Das, while introducing Misri's work, astutely observes: "Here the child is described in terms of the speech of society and perhaps needs a reverse description of society as it is encountered in the speech of the child" (Das 1985: 5). In a later article entitled 'Voices of children' (1989), Das takes on

the task to trace the nature of children's subjectivity and their interpretation of the world in both everyday as well as crisis settings. Like Misri, she also acknowledges that the cultural views on Indian childhood alternate between a practice of 'civilizational obsession' and a theory of individual mind/impressions. While the former can be traced to the 'life cycle rituals' aiding in the child's induction to the new life, the latter is signified in indigenous ideas like that of past-life and '*samskaras*' (or embodied tendencies) of a newborn/child. Das persuasively argues for taking a "bifocal view of the child - he is both the one who is spoken about and the one who speaks" (Das 1989: 264-65). She looks, accordingly, at the communication patterns in the familial setting, the rhymes and stories for children, children games and plays, and children expressions of trauma, in order to carve out the objective and subjective child in India.

Indeed, while talking about the communication patterns found in the families, Das demonstrates how the child occupies a central space in the family's everyday addresses of acknowledgement. Through both direct and indirect forms of address, children are exposed to attention and remarks of various kinds conveying a notion of self and the world. The child in return, as is held, acknowledges actively or passively (the latter, note, is not seen as lacking intentionality) these displays using them to conjure an understanding of the nature of the world: "Culture is not communicated to the child in any society as a command but is, rather, embedded in a series of different contexts. *It is not a single imperative voice that the child in Indian society hears but a multitude of voices*" (ibid.: 272-73, emphasis added). Das further looks at various lullabies, jingles, rhymes, and stories as forms of 'cultural artefact' created for children in Indian local culture. She identifies in them various tendencies, ranging from those which simply valorise and eulogise the child or those that introduce the indulgent world of kinship through to those that expose the larger forces of society and nature which have a claim on the child beyond the powers of their immediate family, and including those that mock and caricature the adult world. Das also points out that the models of children's world also sometimes enthrall the adult world, as in the case of the childhood stories of Hindu gods. Thus, as she claims explicitly: "The world of children and the world of adults meet on many points. They have a kind of floating relationship which cannot be described through analogy and polarity alone" (ibid.: 279).

Even more emphatically, moving on to the ‘domain of play’, Das attempts to see how in various dramas, children take on the roles of others around them enacting real-life situations of everyday mundane realities like kitchen scenes, weddings, and even of violence witnessed. Following G. H. Mead, the American progenitor of ‘symbolic interactionism’, she posits that such enactments give an opportunity to children to internalise other’s voices and views by taking up role-playing. In addition, these are also seen to allow children to transform the interpretation of reality through creative stances, and in a way transmuting the reality that they witness in the real world. Finally, Das looks at ‘children of crisis’ to examine children’s adaptation and accommodation of those extreme incidences in their everyday lives, while going on to conclude that children are constantly engaging in creating a world through their activities and interpretations, which (as is posited) possibly floats unobserved and imperceptible by adults. Das, however, quickly maintains that such sharp distinctions between children and adult worlds are considerably ‘softened’ when accessed through certain ‘special markers’ like mother-child relation, the family conversations about children, children’s play and childhood memories of critical moments of violence (ibid.: 291).

It is important to note that when Das explores aspects of the children’s world taking leads from the Indian cultural and indigenous modalities, she encounters an intermeshed reality which is experienced by both adult and child simultaneously, even though it is possible to reinterpret, reconstruct and transform these realities and experience them differently in different social realms as in case of distinct adult and children worlds. This intermeshing, proximity and interface between the adult and children worlds are not essentially based on power division, authority structures, and separations; neither is it linear in its power flow. In fact, quite at a remove from the Western rational-liberalist framework of authoritarian adults, subjugated children, and child empowerment movements, Das puts the adult-child world in a more complex *modus operandi* with multiple kinds of influences and impetus. It is worth paying attention to the fact that, in avoiding the Western framework, Das does not encounter the strict ‘familial body’ rendering of individual identity or translate into an absence of childhood culture theme. Rather, she is able to demonstrate a child, which is as much an object of value for the

society/family as it is an active constituting agent (the subjective child per se). I feel such a nuanced portrayal is possible because of the epistemological stand that Das takes of incorporating children's articulations and expressions in social representation and inquiry.

Adult-child relation: a shunning of power relations?

Equally, and on a different theoretical register, Meenakshi Thapan's (1991) ethnography serves as a very interesting site of analysis. Thapan explains that, while drawing on 'interactionism' and 'phenomenology', she oriented her study to explore the participants' views, interactions and interpretations of situations in order to reconstruct the everyday life of the school as an institution. This necessarily meant, for her, to cover the representations of the teachers, pupils and the (management) staff in depth (Thapan 1991: 227). It would not be an exaggeration to assert that Thapan was one of the earliest ethnographers to allow children an equal role as adults in the formulation of her narrative. She devoted elaborate descriptions of the 'pupil's subculture' by looking at children's relations with their peers, teachers, other staff and children's attitude towards school work, school ethos and their participation in various events. All the same, I would here like to bring to attention another 'factor', a system of thought really, which primarily leads Thapan to give a prominent space to children's experience and explore their subculture within the institution. It is the school's - and its founder, Jiddu Krishnamurti's - idea of 'learning' and learners' about which Thapan speaks at great length while covering Krishnamurti's educational thought. Broadly, according to this line of thought, learning and understanding imply a process of self-discovery, where life itself is the ground of education. For the mind to look, observe and learn, it has to be free of all traditions and authority (ibid.: 18-19). As is noted by Thapan, children were thus encouraged to fearlessly articulate their views and engage in dialogue on various issues. In addition, as is affirmed, Krishnamurti believed that school is a 'coming together' of a 'community' of people interested in this kind of education. A teacher thus also has to make these internal journeys seeking truth for oneself as much as the children.

Not surprisingly, therefore, having children as one of the significant categories of the ethnographic description came with a dual impetus for Thapan. Keeping in line with the

school's philosophy, Thapan sought to capture the dimensions of children's representation as one of the equals among other stakeholders or participants in the school's world as delivered from its 'inside', as it were. It is worth paying some attention to the fact that Thapan did not exclusively base her study on discovering and reconstructing the school from the perspective of the children per se. However, in the process of her narration, she does keep the descriptions of children and their shared reflections as a separate section, studying the children's world as a 'subculture' constituting the school culture as a whole. This is so because, being a modern education institution, the school (and also Thapan) cannot entirely abandon the idea of adult-child division adhering to the age-based universal order of childhood definition. However, it is important to note that this 'separation' is consciously not transformed into an authority and subjugation structure; rather, the worlds of teachers, management, and pupils are treated with a sense of simultaneity of acknowledged existence and subjectivity.

I would like to add that such an approach allows Thapan to reach out to various substantial aspects of the children's world, whether in terms of peer-interaction structures, their outlook on learning, future and growing up and their ownership of the school community and different tactics to move through it. This frees up the focus of the research from the outer relational aspects of children's life, and allowing for a closer gaze at children's multi-dimensional inner world.

More on adult-child relation: on the social construction of adult authority and children's contributions

"The children of Kasimpur shared with me their lives and worlds, and patiently and cheerfully entertained my interest and queries. The teachers and heads of the three schools gave me their time, and aided my stay and work in the school by being themselves", so goes Padma Sarangapani in her poignant work (Sarangapani 2003a: 9). Children find full expression in her ethnographic work, in the context of which she ventures to construct the meaning and reality of a government primary school and its processes from the 'common knowledge' of the community and participants. Following a 'constructivist' approach, she traces the contours of the everyday life of the school as visible in its daily routines, processes, and interactions; and, as such, the study is based

on direct observation, conversations, activities, and interpretations of school children. Even so, the book is the site of a struggle that she faces in recovering the nuances of children agency, on the one hand, and taking into account the adult authority and child compliance structure inherent to the modern school system, on the other hand. Sarangapani attempts to cull out the underlying principles of this structure and expose its 'ideological' supports. She finds operative a cultural distinction made between adult and child on the basis of 'work and play' and 'teacher and taught'. Indeed, according to her, both these cultural ideas confront one another in the Indian classroom creating a situation of struggle to uphold the 'adult authority and child compliance structure'.

More poignantly, Sarangapani looks closely at the 'teacher-taught' dyad and tries to recover its various multi-layered value moorings. She identifies a deep local cultural ethos of 'patron and protegee', 'parent-offspring', '*Guru Sishya*' (teacher and disciple), 'adult-child' and 'teacher as a patriot/martyr' playing an important role in nation-building, all of which are invoked in the school and classroom environment to confer the reverential and authoritarian value of a teacher in the classroom (Sarangapani 2003a: 108-117). The 'hierarchy' as framed is thus not 'automatic', but 'socially constructed' in nature. In bringing out the complex nature of this hierarchy, Sarangapani points out to the cultural frames of Kasimpur village where the school is seen as a 'doorway to growing up' and in the context of which the attributes of childhood like 'playfulness' are to be abandoned for 'purposive' designed task (ibid.: 74). Accordingly, as Sarangapani alleges, the image of a 'student' is riddled with an 'inherent duality': "The basic character and needs of a 'child' are believed to be contrary to that of a 'student'. ... So their (children) obedience is not complete and persuasion is also required to achieve compliance" (ibid.: 121). She thus strongly recommends the abandonment of a simplistic rationalist liberal interpretation of the 'teacher-taught' relation and urges attention upon a more indigenous value context for its interpretation.

In exploring the 'constructed' nature of 'adult-child dichotomy', therefore, she looks at the 'subjective child' whose sense of self gets mediated by the above mentioned cultural ideas and practices of modern schooling. The child internalises an image of 'knower', however, only in relation to the 'more knowledgeable others'; and consequently, as is

posited, children become aware of their subjective status as “children- who- are- not- yet- but- learning- to- be- adults”. Accordingly, as Sarangapani frames it, “Children are actively engaged in being and becoming children” (ibid.: 241), while further maintaining:

This rationality is deep-rooted and obtains from a framework that both precedes and is independent of the modern institutional structure of the school ... and they are the common inheritance of both the teachers and the students. Contrary to the romantic image of children being oppressed by authority and discipline, the students also actively participate in creating the reality in the school, in instituting and interpreting the power-knowledge regime’ (Sarangapani 2003b: 415).

To be sure, Sarangapani’s work gives us a glimpse of the immense pressure and constraints that the assumed framework of ‘adult authority versus child subjugation’ puts on our conceptualisation and theorising of practices of childhood in contemporary society. Paradoxically yet, the frame leaves only a limited room for assigning and observing children’s agency and realities even when the aim is explicitly to recover children’s discourse. Not surprisingly, towards the end of her investigation, she brings to the discussion the traditional model of ‘*Guru Sishya*’ (teacher and disciple) where the relation was not of singular authority and compliance, but is rather backed by a personal connection, trust and encouragement of ‘spirit of inquiry’. Sarangapani is categorical: “Alternative ways for adults and children to relate to each other and stories that assert the importance of independent thought and decision making in children are available in folklore and classic literature” (Sarangapani 2003a: 257). Besides, as a way of qualifying her claim, she refers to stories of the *Panchatantra* and to childhood practices of tribes to illustrate the involvement of the child in various family responsibilities. She also recalls the stories of ‘unconventional *sishya*’, where the child was allowed to transcend the authority structures and become authorities in their own right like that of Nachiketa, Ashtavakra, and Kartikeya (or, for that matter, the stories of Dhruva, Prahallada and Balamuni Shankaracharya). She explicitly points out that though children as a learner and younger members of the house had to practice obedience, discipline, and humility, yet they were encouraged to develop a spirit of inquiry, rationality, take responsibility and enhance their skill. She laments that the uncritical acceptance of “universal validity of liberal-humanist ‘truths’ on ideal childhood” erodes the cultural values of Indian childhood.

Adult and child relation: co-existing frames

Teresa Robinson (2014), whose work is placed in a more contemporary time and interested to map the contours of Indian youth and 'self-development', explicitly avers that she did not have a second thought before directly involving youth and their own understanding of personal and emotional space vis-à-vis the family. Indeed, in her engagement with middle-class Pune, Robinson found herself in a field setting where market choices, global exchange of ideas, and liberal-humanist universal order of education had already seeped into the fabric of the social lives of the people. In fact, the deeply Western modern ideas of individual choices and child rights had even entered into colloquial references. Expectedly, Robinson thus encounters a discernible youth subculture, as separate from the adult world, which she characterizes as the 'Café culture'. Mostly college students, these youth, as is represented, expressed their need for and asserted their autonomy of choice and independence from parental ruling, even a separate space away from the family environment, in many different ways. Robinson lucidly tracks this subculture in 'moralities of conviviality' (as obtaining within the family, among neighbours, and within friend circles) and in choices of education and marriage among the youth.

Having explored the growing space of youth as a 'subculture' away from parental and familial intimacy, Robinson then proceeds to look at the young people's beliefs and behaviour with regard to the space of the family. In this context, she immediately realises the incidental status of the adult-child separation framework and discern an alternative form of adult-child coexistence framework which could be defined by principles of complementary acceptance. Indeed, as she digs deeper into the dimensions of the latter, she finds that despite the need for separate space and association circles, the youth continued to privilege the relationships of 'family ties' and 'old friendships', in the midst of which they did not see themselves as losing their self and volition. Robinson accordingly concludes:

Hence individual autonomy was valued higher and supported more than before in India, but was not regarded as the most important value. ... Individual autonomy remained encompassed by and subordinated to the idea of a highly socially connected self, who happily reached a joint decision with the family. ... A single person in Pune formed a notion of the self that was not autonomous or

distinct from, or against, the wills of others, custom, tradition, and religion, which is the expectation in 'the west'. ... They realized themselves not only by reinforcing or subverting, but also by performing, inhabiting, experiencing, aspiring to, and reaching for social roles and expectations (Robinson 2014: 260-61)

Robinson, clearly, prioritises the 'substantial' aspects of youth life, elaborating in particular the beliefs, sentiments, practices, and performances of the youth from a simultaneous lens of the 'global' and 'local' and the 'familial' and the 'individual'. This allows her to look at the dynamics of the youth world and the presence of multiple frames within it. In fact, it is in her attempt to describe the local cultural modalities which she encounters that she uses the concepts of 'conviviality' and 'moral aesthetics' as articulated by (or within) middle-class domestic lives, covering at once the emotional and practical values underlying the co-existence of the dual order - the shared and the individual - in a 'young Puneite life'. I want to draw particular attention to this recognition that Robinson makes of a co-existence of the shared and individual identity as reflected in the 'separate autonomous space' that 'young Puneite' demand and the familial attachment that they displayed in describing their life world. Robinson, to some extent, tries to explain these from a perspective of social change, a temporal cusp where modernity meets the traditional. However, substantiating from the reflections of the youth, she hints at a deeper relational order where the individual and collective are complementary and not exclusive of one another. The acceptance of the collective, as the study avers as a whole, is volitional and not imposed.

In Retrospect and Prospect: Children in Our Study and the Being-Together of Adult-Child Relations

Through the extended review of childhood studies and Indian childhood in particular, I have tried to look at the problems in the adult-child dichotomy framework which explicitly fails to explain the social reality of Indian childhood. I further critically analysed the unsuitability of a 'familial body' framework which totally negates the possibility of individual identity. More particularly, with the help of particular studies on children's subjectivity in Indian childhood studies, I tried to show that the dominant

frames are not only constructed and mediated by restrictive conceptual manoeuvres; they are also deeply constraining for more robust descriptions of the self of childhood and the child in India. Like in the context of Robinson (2014), my field too presented a situation where both the modern adult-child separation and traditional familial attachments are prominent. Like Robinson, besides, within the contours of my own study, I am interested to explore the ‘volitional’ nature of family ownership by the individual (children, of my instance). Going further, I am also interested to examine the various ways in which the family accommodates and allows for the individual assertions in the context primarily of children’s lives. In the context of these urgencies (or admissions, as it were), a framework of ‘being-together’ suggests itself, where as much as the individual seeks to identify with the familial, the ‘authorities’ in the very range of the social (including the family) seek to formulate and build the individual abilities and capabilities. This, I feel, is deeply ingrained in the Indian pedagogic as well as socialisation spirit as reflected in the old Upanishadic mantra, which was to be recited by the ‘giver and receiver’ of knowledge together, ‘*Om saha navavatu, sahana bhunaktu, saha viryamkaravavahai*’ (Let the divine protect us, let us be together. Let us develop our ability together). But, of course, we need a complementary aesthetic of reading and writing to contemporize this very modality of ‘being-together’, lest it translate into a shaky and questionable form of nativism or even a flaky form of nostalgia for the old, the passing and the gone. In the context of my own work on and off the world of children, I feel the need and the urgency to open up the frames of adult-child relations and the multiple tonalities of authority and individuality underpinning the same.

Keying into children’s own account(s) and broad chapter sequence

Looking at the world from the children’s eyes remains the mainstay of my study, as indeed forms the basis of my quest. It is indeed ironic that children have had to wait so long to be able to tell what they feel about being children (or, for that matter, what they think about themselves). Even as the children now find their say, it is mostly seen as supplementary to the adult voice. The works that we reviewed in the foregoing pages are all constantly looking at social mediations and the conditioning of the child in developing a tendency of being in the family and collective action (with of course a few rare exceptions). Dorothy Moss has put it aptly in the title of her paper ‘How Do Children

Practice Childhood?’ (Moss 2010) and, in keeping with this emphasis, I would like to explore children’s experiences and reflections on their own family life so as to reconstruct the ‘social reality’ of family and childhood within it, while also optimising on the methodological and conceptual significances that such an endeavour might have to offer. In doing so, I hope to understand the ‘ownership’ and/or rejection of the collective sentiments, values and cultural ideas around issues concerning their day-to-day lives as embodied by children in the context of their family life. Accordingly our thesis title: *‘The World at Home: Exploring Children’s Lives in an Odisha Neighbourhood’*. We do, however, transpose the terms of a specific framework working off the idea of ‘moral sentiments’, which we shall detail in Ch.4 of our study, having traversed the imperatives of studying children and childhood research as a whole (both in India and elsewhere) in our first chapter (Ch.1) and encountering some critical issues of method, especially in relation to ethnography with children in Ch.2.

Indeed, by way of the overall structure of the thesis, I have divided it into **Three** parts: **Part One** subsuming Chs.1-3, and a brief conceptual interlude forming the basis of **Part Two** where Ch.4 invokes the concept and framework of ‘moral sentiments’. We move then to **Part Three** which works its way through Chs.5-7, detailing aspects of the ‘world at home’ as duly informed by our framework of ‘moral sentiments’ and as presented by the children themselves. An extended concluding chapter (Ch.8) follows on the basis of this ordering. In more enumerative terms, yet, the research context of our narration will hopefully find cogent articulation in the two preliminary chapters (**Chs.1-2**). The substantive orders of our narration proceeds through **Chapters 3-7**, combining together a detailed introduction to the neighbourhood studied and its residents and children (**Ch.3**), proceeding to an outline of our theoretical framework informing the various orders of our description (**Ch.4**), and then going on to unravel (through **Chs.5-7**) the grid of our narration through children’s lives and the moral worlds informing them. The focus, through the latter three chapters, is the kinds of ‘moral sentiments’ and significance which children attribute to various actions and events that happen in and around their family lives.

More specifically, **Ch.5** addresses the meanings and grounds of ‘family feelings’ and belongingness as professed by the children, as also the place of their own needs and desires in this moral sentimental context. **Ch.6** engages the children’s perspective on morality in the family space and the sense of responsibility shared and demonstrated by them; while **Ch.7** goes on to cover the moral dimensions of children’s understanding of their family situation and their future. The final chapter, that is, **Ch.8**, broadly recapitulates the grounds of this investigation, while also striving to incorporate a critical disposition towards the concept of ‘socialization’ as a structure of explanation for the specificities of ‘the world at home’ as rendered through children, which had formed the bulk of the narration in our work as a whole. The particular chapter sequence, I need reiterate, has been arrived at both to capture the specific challenges of keying into children’s own account(s) as well as to deliver into the very density and fecundity of the children’s descriptions as a form of first-order reality – indeed, the very fabric of children’s lives that our study has set out to explore.

Along this course, hopefully, we would have gone beyond the point anchoring parts of this our introductory chapter, namely, that ‘childhood’ has been conceptually used more to understand cultural processes, social structures and community character at large and not necessarily ‘children’ per se. Hopefully, again, through the course of the study and the specific orders of its narration, we would have concretized the oscillation in conceptualizations of child and childhood in India between ‘adult-child separation’ (as dictated by the notion of modern individuality along the lines of ‘autonomy’ versus ‘subordination’) and ‘adult-child proximity’ (as defined by the Indian ‘relational self’), which as we documented in the foregoing pages requires critical re-positioning. As we reiterated through the present chapter, there is a need to open up and examine the box of the ‘familial body’ – and do so, as we do, through children’s own account(s) and ‘first person’ representations of the children in the homes studied. The adult-child simultaneity frame, as forwarded both by our study as a medium and the study of children’s family life that it encapsulates as an outcome, may require our fuller terms of engagement, after all.

Chapter 2



Arguing Method: Doing an Ethnography with Children

Ethnography always begins in the midst of social life, and so it is with our writing ... (Biehl 2014: 101).

I could have named this chapter ‘Ethnographic Dilemmas’, by way of a methodological extension from the considerations forwarded in Ch.1, but I chose to frame it with the above title. That is because some of the dilemmas underscored here stemmed from my own experience of the field and the accompanying fieldwork which lasted over two years in an urban neighbourhood in Odisha (a further detailed narration of our field and the fieldwork ensues in the next chapter). On a more substantial register, however, the present chapter also addresses determinate questions of method and ethnography specifically with reference to children. My professors’ once alerted me that ‘mere practicalities of the field may not necessarily qualify as methodological issues unless they lead to strategic changes or research insights’. I would like to add here that it was not only myself, but my field people too who were experiencing my research in a similar fashion: an admixture of amusement, surprise and disbelief. These mundane experiences are necessarily indicative of the nature of the ‘field’ in social science research and the need for corresponding field workers’ attitudes.

‘*What is (my) research data?*’ - During my early phases of fieldwork, people in my field and me often entered into casual chats over this question. If I took their permission to jot their points down, they felt intrigued; some would even chuckle and state in a self-deprecating tone that I thought those things important at all. For example, when the mothers of children who I intended to study saw me writing down what they are saying, they would ask with genuine surprise, “You need these! Really?” (*Aesabu darkar! Satare?*). Once a father looked at my copy, and asked forcefully: ‘Which part is data?’ And, again, on a festival day, when I sat taking notes in a temple premises to get a sense

of the public celebrations, one of the elderly men also sat there to sing *bhajans* (devotional songs). Before leaving, he called out to me, and sympathetically advised that I need not laboriously write down his songs as he could just handover his *bhajan* book to me. The elderly person was under the impression that I had been writing down his songs all the time.

My field subjects were used to seeing statistics as data or at best a questionnaire that they often filled in for various surveys. To have someone hanging around really interested in knowing about their day-to-day activities was certainly not ‘serious research’ for them. Neither had I, at that time, reached the analytical alacrity required to point out which cut piece of their life was my data and why it formed an important dimension compared to everything else they wanted to share. They remained intrigued as much as me. Them and me, walked along figuring out the lineaments of my work, and within it making a heuristic attempt to figure out the world of ‘qualitative research’, they through me and me through them. I reckon, in the early days, the significance of any single meeting or a conversation that I had was never fully realized in our minds, by either party at that moment; as is the nature of most such ‘research’ encounters. More than comprehension of causality between events, it was a deliberate sense of ‘belief, hope and purpose’ (*Biswas, asha o udeshya*) as attributed by my field subjects to these events that gave this fieldwork and the accompanying ethnography its currency.

As my next chapter (Ch.3) will further disclose, what enabled the fieldwork was not only their trust and patience with me (opening up their lives to me in many ways) but also their empathy towards my ordeals and sincere wishes for the success of this work (enabling me to keep going in the face of uncertainties). I am infinitely grateful to them for much more than what I present here, in this thesis and in the tangled orders of its narration. My effort in the present chapter is to take up some crucial methodological issues involved in doing research with children (and, in that sense, carries forward the concerns expressed in our opening chapter). In constructing meaning and sharing (or occupying) the expansive spaces of interpretation, what might the heuristic relations look like for a field-worker with the ‘children’ of her field? This has remained one of the most uncomfortable and by now unavoidably complicated questions in the legacy of

childhood research as a whole; and I, as ethnographer, have been forced to inherit and confront it at every stage of my research. Robert A. LeVine alerts that “anthropologists have remained partly dependent on other disciplines, especially psychology, for assumptions on how children experience their environment and that with the rapid turnover in developmental theories from behaviourist, cognitive and social-cognitive orientations, this has left ethnographers in a quandary” (LeVine 2007: 249-50).

In the first section of the present chapter, I propose to further discuss how the chequered past of conceptual and theoretical debate on childhood has affected the inclusion of the ‘empirical child’ in childhood research and the associated issues in the use of methods. Following this, through a sequence of sections and alongside a personalised order of rendering, we wade through the methodological challenges of doing ethnography with children. The orders of our investigation into children’s worlds in their home setting will also find articulation here, although a fuller recounting of the neighbourhood and its children and families will be deferred to our next chapter (that is, Ch.3).

Children as Subjects: Further Measures of Childhood Research

Early morning. Winter-break. The three year old sat shuffling TV channels, sipping milk from a sipping cup. She stopped at a scene. It is from a Hindi film, *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (a blockbuster Hindu film). In the scene, both the heroine and hero, facing each other, were having a dialogue with a beautiful chandelier hanging between them, their face profiles beautifully captured in a close-up. I knew that the little girl liked the famous actress and I assumed that this was the reason why she was intently watching the scene, until she spoke -

Girl: I think they will fall in love (she puts her hand in front of her mouth as if stifling a giggle).

Me: (more surprised with her expression than the question) What do you mean?

Girl: (pointing a finger at the T.V) Look at them.

Me: What?

Girl: (now upset that I did not get what she was pointing at) No!

Me: (imitating an exciting tone to capture her interest) No, tell me! How did you know what will happen?

Girl: They fall in love when they look at each other like that.

Me: You saw that on TV?

Girl: Arrgh! (slumps back, maybe because I was disturbing her).

Me: Sorry. It is so interesting you know. Does that happen in other movies too?
Tell me!

Girl: (with an angry face pointing her palm at the TV) Yeah! You have to watch.

Note: this was a conversation that I had outside the active phases of my fieldwork. As I recall and re-inscribe this conversation, the words of the British sociologist Emma Uprichard ring in my ears: "... whether or not, children's experiences differ from those of adults, because children are situated in the world, they also know about the world" (Uprichard 2009: 9).

Inhibitions in the 'traditional' paradigm

As we indicated in our very first chapter, discourses around childhood studies in the context of the social sciences have until recently remained strongly tied up with the former's motivated origins. The two major stimuli behind these discourses were, firstly, that the child should be brought up to become a better social being and, secondly, that the situation around the child should be bettered to provide for a worthy life. The former concern was mostly dealt with by psychologists and educationists, and the latter was handled through policy and welfare measures. These so-called 'bettering measures', however, were not innocent or natural processes; they were value-loaded and culturally embedded processes. Again, as already emphasized in the opening chapter, very often the understanding of a 'better childhood' was based on ideals that suited the adult society more than the children themselves. This was so practiced because children were seen as innocent, vulnerable individuals dependent on adult attention for their survival. Evidently, children were seen as underprepared and incapable of making their own decisions, evaluations, and opinions about society and its issues. These assumptions have obviously had great methodological implications in conducting research on children.

For one, the child itself who is in a stage of development was not seen as a being capable of sensible dialogue; in fact, the speech of a child was not seen as reliable (see Punch 2002). Information on children and their experiences were mostly accessed through other adult family members, child caregivers, teachers, etc. The research was mostly

conducted to benefit parents, caregivers and policymakers; and, more than often, the research enterprise was modelled to find out the childhood problems or developmental needs. Another reason, I would like to mention, for the reluctance to access children's responses directly in the form of conversation and dialogical processes was the researcher-child power hierarchy (see Kellet 2010: 83-88). It was believed that the researcher, being an adult and an authority figure, would impact a child's responses; it could either inhibit the child from speaking out openly or may lead to the child feeling compelled to oblige despite his or her unwillingness to respond. Lastly, but not the least, the natural factor of 'age' was seen as an inevitable structural gap between the adult and child that inhibits building rapport and empathy (see Mahon *et al.* 1996: 148-52).

Inhibitions in the 'new' paradigm

It is important to stress that even in the context of the 'new' paradigm of childhood studies – and, specifically in the wake of the 'interpretative' school of childhood studies and the political stress on 'children voice' - the above methodological dilemma has remained unresolved. The 'new' paradigm even brought forth another range of problems. Indeed, given that the acknowledgment of childhood participation first came in the context of policy and welfare programs with an intention to 'empower' the child, it was thought necessary that children actively participated in the process of research. "Researchers should also be for children; in the end, the justification for the research - for 'collecting the data' is to help make the child heard" (Hood, Kelly and Mayall 1996: 119). This necessarily implied that children should properly understand the questions, the context and the aims of the research to be able to keep their 'opinion'. There were even calls for taking children on board in the very design of the research and its questions so as to not impose adult perspectives on the problem and its bearings. This, however, entailed very misleading assumptions and limited access to children's experience of the issues in focus or of the social order in general (see Uprichard 2009). In addition, this also leads to an imagination of childhood as a problem-loaded space. One specific ethical concern here that researchers faced had to do with whether it was correct to expose the child, through questions and pointed probing, to realities that they might not be aware of yet (and especially about unpleasant matters, such as tensions in parent's relations, domestic abuse and other forms of family crisis) [see Mahon *et al.* 1996]. Thus it was

not uncommon to find researchers asking children to write about imaginary family and future stories, make pictorial representations etc. to glean such limited themes as the patterns of gender roles, hierarchies and the like, as a substitute for directly asking about immediate family situations and circumstances.

Ironically, in the broad folds of childhood research per se, 'participation' has implied a prior devising of 'participatory techniques and tools' by adult researchers for children, instead of children leading the direction of the conversation. Participation tools and techniques were often accompanied with strict instructions on how to participate. Children's views were further accessed through 'practical activities' like drawings, mappings, story or diary writings, expansion of vignettes, photography, the child-led tours or using multiple tools called the 'mosaic approach' (see Clark and Moss 2001). These methods were also adopted following its popular use in child therapies, and were wholly seen as 'child-friendly', 'fun' modes of communication (see Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; also Punch 2002). Such an orientation, on the one hand, necessarily narrowed down and dictated modes of children's action, expressions and interpretations about life situations; and, on the other hand, gave a predetermined essence to the topic of research. Thus we can say that this strategy has in a way failed the initial intention of providing children with the freedom of speech and representation. By way of criticism and as part of an alternative method, researchers have called for a more open-ended and holistic approach of exploring children's lives that would allow capturing the latter in activities that unfold in a more natural setting, covering as well the unexpected turns and responses in the flow of situations, and beyond merely feeling heard or registering children's opinions. Graham and Fitzgerald (2010), who believe in pursuing childhood research with an aim to strengthen advocacy, call our attention to viewing children's conversations as 'dialogues' and not merely as 'speech'. As they write, "we interpret conversation to be dialogic in nature as it implies that understanding is not simply reached by reproducing our conversation, partner's intent or meaning, but rather on producing shared mutual meanings" (Graham and Fitzgerald 2010: 351). Understandably, therefore, ethnography, ethnomethodology, and multimode approaches are being increasingly considered as suitable methods for accessing children's lives. Especially in sociology, the scope of study has often extended to the realms of a larger

collective and social order. This has necessarily involved, at least for me and the contours of my study, the equally intimidating challenge of capturing the phenomena of group life, the shifting contours of sociability and social relationality, the dimensions of ‘collective’ ownerships and the fertility of dialogical exchanges that moved seemingly beyond the limits of directed modes of children’s expressions and lives.

The Turn to Ethnography: A Personal Crossing

Ethnography as a method has been hailed right from the beginning of the ‘new’ paradigm of childhood studies, so much so that James and Prout (2005 [1997]) singled it out as one of the central tenets of their famous ‘emergent paradigm’ for researching children. They have affirmed: “Ethnography is particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. It allows children a more direct voice and participation of sociological data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research” (James and Prout 2005 [1997]: 8). Further, as part of the ‘emergent paradigm’, the poststructuralist view of ‘self’ as an ever-changing entity embedded in the context of social relations necessitates us to be attentive to both the discursive as well as the non-discursive aspects of social occurrences. Indeed, both the ‘speech’ and the ‘act’ and the ensuing situations yield complementing meanings that make the interpretation of the field and the forms of life confronted thereon all the more richer and more compelling (see Das 2007: esp. Ch.1). It has been more specifically observed that “ethnographic childhood research, especially ethnomethodological approaches which posit that all actions make some sense or are rational in their own way, has a lot to offer in thinking about and overcoming these challenges” (Warming 2011: 40). Ethnography then emerges as the most suitable choice of method in contemporary childhood research. In studying children, in fact, this mode proves especially compatible since it allows not only to capture what children say but also what children do and the situation within which they act.

Of research becoming an ethnography

Our opening chapter has broadly recounted the reasons why, on a personal register, one was always interested in studying children. Importantly, however, when I started my research, these were not the reasons why I ended up doing ethnography. I was an ardent

supporter of trusting children's voice, and I had no qualms in settling for a research based out of a series of interviews with children. All the same, the factor that led me to ethnography was my intense feeling of unfamiliarity at various levels to the extent of feeling lost in the field when I entered it as constitutive part of the present research. Firstly, the neighbourhood setting of my research was huge and diverse, the specific details of which we shall recount in Ch.3. As will become evident in course, making sense of its many dimensions and its seemingly unconnected and fragmented life took me a long time; apart from the sheer effort involved in getting people to become familiar with my work. Secondly, the neighbourhood was too formal, perfunctory and highly guarded in its privacy and forms of community life. In fact, as our Ch.3 will more fully explicate, I did not expect to see this in a city which was certainly not a metropolis, and at least not in a neighbourhood that was established 30 years back with many of the early families continuing to inhabit the same space till today. Thirdly, a sense of loss was most acutely felt in seeking the invisible children of the neighbourhood, a point we shall again return to in the later chapter. As we will harp, children were quarantined from all strangers, not quite only because of a fear of trafficking, kidnapping, physical abuse, drugs, etc. that was being brought home to parents through daily news, but also because of the danger of 'bad influence'. Families were extremely conscious about what their children were doing, to whom they were talking and what they were getting to know. Especially with the heavy presence of social and popular media, parents almost lived in a sense of panic of losing control of the child and losing him/her to bad habits. Inevitably, my access to children – whether ethnographic or otherwise - depended on developing high levels of trust with the families. In fact, the importance of trust and privacy was so high in the neighbourhood that initially I had to wait for families who were getting to know me to invite me to study their children instead of me extending a proposal to study their children.

All these situations and circumstances went towards shaping my research into (an) ethnography. In this connection, I would like to call attention to an additional factor overseeing my turn to ethnography. Indeed, consistent with what James and Prout (2005 [1997]) had called the 'emergent paradigm', I was determined to build my study around what the children considered as important or what appeared and occurred most

prominently in their engagements of daily life. Surely enough, for this (and as our opening chapter has further demonstrated) I needed to have some insight into the children's world. To be sure, the children's world as I entered appeared different and new in many ways. Not only it had been a long time since I had been a child, it was also that the designs of childhood seemed to have changed greatly and continued to do so at a higher pace. It has taken me some time to figure out and attune to the changed schooling patterns, books, parent-child relations and attitudes, new friendship ethos, video games, toys, new animation series and so on. This too involved spending a good deal of time in just hanging about and having casual conversations with children before venturing into matters more serious and constitutive of their lives. Needless to say, and our chapters will disclose this more fully, this left an impression on me of the life beyond (or behind) matters of speech. As my professors' repeatedly emphasized, 'there is a whole life passing by as you are talking, what about that?' Inevitably, in paying attention to the different expressions of my field and its various subjects, my study took the form of ethnography, nevertheless with the children and their lives as the centre of observation and description.

Further iterations of method and ethnography: the upper-hand strife and beyond

Even as our third chapter will give a fuller description of our field and our fieldwork, I would like to remain here with our question of doing ethnography with children, while inhabiting this ground on a personal albeit methodologically grained register. Allow me to reflect on my experience in conducting habit-building sessions in a local school with pre-primary and primary children in the neighbourhood, so as to give an indicative picture of the dynamics involved in relating to children in an ethnographic mould.

It was during my initial days in the field. I was still exploring the possibilities of different sites in the neighbourhood where I could access children and their informal groupings like in dance classes, schools, tuition classes etc. During this time, a principal of a low-cost private school in the neighbourhood requested me to carry out habit-building sessions with a few children who needed extra attention. It was summer break, but many students continued to come to the school for extra-summer classes. I agreed to give a week's time and designed the required sessions. The principal had fixed two teachers to

monitor the children during the sessions. On the second day, the teachers excused themselves saying that they had other commitments to attend. I had to take the sessions on my own. The teachers being absent, the classroom transformed into a playground. Children made it clear that it was summer-break and that they wanted free play. The entire class was in a commotion and some children started acting violently; a few broke into fights hitting out at each other. Two of them even wandered out of the class. I had to immediately assume a strict stand, acquire the style of their teachers, and threaten to call the principal. That very day too, I stayed back to meet their parents in the presence of the children. Though I did not mention about the ruckus, I inquired about each child in detail and explained to parents about what I intended to do. The sight of me talking in equal terms freely with parents and later on with teachers made the children feel that I could influence people who have power over them. On the other hand, I learnt that most of the children were from 'disturbed' families and I had to change my plans accordingly.

The next evening, I sat with the children conferring about what and how they wanted to have the sessions. In doing so I made it clear that I had views and ideas that they were compelled to listen as much as they were bound to listen to each other. My power on the children still remained in that I was the one who was introducing what could be talked and discussed and what were matters that could not be part of the discussion (for example, I had to categorically rule out the suggestion of going for a picnic). The situation was getting better for me, I thought. Children now paid attention to what I was saying and waited for their turn to speak; and if one of them cut in on the conversations, then the other children reminded the child not to. But, crucially enough, as studies have pointed out, children know the difference between 'having a say' and 'having their way' (Graham and Fitzgerald 2010: 347). In fact, during the practical and group activity sessions, children asserted their freedom of 'having their way'; and this was partly because activity-based sessions were not common in their school and did not represent a classroom space for the children requiring typical discipline. Children continued to loiter, delay, tease each other, divert attention, and venture differing suggestions, even sometimes simply choosing not to participate at all. It took some time for children to see a pattern internal to the rhythms of the activities, and fall in line. But still, there was not

a single activity that I could carry out the way I would have liked or to what they (children) had initially agreed upon.

I would like to use the above reflection as symbolic of the complexity of my relationship with children in my field, even as I moved beyond the school context and went on to study them in their home setting. The point I want to make is that once we want to move away from the conventionally defined power positions and ask children to have a say as well as take initiatives in the conversations and activities, then the borders and demarcations of authority and power-play becomes extremely complicated to pinpoint. I do not in any manner want to say that I had no freedom and was completely at the mercy and goodwill of children. But the other way round was not true either. My ethnographic relationship with children in the field depended on many factors in different situations.

Doubtless, researchers have debated about different strategies and positions that an adult researcher can adapt to gain access to children's worlds. A popular strategy on this front has been the 'least adult role', where an ethnographer abdicates his/her adult authority and privileges and lets the children give and decide the ethnographer's space and role. The researcher is expected to participate in the activities of children and share a 'sociological empathy' in understanding children's actions and reactions (see Warming 2011; also Corsaro 1985). Yet some others consider this as an illusion that might as well confuse children in what to expect and how to behave with the researcher; and accordingly they advise for the role of 'detached observer' or 'the other adult' (see Warming 2011: 5). However, I experienced that the position of an adult was ever-shifting and not fixed, varying from occasion to occasion. In fact, my own image as an adult remained compromised and unsettled for many reasons. Firstly, I had no legitimate authority over children and they were not obliged to respond to me. I was not their parent, relative, family friend, neighbour, teacher, tuition master or any government authority. In addition, I was an outsider and yet I was getting too involved in their family lives (the latter, of course, took time, as my later chapter will further disclose). Besides, the children knew that I was going to be there only for a few months at a stretch. Indeed, during one of the conversations around the topic of the family with a child, the child's parents were amused to see how the child prioritized happiness, mutuality, lively

exchanges and belongingness over kinship or other conventional social bonds in defining relationships. The child's parent out of curiosity asked him to place me in his circle of relationships. The child, impish as ever, replied: "Well, she was a neighbour and now she is becoming a cousin" (given that I was spending a lot of time with the family and getting involved in their day-to-day lives). The child found it hard to place me up in their conventional social relation schema.

Being adult-but-junior and 'didi': on ethnographer positionality

In his phenomenal work, 'We're Friends, Right?', William Corsaro deals with the question "But how does a grown man go about being accepted into children's worlds?" (Corsaro 2003: 8). In answering this question, he talks about his fieldwork experiences with school children in North America and Italy, and specifically speaks about his being perceived as "A Big Kid" (ibid.) and "An Incompetent Adult" (ibid.: 15). Doubtless, I too had to face the same question in my fieldwork and find my own answers. There were some other aspects about me as resident ethnographer that created some confusion for the children. I was once employed, but now I was studying again (even though I did not attend classes) and I lived away in some hostel with other students. A little girl once asked me quite seriously: "So what exactly are you doing? You are a parent (meaning adult) and you are still studying. Are you on holiday?" The way parents dealt with me also affected my image with the children remarkably. On the one hand, parents were very protective, affectionate and attentive to me as someone they have to take responsibility and care for. They often enquired after my parents, studies, and health. On the other hand, parents, mostly mothers, spent long hours sharing their ordeals with me seeking consolations as a contemporary. Thus, in this light, children looked at me as an adult, and yet at the same time a junior person. Interestingly, another reason for seeing me as less than a fully responsible adult was my complete lack of house management skills. Both the elder and younger children remained highly surprised that I did not know or care to learn how to cook and other housekeeping skills. Children were also much more expressive in their surprise that I never showed any interest or worry over my marriage. One boy even emphatically enquired, "Are you going to remain a girl child (*jhia pilla*) always?"

More than once children sought my help in their science and literature projects and I may admit that some of the high school projects proved tough for me. For instance, building a small battery-driven robot following instructions from a manual, reading Shakespeare in original and helping the child to understand the phrases in the same manner that the school had dictated it out, each of these tasks that took a long time and where both the child and I struggled. My difficulties with them made me look like a person without the required subject authority. To add to this, some of my questions more than once appeared naive to children. For example, when I asked a boy what exactly he meant by '*shararati*' (being naughty), he looked back with utter surprise and exclaimed, "You are such a grown-up person, don't you know anything!". On another occasion, this boy further teased me, "Is there anything in your head or not?", for which he promptly got scolded by his parents. Clearly, the kind of questions I asked and the kind of information I was seeking also raised doubt in children's minds regarding its value as something serious enough for adults. A boy, once talking to me about his aspirations to become a scientist as that would allow him to discover something good which could be used to help the world, suddenly turned at me and declared that I should have become a scientist instead of doing sociology. I explained to him that I was also doing research and that my study might come in help too. To this, he blurted out, "But these are all obvious questions. Anybody can answer them. Everybody knows this. What is new in it?"

Lastly, my docile young lady self-image, which was expected of me in my fieldwork as a kind of moral position, also contributed to what children thought I was capable of knowing or not. A high school boy who was once telling me about his school and started talking about love affairs between students, told me emphatically, "Schools in your days were very different, you don't know about all these things, it has changed. All those things cannot be said". Clearly, children faced some problems in assigning me a clear position in their social order. However, there were a few things about my life that conveyed my image as an independent woman to children. I travelled alone, I did my own shopping and banking and other duties on my own. In addition, there was another factor that made the children distinguish me separately from their parents. I made no attempt to share our discussions, especially those that the children would not like to, with parents and others. In this sense gradually, children saw me as a friendly elder, the *Didi*

who understood and empathized with their position and status. But, of course, on occasions when parents did ask me about the children, I made sure that I did not lie, because I knew that the children were already talking a lot about what we did or spoke, excitedly so, with parents, siblings and friends too. Such situations, however, were not very easy to handle.

I fitted into the Hindi nomenclature '*Didi*' perfectly. A '*didi*' simply means the elder sister, although in its regular usage it is extended to non-kin relations to mean an elder female who is sister-like, invoking respect, dependability and to whom one may approach for help or suggestion. The term necessarily signifies a sense of informality and geniality. It is not uncommon these days to hear the many women volunteers and government workers who are engaged in community mobilisation, face-to-face engagements with the public being called '*Didi*' or '*Bhauni*' (sister); as, for instance, Asha *didi* in the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) program, Doctor *didi*, Teacher *didi* etc. In the field I was introduced to the children as '*Didi*' and that is what the children called me, albeit sometimes with the Odia variation *Awppa* and *Nani*, but mostly '*Didi*'. (*Didi* as a term has been catching up in Odisha exactly like the English word 'Papa' for father, and both are seen as something modern compared to their Odia versions). This, one might say, best defined my position in the field.

Being typically 'adult': more on ethnographer positionality

A challenge for any child ethnographer is not to place oneself as an extra-lever of adult authority. Indeed, I was extra cautious of not presenting myself as an alternative to parents' authority even in the slightest of manner and hardly took a stand differing from parents in front of their children. Children thus often saw me as a person without a stand, or as one who submitted to their parental authority. A parent's rapport was extremely important to me. In addition, I did not want parents to get any more guarded because of my presence and start behaving with children as they did in the presence of other visitors or outsiders. As already mentioned, parents especially mothers opened up a lot to me. They seemed to appreciate the fact that though I had travelled and worked outside, I showed care in respecting their homely ways. Mothers spent a long time talking to me about their life and difficulties. This distanced me from the children in some ways. They

(children) perceived me initially as an ally of their parents. I had to compensate and dilute this perception by feigning ignorance about worldly matters and also by admitting to my own parents' authority over me.

All the same, there were a few occasions when I did consciously or unconsciously assume adult roles. Mostly when I found children 'misbehaving' or hassling parents in my presence, I found it hard to hold my tongue back. For example, when it seemed to me that one of my child informants – a young boy of class 2- was misbehaving with his mother, I chided him about his behaviour, and reminded him of certain opinions 'on being good' that he had shared with me on another occasion. The boy was quick to apologise. His mother then promptly took me to the side and exclaimed, "You should come more often and discipline him a bit". It was at that point I realized that I had probably acted like a 'typical adult'. One must admit there were more occasions where I found myself giving moral sermons to children on not telling lies, not being irresponsible with money and not being disobliged with parents.

Significantly, yet, there were also times when I was expected to take up 'adult' roles by others. Initially, parents mostly allowed me to have access to their children because they thought I would be a 'good influence' on the child. I was expected to assist in studies and help them improve their standards. One parent told me about their son's failing grades in exams and asked me to find out exactly what was the problem. In almost all the houses, parents would similarly ask me about my views on their child's competence and grasp over his/her subjects as also mannerism. They shared their anxiety about the child's future, happiness, and his/her attitudes and habits and asked for my suggestions. Many times, yet, my analysis of the situation differed from the parents. I thus learnt to be very patient and more observant before expressing my views. I found that I knew the child only partially, while parents operated from a much more holistic understanding of the child's personality (although, of course, each home had a different approach towards this).

Conversational Ethnography and Children's Worlds: Further Negotiations

“Participating in children’s activities and informal talks are said to be more fruitful than formal interviews and to yield a lot of information about their life worlds” (Notermans 2008: 363). The struggle for clarity, to relate to what exactly either children or their observer (whether participant or non-participant) meant from a statement, an action or a reaction, is real and undergirds most ethnography; and, to be sure, it existed between us (the children and I as researcher) throughout the ethnography that we were both seeking and trying to put together. The children were equally intrigued in figuring out my life as much I was in figuring out theirs’. The former knew I was doing research on them and wanted to write a ‘thesis’ on their world and the form of their lives. Around the juncture of my fieldwork when I was due to commence my intensive work with children, I fell ill. Understandably, people who had become friendly started visiting me to inquire after my health. One such visit was by a mother and a child (who was studying in the 3rd standard). The child wanted to have a tour of my room, and so I led him. He saw my laptop and wished to play games. I told him that my laptop was strictly for my research and instead handed him some other games. As we explored the game, the child asked me about my research, to which I somewhat cryptically replied, “I have to write a book on children, but I don’t know what could be important to write about”, while urging the child to suggest. He pointed a finger at himself and proudly said, “I think you should write about their lifestyle” (*Mun bhabuchi tame tanka lifestyle upare lekha*). Needless to say, I asked the child about what I should include in writing about their ‘lifestyle’. He was quick in his explanation: “What they eat, what they wear, where they go, what they do with friends, do they go to tuitions?” From then on, I often used this explanation in introducing my work to children when they wanted to know about it. Most of the older children knew what a Ph.D. meant, and were very cooperative to the extent of even exceeding my expectations.

Having said this, I must admit that, many times neither it was easy for me to make sense of what children said or did, nor the children understood entirely what I said or did. Sometimes, the children would make it clear that they did not relate to or agree with what I was talking about. In fact, the younger children simply reacted with a ‘How do I know?’ or ‘I don’t know’ when they could not get what I was saying. The elder children voiced ‘I have never thought about it’ or ‘Who thinks so much?’ For example, while having a

conversation on God with a child who was in class 4, the latter started talking to me about God being present everywhere and who could appear anywhere if called sincerely with an innocent heart. I assumed that the child might have developed these ideas from the mythological TV serials that were popularly followed almost in every family. Consequently, I probed further asking the child to explain more about it and how it was possible. The child, obviously irritated, asserted: “I don’t know. If you are so interested in knowing, then why don’t you call God and interview him directly”. However, on another occasion, a child in class 3 spoke to me about how he had read in a divine book about ‘afterlife / next birth’ (*Para janma*) and that he had full belief in it as the words of God cannot be doubted. Further probing revealed that the boy had heard it while his grandmother was reading some religious book. It was never easy for me to have a set expectation about what children believed, knew, understood and what not; it varied with age, one’s home and the child’s own inclinations. More than that, I had no guideline to the structure of questioning, and the available disquisitions on the ethnographic method as indeed children’s ethnography were not very helpful either. In fact, the question is a vexing one: how much could one probe in talking to children? This was never a problem in talking to adults as I had a certain intuition of where to stop. Let us discuss it step-by-step.

Talking with children: the ‘interview’ interrogated

What seemed to attract the children primarily about my study was the idea that I would be ‘interviewing’ them. Invariably and expectedly, children and parents asked me about what I was going to do with them (children). Though I did not have any structured interviews planned, still I chose to use the word ‘interview’ for my research activities while talking to my field people. Going by the ethos of my field, chit-chat (*katha-barta*) and gossip (*gapa-sapa*) did not count as an act of knowledge-building or represent a form of any serious activity; rather, they stood in opposition to it. Leisurely conversations were ‘time-wasting’ (*samay nasta*) habits which were to be discouraged among children who needed to inculcate the habit of ‘time management’, ‘silence’ and ‘self-study’ (or studying by themselves) focusing on books and copies keeping in mind the instructions of a teacher. The latter was explicitly seen as the appropriate method of studying as opposed to ‘group study’ involving peers and discussions (which is still not seen as an

effective mode of studying by most parents). For example, interactions between siblings were strictly monitored by parents to make sure that they talked only to the extent of clearing doubts related to the study subject and not about affairs of the day or entering into quarrels.

Given that I was doing ‘research’ - a knowledge-building activity - which was equal to ‘studying’, I could not use the words ‘conversation’ (*katha-barta*) or ‘hanging out’ (*bula-buli*) to describe my activities with the children. The word ‘interview’ served the purpose better in both preserving the seriousness of my vocation as well as formally representing the kind of activities I would be engaging with the children. Both parents and children would often introduce me to their relatives and friends as ‘the one who will take interviews with the children’. But then the ‘interview’, the very idea, did have other meanings. In the Odia public media, it is mostly translated to ‘*shaksatkar*’ (a one-on-one designed meeting where an interviewer questions and the interviewee answers) or ‘*sambad*’ and ‘*charcha*’ (where the interviewer and interviewee enter into a debate or discussion on an issue). However, some encounters with children also directed me to other forms of meaning that I had sidelined. For instance, ‘interviews’ are conducted for ‘jobs’ where the credibility and qualifications of a person is ascertained. By extension, it is also used to capture ‘quizzing’. Thus, on one occasion, a tuition teacher of primary school children (to whom I had spoken about my research and had taken permission to observe the class) went ahead and introduced me to her students as ‘*didi* who will take your interview’. One boy, of the 5 children there, started taking out his books and handed them to me. Another girl innocently asked if I could give her the questions beforehand so that she could prepare the right answers! I calmly explained to them that I was not interested in their book question-answers and that I was not going to ‘quiz’ them; rather, that I needed their help in some other kind of questions. To this, another boy joked, “What? There is no *Kaun Banega Crorepati!*” (‘Who Will Become a Millionaire?’, referring to a famous TV show where the participant could win up to an amount of one crore through a quiz game).

Parents too more than once asked me if I could show the plan I had. ‘Interview’ thus meant ‘serious business’, mostly one-to-one, whether in terms of making knowledge or

otherwise involving the interviewees' reputation. I thus found myself at my wit's end for finding a local term that would represent the order of my research work. 'Sodh/Soudha' (broadly 'research') was not a word that the people commonly used. As far as I know, words that were close to research were 'parikhya' (examine), 'nirikhya' (keen-viewing or review), 'aabiskara' (discoveries), 'gabesana' (experiment), 'anusandhana' (minute or elaborate search), 'pachara-uchara' (as 'to interrogate', mostly used in a colloquial spoken language form, while a Hindi-sed version would be 'janch-padtal' which is in popular vogue too), 'sarbekhyana' (survey), 'ganana' (enumeration, as in 'jana ganana' or population enumeration). My research activities were, clearly, nothing of this sort. Ethnography, ethnomethodology and/or conversation analysis had no resonance with the common understanding that I could apply to my favour. Accordingly, such renderings as writing a thesis on children's beliefs, 'to know' (*Janiba*) what children thought and simply 'Ph.D. research' were the expressions I used to anchor the meaning of my work in the people's mind.

Moving ahead with 'interview' and moving deeper

Evidently, I had no structured questions or even an experiment to conduct; and there was no pattern or structure to the time I spent with my subjects. I was mostly available and free. Children, consequently, did not know what to do when with me. Initially, the moment I reached a child's home, they would want to have free time, playing games, doing projects, reading comics or storybooks, showing me their toys, devices and school books or making me watch movies or take me around in their garden. Other family members too found it difficult to associate my visits with research in the beginning. Thus, anytime when they found me just hanging out with the child, they would call me aside and start chatting and gossiping about their lives and concerns. This is bound to confront any sharp ethnography – and even more so about any ethnography with children in their home settings – and, truly, this was one of the hardest times in my fieldwork. Anxiety was high. Which part of this was data and which part was incidental? Should they be divided as such? What should be my orientation? I dealt with this situation the only way I had learnt to, by taking elaborate notes and longer breaks to find and see what patterns could be emerging (I discuss this more fully in Ch.3, where I describe the

neighbourhood and its families and children and the process of my fieldwork, as indeed the challenges posed by these contexts to my fledgling research concerns).

This mental wandering continued till I got a sense of the routine and rhythm of the child's life and decided to take a more active role in probing into matters that, I felt, frequently or prominently figured in the child's day-to-day life as well as in the child's own speech and conversational talk. Given that the children I accessed belonged to diverse family settings and orientations, my observations and conversations varied from house to house (and especially so in my conversations with parents). While in some homes a lot of conversation happened around relatives, in another it was about video games and projects, and in yet another it was about performance, aspirations and reputations. However, when it came down to children, some of the most common themes that children spoke about and remained preoccupied with were family, parents, school, friends, relatives, teachers, good and bad, God, performance and reputation, studies, their own understanding of their roles and their feelings in different situations, and so on. Besides the daily routine, festivities and attending to guests, their demands and disciplining, game time, examination stresses and vacations, all made for interesting observation and commentary.

As with any immersive ethnography, at this crucial stage when fieldwork transformed into detailed field notes, the life of children as I had observed ran into a scatter. Put in narratives, descriptions, clusters and vignettes, the 'data' clearly could be featured in many possible ways. I realized through further readings – especially Charles Taylor (1985a: Part I) and James Clifford and George Marcus (1986) - and frenzied consultations thereafter (including the work of Veena Das [2007] and Das *et al.* [2014]) that I needed to dive deeper both into the fieldwork as well as the spirit of ethnographic inquiry to touch upon the realm of principles, intentions, and sense of purpose behind the scatter. Working on one's sensibilities to notice the flow of thoughts, the shifting preferences and the change of gears in everyday conversations, and observing the assigning of feelings and everyday gestures became a constant and conscious effort on my part; it was also an exercise in refurbishing the researcher's self within me. This was not entirely pleasing or comfortable, for developing sensibilities of this kind involves

growing conscious of the ideal and the obvious, both in others and oneself, and can involve partitioning of an individual (whether the researcher or the researched) into different units. All this reflexive order of work is only possible by simultaneously exposing one's own mind - its perceptions, impressions and its judgments - to one's own reading as if it were a stranger's brain.

While talking to adults, one can make out somewhat more clearly about where to draw the line and whether the time, situation and affinity allowed for certain discussions or not, although yet one had to be sensitive to the appropriateness of behaviour, one's body language and responses as a whole. Obviously, when a person got into the flow of the situation, the density of the detail and the richness of the narration are bound to be spontaneous. One had to just wait for the occasion and the proper rapport to get the narration started. The semantics of probing is always certainly there, but there needs to be something effortless about it. In the context of my own ethnography, both the narrator (the parents, grandparents, or other people) and the listener (me) could grasp and relate to the probes. And if a person did not want to get into details and open up or tended to avoid a topic, then the very act of avoidance, the change of topic, as it were, and the telling silences itself made it all very clear. I could mostly catch the clues.

But with children, my experience in this matter differed, in that I could not be sure of the clues. I realized that with children, cultural appropriateness and mannerism were not so much a concern. Once the friendship and trust were established, I could drop strict etiquette and/or cautions about disappointing them. Children did not mind all these (and one is not sure whether there is something cultural about it or, alternatively, one is being ethnocentric here). If children teased me, I could tease back; if children huffed, I would sulk; and if the child seemed to be stiff and grave, then I could loosen them by taking them on a walk or helping with their studies and just pay attention to whatever they might have to say. Invariably, they would open up. The lines of personal space were certainly more relaxed when it came to children. They were ever welcoming and did not mind my company even when they were being punished or had class tests to prepare for or had playmates visiting them. It was so because they had no obligations towards me, and very often time with me meant 'Free time' (*Khali samaya*).

Amidst all this evident openness, what I found hard was making sense of children's dispersed narrations. Palpably, I did not relate to them as automatically as I did with those of mothers, working women and fathers or even of youth. Whether it was about my discussion about God, their shifting roles, everlasting friends and effervescent siblings, I found myself surprised often. Children's narrations are bound to challenge one's mind-set constantly, as they did mine and my unnoticed expectations about them. This is somewhat paradoxical because one had been under the impression all along that, being pro-child, one could relate to them and their narrations more easily than one did with adults.

To be sure, getting children to have direct consultations and dialogues is difficult as they would break into teasing and divert attention, invariably wanting to spend all the time playing and teaching (as in my case) new games or demanding stories to be read. Especially with the younger children - those in primary classes - I had to heavily depend on parents and other family members to get children to behave themselves and cooperate with me. It was not uncommon for children to open my notebook and have a look. To begin with they looked surprised at all the things that I kept noting down, and the scribbles that dotted the page. Later on, they insisted on noting down the exact words that they wanted to be included in a given discussion. The elder children, obviously, had more questions for me about my life and experiences than they allowed me to ask about theirs. At any rate – and I think this is an important point for any child-centred ethnography - I found that children were just not used to being asked about their lives and views. Besides, many times children felt too shy to speak their minds. A few times, the children would just shrug my queries and state that they had not thought about it or protest that they did not want to answer. Indeed, as has been poignantly noted, “I would like to add that this marginalisation (of children) should not be attributed only to an anthropological tendency to overlook children, but also to the inaccessibility of children's life worlds to the adults” (Notermans 2008: 365).

Grasping the shadows

Whenever children started a description they assumed that I had prior knowledge of the physical location and interior settings of the places they were talking about (as, for example, their school, their grandparent's home, and even sometimes the cities they would have visited in vacations). Introducing a narration or locating a description did not come naturally to children, and I had to wait for later occasions to ask them about those details without interrupting their descriptions or even sometimes ask the parents to clarify it. Probing further can always prove a challenge. I sometimes could not understand if children were saying something because they affectively felt so or because they had heard others talk about it? When I tried to probe asking what made them say what they had said, half of the time children struggled to answer. The children would call their parents to help them narrate the event they might be talking about (whether get-togethers, relatives or family stories) or they would ask me to watch the serial or film ("You watch that, you will understand"). The only exceptions in the course of my ethnography were picnics and family vacations, which were events that the children invariably volunteered every detail starting from roads, distances, landmarks, ticketing, timing etc.

Now it is not that children cannot construct their narratives at all; in fact, on many occasions, I was surprised with some of the experiences they related me. Rather, my simple point is that they are not used to deep probing or 'searching' questions, especially when absorbed in long conversations about their experiences with adults. On a few occasions, surely, I observed children with their friends. They would chat incessantly with their friends, and there was no irritation or struggle in relating their stories with each other. Their friends, in return, would invariably complement their own stories more than probing deeply. Doubtless, a shared and celebratory spirit of competitive storytelling, combined with an active sense of participation, underlay the interactional space between children and their peers. The scene changed the moment an adult entered. To be sure, I wanted children to open up to me freely with their own thoughts and sense of play, but I did not know how to build or augment the shared, celebrated and competitive narrating space that children enjoyed with their contemporaries. Neither did I know how to retain my research orientations without asserting them.

Beyond conversations

I decided to take the children into confidence and explain them my situation. On the one hand, I made my struggles clear to them and in doing so I was creating a different space and style of interaction and conversation with them. On the other hand, I had to shift from probing to observing daily conversations and participating as genuinely as possible, often openly expressing my likes and dislikes, fears and supports, asking for explanations and admonishing cautions, and being at the receiving end of their pranks and demands. Thus, as I proceeded with my fieldwork with children, I dropped my sense of urgency of figuring out my research queries; even letting children question me and raise topics that I could then follow up genuinely as day-to-day conversations. The fact that the urgency of figuring out could act as a ‘filter’ is a great realization in the course of any ethnography.

Clearly, there was a gap about how my mind had gotten used to accepting things and how the children seemed to do so. And it was this gap that gave the interaction its interpretative and eclectic import. Surely it is not that this import makes the study fashionable, rather the acknowledgment of it makes the study possible. I was carrying through my role as an ‘adult but junior person’, ‘*Didi* and friendly elder’, and even being ‘typically adult’, all at the same time. As my professors back at the university urged: “Keep these tensions in mind. These tensions set the pulses of social life”.

Of course, I am not saying that the adult respondents had thought of everything that I wanted to know from them concerning their own children. As our Ch.3 will further disclose, I had come across conversations in which adults had answered to me by saying, “Where is the time to think all that?” Thus a mother once took out time from her heavy workload to ask about my time with her children. She was very surprised to hear about how the children had responded to me and then ruminated aloud: “Where is the time to think about what is going on inside their (children) head? All time goes in making sure that they have two mouthful morsels, sleep in time and get ready for school in time”. Another father, who asked me about the matters that I wanted to discuss with his son, laughed at my answer and exclaimed: “...Who has time to find out about these? They (children) also have other demands and expectations from parents that we have to meet

(referring to his son's growing demands for gadgets and outings and general education expenses)". But somewhere our concerns, responsibilities and expectations as 'grown-ups' and adults make us relate to the world and view the world from dimensions not necessarily yet common for children. The intuitive comfort of shared rules of conversations - about what to expect and what not to do so, what was acceptable and what is not, what was understandable and what is not - is not something that one can ever assume about children. Speaking for myself, I had to figure it out all the way in my fieldwork (as Ch.3 will more fully disclose).

Other considerations: The Fluidities and Greys in the Everyday

Children are generally held to embody a certain purity and innocence. In the course of doing our fieldwork though, one hardly came across a chance to gloss over the children as angels of innocence. Rather, my experience was what one of my friends, working with children for a decade, had told me, "Children are smart negotiators". Getting children to do something is always hard. Often children would make me do the things they wanted a given day, promising me that the next day I would get to decide what we should do. But more than often children would renege on the promise. These were occasions where I had to do learn my lessons of outsmarting them and did not hesitate in pulling parents in for resolution. I had to spend long hours with the children playing games, doing origami, roaming about in the garden with them, helping them in their studies, before I could sit down and have a talk. Sometimes parents had to intervene and ask them to behave and cooperate with me.

Many a time children used my presence as an excuse to shirk their daily duties and routines. I had to be careful in not interfering with the children's study hours. Initially, even parents did not know whether to ask the child to continue to study or give me company when I happened to visit during study time. But I insisted on fixing a time for the visit that did not overlap with the child's study. Sometimes I simply sat studying my own books as the child studied, making it clear that I was not in support of violating their daily duties. I had to do this also because, if parents saw my fieldwork affecting a child's study or other meaningful work, then it would have been hard for me to sustain it. One

did feel that the discipline of study hours was burdensome, given the age of the children, but parents had little option left to them because most of the schools conducted weekly tests and the child had to be prepared with their lesson which was not possible if they were not studying regularly. On school days I had to hence discuss with the parents and children about my possible visit the next day and their preferred timings. On holidays, however, this was relaxed. Summer vacations were the most optimum time for my fieldwork, even as children had tuitions and summer camps or had to visit their native village. The over-scheduling of children's time remained a constant challenge for me, as Ch.3 will further disclose.

Needless to say, talking about differences of views within the family and children's possible dissatisfaction with parents or family was not always easy. In fact, such topics as might disrupt the image of 'good' family life or 'worthy' parents were hard to broach, as with any ethnography tiding over normative questions. It could only be done indirectly through the discussion of something that had happened outside in someone else's home. This constraint was intensified by the fact that my conversations with children was mostly carried out in spaces within easy reach of the parents (comparatively less so with working mothers, although I was aware that parents did ask children about our conversations at the end of the day). None of the children I studied had their own room irrespective of the family's economic standing; they did have separate study areas or tables. Most of them shared their devices, toys, extra books and project materials with siblings or if required with other cousins. Children's spaces and time would always be interspersed with others in the family. Anytime, anybody could interrupt children. But people were cautious not to disturb them when they were studying; and children were adamant that they should not be interrupted when they were watching their favourite TV shows. Such proximity meant that I hardly had a separate space to talk to children. In some houses, parents left me and the child alone, but they were within listening distance; and many times dropped in to add few words or tell me something they thought might interest me or just to serve refreshments from time to time and to check if needed anything at all. It was only towards the end of my fieldwork that I got the chance to be with children without parents when they were allowed to go out to the market or park with me or visit my home. On a few occasions parents left me on guard with the child

in the house and went out to attend functions. But such baby-sitter arrangements were not a regular phenomenon.

Multiplicity of lived dimensions

To be sure, the above and foregoing scenarios gave me a new lesson on the form and nature of ‘serious research’: surely any ethnography with children is no child’s play. I had imagined and expected to have more disciplined research with clearer roles, easier identifications, made-up minds, pin-pointed responses, and plans that fell into place. Instead, I faced people, lives and situations which at the same time held multiple meanings and significations. There was no one meaning to assign and no one view to command; the field always belonged to a different order of expressions from what I was prepared to grasp. Not only because each event or episode had different players; but also it was not uncommon for a single person to be intending to achieve multiple ends through the same acts or to be working with intertwined meanings. Opposite values always seemed to coexist in any single narrative. For instance, a woman in the field who confided about her harassment and hardship in her married life constantly presented the story as an interplay of her victimisation as well as her heroism notifying her grit, resilience, and fight for a better life. As such, she had no regrets in her life because she had worked hard to change her situation to the best of her abilities and continued to do so. She particularly took credit in forgiving her in-laws (when she got a chance to take legal action) and continuing in that house, gradually carving a space for her own self. “Not everyone was bad,” she matter-of-fact opined. The varied experiences of reality and the mixed nature of judgments ran parallel; and the significance of acts was always intertwined. Indeed, as has been pointed out elsewhere: “Using another, more modern form, we could say that unidimensionality in thought is unsuitable for understanding polydimensionality of lived experience” (Maffesoli 1989: 4).

Thus, as a field worker, one’s idea of ‘a conclusion’ would constantly change gears. In writing my field notes, I realized (in a muse incorporating the following lines) that ‘even though I could be concluding my study and the stories in it, there was no finality, never *the end* for it’. It is not possible to exhaust the interpretations in just one or a couple of narratives. In the beginning, I must admit, this gave me another dose of panic. It seemed

to me that my findings and analysis were poorly worked out, as often there were multiple and also opposing perspectives and values figuring out from within it. This phenomenon often occurred with children when they shared their reflections on their actions, opinion and/or views of things. For instance, it was likely that a child who has been punished for disobedience or trouble-making continued thinking of himself as ‘a good child’, without carrying any ‘hard feelings’ or ‘guilt’, confidently banking upon the good compliments he had received from relatives and also parents on other occasions.

Another aspect that I realized was the continuous attempt to toy around with the meaning, always attempting to push the rules beyond their arena and yet covering up. Locally this is called ‘*Katha bulei ba*’ (to turn the talk). More emphatically, many times children would cross the rules to make me do things for them, such as indirectly letting me know what they wanted for birthday or hinting at wanting me to play games that are not allowed with elder people (like ‘blade and cutter’, which involved physically pinching and nailing or acting like animals). Indeed, on such occasions, if they sensed my or their parent’s reaction as not favourable, children would immediately try to change the meaning and reference points of their words. Thus when somebody is caught ‘turning the talk’, as it were, it is locally called ‘*dhara padiba*’ (to be caught). Such a state of affairs is in fact quite difficult to establish as it involves knit-picking about someone’s intentions which are not straightforwardly expressed in the action.

These ‘grey’ areas, multiple significations, the coexistence of opposite values, an unruffled switching of perspective, experience and presentation, each were hard to capture and describe. Multiple impetuses lead to multiple possibilities. As a researcher of social life in all its fluidity, I wondered, was it methodologically more crucial to pick a dimension, analytically abstract it and see its workings or was it methodologically crucial to keep them together? Acknowledging the multiplicity, in whatever humanly partial discernment and greater details it was possible, I have been told, is the first step to intellectualise it. However, it is no easy feat to accomplish.

The tentativeness of interpretation

I propose to here engage quickly with the fragmentary, partial, affective and necessarily selective (if not determined) nature of ethnographic work. In many ways, this discussion further concretizes the Joao Biehl (2014) quote cited at the beginning of this chapter, without necessarily implicating the latter's theoretical inspiration.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I was constantly worrying about the lack of a sense of 'finish' on the basis of which one could in some way ascertain as 'enough', if not complete. I had done my best to access children at different times of the day and different occasions like holidays, festivals, in the presence and absence of parents, inside and outside the home, and so on. However, I was still witnessing only fragmented snapshots of their lives. Doubtless, I used conversations extensively to make sense of what I saw. But the magnitude of experiences unleashed by the field reality was beyond my human ability to register, reflect and comprehend entirely. My sensitivities and my access to various spaces of the field depended greatly on my own conscious and unconscious decisions and orientations. My own expectations, background, and cultural moorings affected my experiencing and understanding of the field. It also depended on how others chose to react to me. Punch sharply alerts:

Positionality has become an acceptable way of discussing how self impacts upon the data generated, but it tends to do so in a relatively safe manner by focusing on social categories such as gender, class, ethnicity rather than on more controversial issues such as personality ... and emotions ... (Punch 2012: 87).

In this sense, doing ethnographic fieldwork is exhausting not only at a physical level, but also at a mental and sentimental level. I was nothing less than a full human being in the field. I had my curiosities and queries, and actively sought answers to it. I got involved in and was affected by people's stories. I made myself present in people's lives through numerous ways of relating, starting from the girl next door, university student, children's researcher, 'like-our-daughter', 'like-a-sister', best friend, the good influence, the trespasser, the stranger-danger, and what have you. I watched events unfold, asked people about their feelings, views and reasons, and stayed through with the families when they needed me. In return, they took great interest in my life, took care of me, sought my opinion, views and help, while also advising and correcting me. I had to learn about their cultural refinements, unspoken rules, and underlying collective sentiments. They,

on the other hand, were patient about my conventional and unconventional probing, opinions and interference. Thus I continuously entered and slipped out of judgments, confusions, and realizations in figuring out the field in front of me. Particularly, in the interpretation of the non-discursive, one had to rely on the unsaid gestures and body language, the decided silences, situations and processes where the ethnographer mostly relies on introspections and empathy to make sense of the situations observed. As Teresa Robinson, who accomplished a lucid ethnography on the middle-class youth of Pune, writes about her own work: “In general, my own reactions and feelings were often the most valuable resources to understand the Indian ways of being that are discussed in these chapters” (Robinson 2014: 32). The personal journey of the ethnographer in inevitably enmeshed in many undetectable ways with the versions of the respondent/informants. Obviously, this nature of the social is not something that we can avoid but have to incorporate and handle with some degree of awareness.

In the context of my fieldwork, however, I realise that there can be a limitation to this phenomenon. It is important to note that Robinson elaborately uses her field people’s reactions and attitudes towards her – she is particularly struck by the attitude of her hosts’ towards her - in understanding people’s behaviour towards young people in Pune (complementing this of course with her intensive engagements with the young). Obviously, this was possible because she was herself a young woman researcher staying in Pune at that point in time. As participant observers, most ethnographers get a chance to build upon some of their shared identities with the respondents (as man/ woman, youth, working person, etc.) so as to work out the meaning complex prevailing in the field. They use their own personal experience as a ‘subject situation’ in order to relate to the meaning complex of their respondent’s narrative and sometimes complement it. But then there are moments when this easy bridge of a shared identity is absent. My ‘subject situation’ was starkly different from my respondents. I was in no manner treated like a child by the people in my field.

The social rules, the power/authority structures, emotions and conversations to which I was subjected to were in no way the same as the ones used for a child. Consequently, making the unavoidable personal journey into the stock of personal experiences and

impressions was sort of unavailable to me. Instead, I did my best to invoke my childhood days' values and experiences (which certainly were in many ways different from what I saw during my fieldwork) to construct corresponding meanings. But mostly I had to depend on the expressions and experiences of other children in similar situations in my field as a perspective in interpreting the acts and activities of a given child. Many times I had to take into view the parent's perspective so as to make sense of the incidents around the child, as they (the parent) had a more holistic and durable understanding of the child, his/her orientations and habits. Thus, deep down, the discomfort of transposing myself and my interpretations into my field people's lives and representation of it haunted me as a violation of the sanctity of their personhood. My only solace was that they did the same in relating my image and personhood to people in their circles (see also Glesne 1999).

In the Field and Out of It: Writing Ethnography

As the orders of my description in Ch.3 will further disclose, in the absence of a questionnaire or a survey sheet, my field notebook gained me some stature of a researcher in the eyes of my field people. So I constantly moved with my field notebook and made sumptuous notes. I sketched the neighbourhood map, plotting the situation of various elements within it. In the beginning, it was more to give me a sense of the field and the fieldwork. People looked impressed at my diligence in note-keeping; anything written, recorded or documented had much serious and foundational value. I took note of the surrounding area, the physical setting, people and their movements, their words and conversations, as part of my observational field. As Adler and Adler have instructed: "This is the most fundamental and central emphasis of everyday life sociology. Naturally occurring interaction is the foundation of all understanding of society" (Adler and Adler 1994: 219). I wrote in short points as well as long sentences on the spot, a form of inscription notes. I requested people and children to allow me a moment to pause if I needed to gather my thoughts. Gradually it became a part of the conversation style. I was pointedly told, "You listen by writing". Furthermore, I retained a practice of jotting down my elaborate observations of the entire day's events, conversations and my impressions of the day as a sort of description notes. Often I took off a couple of days a

week during my fieldwork if I was lagging behind in note-taking (see also LeCompte and Schensul 2010). Keeping a researcher's journal was very important to me as it helped me deeply reflect upon and see the indications and directions of my research. It also helped me to plan my fieldwork each week and follow-up. I made a point to tell my field people about that and they would joke about how many pages of my 'novel' one had covered (see also Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011: 17-38).

I carried my notebook and wrote even in public gatherings. From the response that I got from my field people, I felt very encouraged. "Writing is a precious habit, it is a gift," I was once told. It also added credibility to my researcher's image. But more than that there was something that I had not expected my free and frank writing practice to bring to me. Once on the occasion of a formal gathering in the neighbourhood, I was being introduced to some notables who had been invited. On the side, I quickly started noting down their names and profile. In response to my gesture, one of the dignitaries quipped that "it is better that someone writes than just remembers, then they will write exact information". To this, another elderly person present there promptly admitted, "She is a frank writer. She writes openly everywhere. You can trust her" (I was not aware of this perception until then, and felt happy listening to the comment). I merely nodded, and prosaically added: "Field throws data like sunlight; it is not possible to make sense of everything at that moment. Relaxedly, when I re-read, many things resurface". 'Resurfacing' played one of the most crucial roles when I sat down to make detailed notes on my materials, even as they recalled the prime moments of the ethnography and related the fluidities and greys of the everyday as encountered and experienced in the field (see also Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995: 67-107).

With codes and themes

To start with, in reviewing my field notes, I decided to take a mechanical approach of coding following some qualitative research handbooks. However, given the size and spread of data, it fell apart. There were an unmanageable number of codes emerging that either indicated to a shallow piece of information or had the potential to pull the work in a separate direction. As I sat pondering my notes, pouring through qualitative research handbooks and various iterations of ethnographic work across disciplines, I started

grasping the phenomenon of ‘multidimensionality’ with respect to the field people’s lives as well as social science research narratives. I realized that time and space, events, profiles, and constitutions were not the only marker of dimensions and descriptions of social life; that indeed, even more resolutely, the underlying intersubjectivity and multiple orientations created a denser complex of meaning which is at the heart of any narrative reconstruction. Hopes and fears, social tensions and belongingness, adjustments and negotiations, each could be some of the vibrant aspects of social lives to both describe and analyse. I also realized that I had many creative options for my narrative style.

I knew that my focus was on figuring out children’s family life and its everyday dynamics. I thus started charting out the basic data areas related to this. For instance, I had some information on parents, their education, profession and daily habits; I had some data on grandparents, their views on bringing up children and changing values; and I had detailed data on children, their relations with their parents, grandparents, siblings, their routines, their study struggles, their leisure and playtime, their school stories, their beliefs on good, bad, happy and sad stretches of time, family relations, friends and relatives, God, their urge to participate and withdraw, their demands and aspirations, and their deviance and punishments. I further divided the data based on access, that is to say, whether through observations, from the child’s own talks, from parents and so on. I realized that comprehension of a given object of description lay in the coming together of the categories (including my own reflections) and not within any one singled out code:

Coding is analysis. To review a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesized, and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact, is the stuff of analysis ... how you differentiate and combine the data you have retrieved and the reflections you make about this analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994: 56).

Overall, this phase ushered me to contemplate on various dynamics in family relations and modes of people’s participation. I accordingly started clustering the data into various family situations like that of celebrations, tensions, mundane routines and unexpected occurrences and started analysing the nature of participation and behaviour displayed, especially by children. I further charted these with the various interpretations and

accounts that the children and family members had given to me during our conversations and discussion in the context of these occasions. I thus started clustering data to compile sub-descriptive narratives of various occasions for each family, which were then supplemented with accounts and statements that children and other family members had made on other occasions and co-relatable to the occasion I was describing.

Given that my process of data gathering had been iterative (in that I had taken the liberty to probe people frankly on their statements and behaviour) I was able to undertake these analytical tasks for flushing out my themes and their content. What struck me was the simultaneous intensity with which children held on to their ‘family feeling’ as well as their own demands and desires. I was intrigued: what let children uphold it; what made parents to accept it; and what it told us about children’s family life as an intimate social space. Given that my research focuses on children, I decided to explore this primarily from the narratives of the child, supplementing it with that of parents and my own (see also, across a generational field, Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Schwartz and Jacobs 1979).

As the themes from our substantive fieldwork were getting clearer, one was also simultaneously brushing up on studies about the everyday aspects of family life from a micro-sociological and constructivist perspective which would allow me to capture the eclectic nature of daily life and children’s narratives on it. Following that, I decided not to approach the description of children’s family and familial relations from a lens of kinship structures and functions, but from the lens of everyday moments and mundane events. Furthermore, my study of facets of Indian childhood, as recounted in our opening chapter, threw me into a certain analytical heritage and social paradigms, especially devolving on the nature of the relation between individual and collective, the child and the family and the overall spaces of affect and morality. Indeed, keeping all of it in mind, and in the face of the field data that I was getting, I chose ‘moral sentiments’ as the analytical concept to talk about children’s feelings, moralities, and aspirations that drove their everyday family life. The detailing of this analytical concept must await our Ch.4, but for the moment the following quick reminders are important.

In developing the cases and narratives

In the overall context of our study, and given the configurations that it had taken, I felt attracted towards the narrative styles adapted by Ronald Blythe (1969), Lila Abu-Lughod (2008 [1993]), Marianne Lopez (1999) and Teresa Robinson (2014), which brought to life the individual experiences and stories of their field people through elaborate narratives simultaneously bringing out a vivid description of the setting as well (see also Das *et al.* 2014; Hammersley 2008; and Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

To be sure, in this referential context, ‘thick descriptions’ appear as if they need no analysis. There is a story already to tell, and that too highly insightful and captive. My professors’ alerted me against ‘anecdotalism’ and repeatedly asked, ‘What is the point of description and/or argument?’ To begin with, it felt repulsive to dismantle one’s field people as thinking minds, aspiring souls, desiring hearts, believers, and loving families. My professors and seniors counselled me further by stressing that, consciously or unconsciously, people are always taking stands, making their points and shaping one another lives all the time. I was further alerted to become aware of my researcher’s purpose in looking at the field narratives and the mutual effect they can produce. I was also to clearly discern and own the researcher’s voice amidst the field narratives. Indeed, as Sriram and Chaudhary, reviewing Margaret Trawick’s ethnographic work with a Tamil family (see Trawick 1990), have observed:

At one level an ongoing dialogue with the family is taking place. At a more crucial level, Trawick is in dialogue with herself, trying to explicate, analyse and elucidate the dialogues with the family. It is possible to discern yet another level of communication in the book: that with the reader as she guides her audience to accompany her in the search for the reality as it unfolds before her (Sriram and Chaudhary 2004: 113).

To be sure, in narrating any ethnography there is always a sense of having too many things to say and a sense of superficiality in cutting out one story from its interconnected series. In addition, multiple realities and interpretations compete within the storylines, making it difficult to define a clear-cut stand on the issues being covered. There is also a continuous demand to reflect on the entrenched motivations, judgments and feelings, each operating on every act of relation-building, interpretation as indeed narration. In the process, the researcher and his/her identities, personality and faculty of thought

become as much a field of inquiry as the lives of the ‘others’ (*sic*) that the researcher addresses. Such combined narratives become at the same time a story of subjectivities, inter-subjectivities, performativity and normativity, signifying towards deep structures of meanings. In representing the narratives, finally, I was encouraged by my professors to look for the underlying belief cultures that could be seen as supporting or explaining the various occurrences and engagements that one had engaged or attempted to describe.

Thus I had to orient my data clustering to bring out the social currencies, family occurrences, multiple conversations, individual choices, and the implied invocation of meanings with a focus on children’s experiences of family life. This meant primarily developing remarkably long narrativisations, giving space to the description of the circumstances, respondents’ conversations and reflections, unfolding of subsequent events and tracing their connection as a whole with the larger picture of the family life of children in their home settings that I wanted to portray (see also Lopez 1999).

Needless to say, organising the narration and its chapter took a few rounds of iterations. Even after the decision on the ‘emic’ themes that were going to make the story of children’s family life and the multiparty narrative style was arrived at, there was still the problem of manifold arenas that had to be woven in and made into a cogent story/narrativisation. On the one hand, the chequered past and anomalies in the studies of childhood in the West had to be put straight and, on the other hand, the dominant frames specific to the domains of an Indian childhood studies had to be critically analysed and framed. This, as should be discernible, forms the basis of our opening chapter (Ch.1), which (to quickly recall) also highlighted the gaps in the previous range of studies, which also justified the necessity of our study, and helping to clarify our own research concerns and focus. Indeed, as constitutive of our study’s focus, we placed the ‘subjective child’ as the foundational point behind our framing. Indeed, to the extent that a considerable amount of time was spent in understanding the neighbourhood as a whole, our Ch.3 recounts in some detail the ‘world at home’ as part of the larger neighbourhood and its culture, people and ethos, as indeed the appropriate ways of accessing children in such a setting. It also outlines, somewhat repetitively perhaps, the outline of my fieldwork amidst the children. Following this, of course, we take up the fuller grounds of narration

working off the idea of ‘moral sentiments’ as formulated in Ch.4, while going on subsequently to the substantive orders of our narration (Chs.5-7).

We had begun this chapter by quoting the anthropologist Joao Biehl; perhaps it is opportune the end the present chapter with the words further emanating from the same anthropologist: “So what would it mean for our research methodologies and ways of writing to consistently embrace unfinishedness, seeking ways to analyse the general, the structural, and the processual while maintaining an acute awareness of the tentativeness of our reflective efforts?”, while going on to add, ever so sharply and astutely:

... Both the evidentiary force and theoretical contribution of our discipline are intimately linked to attunement to the relations and improvised landscapes through which lives unfold and to trying to give form to people’s arts of living. *At stake is finding creative ways of not letting the ethnographic die in our accounts of actuality* (Biehl 2014: 106, emphasis added).

Hopefully, our descriptions and analytical forays in the chapters to follow will command the challenges of doing ethnography with children in equally creative ways.

Chapter 3



Wading Through the World at Home: The Sripalli Neighbourhood and Its Children

Sripalli (S1, for short) is an overwhelming site. It has mansions, apartments, bricked cottages, servant quarters, hospitals, hotels, schools, parks, offices, go-downs, shops and parlours, all gathered together in one large dense place. This perhaps hints at its typical non-metro Indian city life and landscape. S1 owes its existence to the Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA) which decided to develop it as a planned settlement in the 1970s. Since then it has been almost 40 years, and the internal constitution of S1 residents has seen many changes. The neighbourhood has continued to retain its gravity and grandeur among other locations of the city as a thriving settlement with modern facilities and not so much as a bygone old settlement with lost lustre and missing people. Accommodating families over three generations, whose profiles cut across regions, professions, and orientations, the neighbourhood has lived proactively stretching its arms to the past legacies and future aspirations. The families of S1, having made their moves in their journeys towards better modern education, employment, new-fangled lifestyles, and newer settlements, have not quite lost their faith in ‘core cultures’ and ‘root values’. As a researcher, I felt keenly the pulse of an expectant and constructive nostalgia that the people of S1 harboured both as a part of a growing ‘smart city’ at large and as an abode of changing generations within its boundaries.

Everyday Life in Sripalli

Sripalli (S1) is considered one of the important and ‘posh areas’ of the city (the socio-economic profile of the neighbourhood as a whole is given in Appendix I). It is situated in ‘Bhubaneswar Central’. To its south is the ‘Old Town’, well known for the Lord Lingaraja temple (one of the oldest Shiva temples, around which the city originally emerged as a village). Towards its north, the city has continued to grow fast with the

spread of many smart city ventures like world-class private hospitals, educational institutions, shopping malls, and gated residential enclaves. Perched on NH-16, which makes for its southern boundary, S1 offers an easy reach westwards to Udayagiri and Khandagiri Caves (carved into shelter places for Jain monks during the 2nd century BCE Kalinga rule) and beyond to the district headquarter town, Khorda. In an eastward direction, as one travels about 20 kms from S1, one reaches Cuttack (the 1000-year-old city of central Odisha well known as the commercial trade capital of the state). S1 is conveniently close to Biju Pattnaik International Airport (6 km) and Bhubaneswar railway station (5 km). A prominent 30-year-old market complex stands merely a walking distance away, across NH-16, which also serves as a major bus stop for city and state buses and the daily running auto-rickshaws. This makes the southern border of S1 heavily crowded, rushed, polluted and noisy. The western border, which serves as a major connecting road towards north, always wore a rather regimented look because of the presence of the CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) campus along this road with its main gate facing S1's west side.

Layout and look

Sripalli (S1) as a neighbourhood though is impressively clean and well-laid out. It is interspersed by 12 streets running west to east and 9 joining lanes running south to north. Some of the streets are long; one of the longest roads measured 350 meters in length and 30 feet in width. Two temples (each on its north and east border), a government primary school and a municipality park (at the centre of the neighbourhood) are some of the major landmarks usually referred while guiding visitors to find their way. The neighbourhood consisted of 180 (30 three-storied apartments/blocks) government quarters and 342 private plots. The government quarters are of two types: E type quarters (2 bedrooms, dining and kitchen) and F type quarters (1 bedroom, dining, and kitchen) catering to Grade III and Grade IV government staff occupying the lower echelons of the state bureaucracy. The private plots were also divided into two types - 46 plots measuring 6000 sq. feet and the rest 296 plots measuring 3000 sq. feet. The majority of the private plots had multi-storied buildings, visible gardens, and driveways. These buildings usually housed more than one family or commercial units with additional servant quarters called 'Out House'. In this manner, I gradually discovered that the

neighbourhood housed about 500 to 600 resident families. Besides this, the neighbourhood had a generous presence of varieties of commercial activities, big and small, most of which were towards the south side which was close to NH-16 and the market complex. Starting from small stationery shops, electronic repair shops, snack shops, to bigger offices of education institutes, information technology (IT) start-ups, advocate offices, NGOs, godowns, coaching centres, clinics, hospitals, hostels, banks, and even a private primary school could be identified in discrete buildings across S1.

Despite this high density of people and activities, S1 was always clean and organised. The residents, especially the house owners and the Sripalli Resident's Association (SRA), were very particular about it. Any delay on the part of the municipality garbage collection, road and drainage maintenance, and water or electricity supply was immediately reported to the concerned authority and even sometimes directly to the Mayor. Given that these active complainants or their representatives from S1 were influential officeholders or senior citizens, their grievances were given a sincere hearing. The SRA listed out all the important department phone numbers and helpline numbers in its annual booklet that is distributed to all its members. Besides the municipality provisions, residents also hired private services for the collection of garbage, cleaning of their residential premises and adjacent road areas. It was not uncommon to hear one resident indirectly or through satire exposing another resident who was violating the basic norms of garbage disposal, water overflow, vehicle parking, building construction or unapproved encroachment of road. The jibes would many times result in a cold relation between neighbours or the involved residents.

S1, to immediately recall, is a locality of well-built and well-maintained houses, some of them being huge mansions. Most of the houses had well-maintained gardens, driveways, and strong boundaries. The private plots towards the southern side were more developed and grand compared to the northern side as most of the bigger plots were found on the southern side. The last two streets of the southern side covering the government quarters though looked older, packed, and more austere than the private plots, albeit still in a good form, having undergone repeated renovations. Overall, the residents' love and pride for their gardens was most evident. They made conscious use of their spacious plots by

choosing rare plants, collecting beautiful varieties and sometimes preserving the indigenous one. Even the government quarter area was covered with old big trees planted right after the construction of the flats. Greenery is also prominent near the park at the centre of the neighbourhood with very many old tall dense trees, chosen flowering plants, decorative and medicinal shrubs, and a sprawling green lawn. Joined by the government primary school plantation patch, this area was identified as the 'Green Zone' which was augmented by the lush gardens of the residents.

Outwardly rhythms

Sripalli (S1) and its adjoining areas were ideal for early morning walkers. I could not resist this opportunity during my fieldwork and took full advantage of it. It allowed me a comfortable space to survey and familiarise myself with S1. The private garbage collector (*Safai walla*) made his trip before daybreak. Pushing a customised garbage cart, he removed the polythene bags that residents placed in front of their houses for disposal. With daybreak, between 5 - 5.30 a.m., it was common to see people sweeping their driveways, front gate patch and plucking flowers for morning *puja*. In few streets, by this time the newspaper men started distributing newspapers riding their cycles. The milk kiosk and the temples in the vicinity became active too around this time. It was easy to get into a town bus or shared auto-rickshaw as early as this time on NH-16. Early morning walkers were out on the street, and one could also see sporty children doing their running or heading for their practice sessions. Between 6 a.m. to 7 a.m. people started watering and weeding in their gardens, washing their cars and so on. School buses ran through the neighbourhood around this hour to pick school children. Part-time housemaids (*Kama Balli*) started entering the neighbourhood from the west or east side and moved fast towards their respective houses of work. Late morning walkers briskly made their way towards the park or another neighbouring park which had a bigger walking track. S1 had few committed morning walkers, almost all of them senior citizens. Mostly men and women went out in separate and small groups. Early morning walkers preferred to take a stroll on the road avoiding plants and bushes, while late morning walkers preferred to walk under the thick shade of the parks. Walks were often short, 20 to 30 minutes, as people had to do morning *pujas*, attend to children, make

breakfast, supervise cleaning or even attend to guests at home. It was not uncommon to see some people doing their *pranayams* and exercises in the park.

Vegetable vendors (*Pariba Balla*) and *Kabadi wallas* (waste vendors) made a trip of the streets late morning between 8 - 9 a.m. People came out in their home dresses to buy vegetables that they needed immediately for cooking or to buy fresh green leafy vegetables (*Saaga*) which is a common daily dish in the locality. On such occasions, people briefly greeted each other or exchanged a few words and returned home soon. On Mondays, it was a ritual for the neighbourhood to visit the Shiva temple to offer prayers, usually with *bel patta* (woodapple leaves), raw cow milk, coconut and light a lamp (*dipa jaliba*). Temples opened before daybreak, and so did the tiny *puja* (worship) shops alongside the temple gates. Men and women visited the temple anywhere between 5 a.m. to 10 a.m. Young children sometimes accompanied their parents, but it was not compulsory for them to visit. From what I observed though, children loved the trip to the temple. College going students sometimes came on their own or with their parents. Occasionally two or more neighbours came together, especially in such cases where an old lady might be in need of a company to take the temple trip. This culture is changing, I was told. Early school and college timings did not allow enough time for temple visits. The same held for early work hours in private companies, and for working women it was extremely difficult to make time. On festive occasions, however, people from every house made it a point not to miss the *darshan* (holy view) at the temple.

As the day moved, the offices and shops geared up. Guards took their positions outside and vehicles started lining up. The residents left for their respective offices and colleges, and those staying back withdrew into their home spaces. Streets were taken over by office crowd, shopkeepers, clients and strangers passing by. Noon was an interesting time. Anywhere between 12.30 p.m. to 2.30 p.m., the roads on the south side swarmed with people who came out of their workplaces to access the restaurants and *dhabas* on the east side of the neighbourhood, all of which had many tempting offers specialising in Odia daily meals. On the north side, the crowd was comparatively thinner with some residents and office workers moving in and out of the streets for lunch. However, on this side, it is hard to avoid the school children and their commotion. Mid-day meal is served

in the government primary school, and children lined up with their plates pushing, teasing, laughing, playing and sometimes fighting each other. Following the meal, the children would spend a good thirty minutes frolicking in the playground. For private school children, it was time to return home and they noisily exited their school gates accessing the school buses and awaiting parents or hired *rickshaw wallas* (rickshaw pullers). All over the neighbourhood, different school buses dropped children who were received by parents or grandparents waiting by the gates. It was the time of the day when the working crowd and the residents came face to face more than any other occasion in the day. After lunch siesta is a well-known Odia routine, and the same goes for S1. Nobody disturbed anyone after lunch and I spent most of this time writing my field notes. Even many shops were kept closed till late afternoon as shopkeepers went for their nap, though this was changing rapidly with the new routines brought in by shopping malls.

Evenings were the most active part of the day. Children got ready for their tuitions. If they had some free time, then they watched television or played video games. Men and women stirred out for buying vegetable, snacks or other needed grocery items. The dance class, coaching centres, parlour, medicine shops, and clinics went abuzz with people. The local tiffin shops sold a numerous local eats (*dahi bara, alu dum, gupchup, singhada, alu chop, chat, dosa, upma, guguni, jhaal mudhi, peethas*) and localised stuff (noodles, puffs, patty, momos, manchuria, rolls, cakes, pizza, sandwich) which were relished by S1 and the other nearby neighbourhood. People regularly packed these to add to their evening snacks at home. The evening was also the noisiest time as the working people made their way out, inmates went out on their errands and various shops and clinics were filled with visitors. It was also the time when the residents received maximum visitors at their homes. This often created a vehicle parking havoc on the road and people entered into regular altercations. The local park would be overtaken by children who came accompanied by an elder relative, mostly the mother or a grandparent. Elder men relatives mostly chose to have a walk or have small chats with other contemporaries on health, sons, and daughters. All these were generally highly short-lived gatherings. Most of them had to leave quickly as the child had tuitions or other activities to tide through, or the elder relative had chores to attend. Rarely, the child was left behind.

Night settled in around 8.30 p.m., even though it was dark by 6.30 p.m. The street lights gave a dim look to the neighbourhood. Most of the residents made limited use of lights and, as most of the houses were away from the main gate, the lights hardly reached the road; so mostly the roads were silhouetted, especially near the government primary school. Television sounds riveted the roads though. It was not common to find a late crowd in S1, though NH-16 remained abuzz around 10 p.m. and later. I was often alerted by people to finish my work by 8 p.m. and not to walk alone going from house to house after that. But it was almost impossible for me to finish my observations and conversations before 9 p.m. or 10 p.m., which meant that I almost found myself alone while returning to the street where I stayed. On occasions when I had to observe a birthday party or feast and had to return past 10.30 p.m., my hosts made a point to escort me, even if I had to cover merely a lane. The retail and the medicine shops were the last to close down by 10 p.m. Nights were yet not entirely absent of people. There were many guards in S1; many of the offices and the few apartment buildings had guards. Some of the private houses also had guards at their gates. Besides these, the neighbourhood had also appointed a private night watchman to patrol the area, who collected a meagre amount at month-end from each house like the private garbage collector and the newspaperman.

Other settings, occasions and closed junctures

The Sripalli Resident's Association (SRA), temples, and festivals dominate the S1 public life. While the SRA represented everything that could be termed 'modern', the temples seemed to resonate with the 'tradition'. Interestingly, they were not exclusive of one another, as our ensuing descriptions will hopefully disclose. Poignantly enough, political and environmental hazards, frequent examinations and vacations added some extra beats to their seemingly patterned lives. Various city-organised activities like exhibitions, sports programs and sometimes the special season sales noticeably excited the S1 residents.

The SRA is a registered body covered under the relevant legislative framework. It covered S1 and 6 other adjoining neighbourhoods that had been developed by the city under one plan. SRA elections are held once in 2 years, with the members and its elected

office bearers being responsible for carrying out various welfare and cultural activities for the neighbourhood. They organised vaccination camps, supervised the repair and maintenance works, attended to grievances brought to notice by residents, and the like. They held regular meetings with various departments and authorities for upholding rules and regulations, maintenance, sanitation and other facilities of the neighbourhood. They also conducted various events like the New Year celebration, picnics, Puri trip of *Ratha Yatra*, Annual Day celebration, Meena Bazaar by ladies (where small kiosks are set up by ladies to sell different handmade items such as handicrafts, food items and the like), children competitions etc. in a grand style. In the Annual Day function that I attended, they had invited the city Mayor as chief guest, who in his speech reiterated the vision of S1 as a ‘model village in the middle of the city’, a village in which ‘Odia values and culture’ were well preserved (as was claimed). He urged that the neighbourhood should have an ‘environment filled with learning, values and tradition’ (*Shikhya dikhya sanskruti sampanna paribesha*), while further insisting that this could not be maintained in a one day function but should be reflected in everyday life.

Largely however, the SRA had come to lose its past popularity. Increasingly, fewer residents took an interest in its activities. Most of its founding members were too old and the next generation members were disunited. They stood divided over the issue of membership, and at one point in its recent history the SRA had two offices running parallel, though later on it was reconciled. But this left a permanent dent in its functioning and spirit. While one faction wanted to give voting rights and life membership exclusively to the house owners (*Ghara balla*), the other faction was in favour of life-time membership and voting rights for all including the interested renters (*Bhada balla*) - the moot issue being, I was told, that it affected the chances of victory of people contesting for the SRA office elections. This feud had affected the overall wider social relations in the neighbourhood. Many of the inmates had stopped taking interest in the SRA, especially the older renters who had once been active members but now suddenly felt unwelcomed within the collective and dislodged from the neighbourhood despite having lived there for decades. Also, the cooperation between the two factions remained dodgy, and often it happened that one faction organised events without informing the other faction. While the active members continued to cold shoulder one

another, a few Executive Committee members did try hard to revive the SRA activities. However, the majority of the members had withdrawn and remained indifferent about the activities. Gradually, with the influx of new generation of renters who were engaged in private jobs with less time for the neighbourhood activities, many inmates remain almost unaware of the SRA's existence and its activities.

The temples, on the other hand, were growing bigger in their activities. While people's constant devotion to festivals was one factor for this, the meticulous work of the Temple Committee members was another positive force. The presence of non-Hindu religious families was sparse, and S1 had no church, mosque or gurdwara, each of which was 3 – 4 kms away. As already mentioned, there were two temples in S1, one on its eastern side attended by people from S1 and nearby neighbourhoods and another on its southern border mostly attended by the government quarters. While the former was devoted to Lord Shiva and Ma Tarini (Shakti), the other one was devoted to Lord Radha Krishna and Lord Rama Sita. However, in both the temples there were shrines of all important Gods - Vishnu/ Rama/ Krishna, Shiva, Shakti, and Hanuman. Both the temples were built on plots donated by individuals and run by the residents through temple committee executive members. The temples were much organised in their activities. They have fixed rates for various *pujas* and rites; they declared the time and dates of various events beforehand and they had messengers who went door to door to pass the information on different occasions. Recently, the temples had also started allowing residents to use its land for celebrations of birthday, engagement, *pujas*, feasts, *homas* etc. to generate a maintenance fund for themselves. The temple committees also organised *bhajan samaroh*, *kathas*, feasts etc. On such occasions, the temple authorities requested the interested residents to come forward and volunteer in the arrangements.

For special occasions like *Janmastami*, *Durga Puja*, *Kartik Masa* (which Vaishnavite and Shaivite both consider auspicious and conduct special rituals), *Maha Shivarathri*, *Jhulana Jatra* (associated with Radha Krishna), *Pana Sankranti*, *Hanuman Jayanti*, *Rama Navami*, *Savitri Osha* and more, the temples would make meticulous arrangements in advance. Extra *purohits* were hired, extra *puja* shops would be put in place and volunteers appointed for managing the crowd, assisting various rituals and taking care of

the arrangements. People of almost every house in the neighbourhood accessed the temple on these occasions, and it allowed '*bheta bhata*' (meeting up) of the neighbours. No distinction was made between owner, renter or outhouse families; growing up children always acknowledged; new members were introduced; those deceased were remembered and those sick were inquired after. I was told that in one of the temples a couple of times some families had raised an issue over allowing Scheduled Caste (SC) families, but these were quashed by other residents and the temple committee including the senior priest. The priests of the temple were some of the oldest faces of the neighbourhood, which the old, young and children recognised very well. The priests knew almost all the families by name and face. Children were encouraged to get up early and make a trip to the temple to 'receive *bhoga*' (*Bhoga/Prasada Paiba*) and those reluctant were chided though not forced. Besides these, there was a list of festivals that were celebrated at home by the families. These were such as *Saraswati Puja*, *Ganesh Puja*, *Khudurukuni Osha*, *Prathamstami*, *Diwali*, *Manabasa Gurubar* and the like; and there were also a few festivals which involved exchanges and sharing of traditional homemade delicacies and sweets between neighbours. These were some of the rare occasions when neighbours visited one another's houses keeping aside the general aloofness and formality. Some major such festivals were *Holi*, *Raza Parba*, *Ghanta*, and *Santoshima puja*. In S1, especially in the private plot area, these exchanges were made between closed groups of neighbours; but in the government quarters it was more mixed and wide spread.

Festivals being holidays, offices and other centres remained shut down and the streets saw a free movement of residents, walking in their wet hairs from a fresh head bath and new or clean dresses, carrying *puja thali* or *changuda* (small bamboo basket) with *chandan* (sandalwood paste) and *kumkum* (vermilion) smeared on their forehead and throats. However, these highly charged celebrations did not spill over to the day-to-day neighbour to neighbour relations. On an everyday basis, S1 inmates liked to associate themselves with a rather small group of neighbours with limited interactions across domestic spaces. Inmates were highly conscious about privacy, decorum, and non-interference in other's life. This small, discrete and close group association by neighbours within S1 was a characteristic feature of the neighbourhood as a whole. For

instance, I was told that for several years 12-15 senior men of the neighbourhood had a get-together every Sunday morning amidst other morning walkers in the park. I got a chance to attend several of their meetings and found them open to my presence, although this group had never grown in size all these years. Neither any 'new' people are invited to join nor did any of the regular walkers approach the group to inquire about their gathering, probably out of respect for the group's privacy. Similarly, on the north side, there was an old ladies' kitty party group which had existed with 12-15 members for thirty years and had never opened up to other women. Neighbours seemed to maintain a conscious and formal distance from one another in S1.

Rather, it was more common for S1 residents to spend their time with their families inside their homes. One would often see the residents enjoying their evening time sitting in the garden with their families than visiting the neighbours or having children go out to play in the park. House guests in the form of a steady flow of relatives are a common feature of S1 homes. Most of the families were in close touch with their native villages and wider relatives. Summer vacation get-togethers and *Durga puja* or *Dussehra* celebrations (generally observed during October-November) were annual family routines where either the residents visited their relatives for some duration or received relatives at home. It was a time when children could be spotted outside early noon or in the afternoon scouting in the garden or on the road cycling with their cousins, sometimes joined in by friends in the neighbourhood. Going out for shopping or visits were common during such gatherings for the family as a whole. Besides these, given S1's location, facilities and easy access to the remaining parts of the city, relatives from all over the state came to stay when they had any work in the capital. These little events often found a mention in the chats with the women of the house as an explanation for not having much time to socialise outside the family.

Sometimes events in the city also affected the normal life of the neighbourhood. Round the year there were various cultural activities that people all over the city liked to attend. Most prominent among them were the annual exhibitions, the *Adivasi Padia* exhibition, *Toshali Mela*, *Ekamra* flower show, etc. These were exhibitions that the state took pride in and were held on a massive scale for over 2-3 weeks' stretch. People from almost all

houses visit these exhibitions and bought goods that were otherwise hard to find. More than that, the exhibitions were extremely creative and excelled in their presentations and activities. S1 residents made repeated trips to these gatherings. Almost everyone inquired about one another's visits and assessed what all one could have missed out. Visitors at home would be invariably shown the pieces that had been bought and their prices discussed. Children especially took great interest, and their visits to these exhibitions became a regular topic of discussion in school and also with relatives staying outside the city. Some other events were, however, not that fortunate. Such occasions as political *bandhs* (lockdowns) and incidences of crimes that affected the life of the city also touched S1. The neighbourhood, being close to NH-16 and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) boundary, often felt the effect of the lockdowns called out by different political parties acutely. At the government quarters, the employees on such occasions left for the offices early in the morning. People also avoided taking their bikes and cars, and their families overall remain tensed until their return. In the private plots also, offices and shops remained closed or half-shut till the evening. Children dropped school, and stayed back home. Once or twice the political party workers patrolled the streets on bikes in groups to see if people were cooperating with the *bandh*. On NH-16 the political bike rallies created an intimidating sight that was visible from the roof-top of the west and south-side houses of S1. Buses, auto rickshaws, and other vehicles were invariably stopped at the market complex bus stop. Even small vegetable and fruit vendors were heckled to withdraw. On a couple of occasions, residents witnessed the burning of tires and wrecking of four-wheelers. The public, by and large, would be allowed to access the road and market on foot, while ambulances, clinics, and hospitals were also allowed to run. Some stubborn city people could be seen insisting on having fuller access to markets and engaged in giving sermons to the rowdy youths. However, generally, all of the commotions simmered down by afternoon when the city was allowed to resume its normalcy and people would revert back to their routines.

Crimes were a major concern in the city, and affected S1 people as well. The neighbourhood faced the threat of theft, burglary, gold chain snatching sometime even during the day. News of such events appeared in local channels and was quick to spread. Upon such incidents, the neighbours close and known to the affected house visited them

and enquired after the victims, and if required assisted in police inquiries. During my fieldwork, a heinous crime came into the picture in the neighbourhood involving a woman's death and mutilation of her body owing to domestic violence. The act was discovered after 4 days, and it made its way into every local newspaper and TV news channel. This jolted the neighbourhood. S1 wore a different look that day. People were out in the open, waiting for any news that they could gather from passers-by. The working people, guards, office returning crowd were all stopped to inquire about the police raids that they may have witnessed on their way back. Inmates and outsiders all had become one for that day standing in small groups sharing the unfortunate incident.

Keying into Sripalli People and Other Relations

Sripalli (S1) is a colony of educated people. There were very few among the residents who had not attended any form of college education, and this was true even of those in the 'outhouses'. People from different walks of life resided in S1, like state administrative officers, authors, activists, doctors, engineers, bankers, business proprietors, lecturers, advocates, teachers, office assistants, project associates, contractors, shopkeepers, maids, and cooks. Often people of different occupations lived in the same plot as the majority of the buildings housed more than one family on rent (see further the socio-economic profile of the neighbourhood as a whole as given in Appendix I). Families lived respecting one another's privacy, though the house owners' maintained strict vigilance on the premises and controlled the entry of strangers into the precincts. It was very common to find a member of the owner's house peeping out or staring fixedly at the movement of any new entrant into their property until it was established that they were invited guests of the renters. Given that people had different professional contacts and access, consultations among neighbours on various official work-related issues was an accepted practice. It was common to see people going into a neighbour's home they merely knew by name to take suggestions or have preliminary consultations regarding their work in the department and offices that the neighbour worked for. Another common example of such interaction was that of college students approaching professors for career counselling or approaching the software engineers

regarding placement advice. On such visits, it was a customary practice to take a common friend to ease the introductions.

One of the drawbacks of such widespread professional variations among the inmates of S1 was the pretence of official designation and associated status games. Sometimes people with official rivalry brought their rifts back home involving their families and children. Such long-standing rifts were visible more between the early settlers of S1 and in the government quarters area. In such cases, families over generations did not interact with one another, whether the details of the matter were known or not to the people caught up in the distancing. Over the passage of time, these professional variations and its dynamics had come to have an interesting subtle effect on the construction of social relations in S1. People who had been highly placed thirty years back had now retired from their jobs, and their junior staff would be invariably better placed presently in the hierarchy of offices. This shifting power dynamics had caused some degree of awkwardness among the families involved in bringing about changes in their attitude and behaviour for each other. More often, such shifts of power and status happened over generations where the children of a junior staff got placed in much higher positions than the children of the senior staff. Accepting and accommodating such changes did not come easy to S1 families, who did their best to cope with it by maintaining a dignified distance and privacy. It might be of some interest to quote one such extreme case of mobility where the inmates tried their best to gracefully mould into the new roles that the changed situation of life presented to them. On the north side of the neighbourhood, I became acquainted with an old lady who was the widow of an early SRA member. She was in her early 80s at that time. All her children and grandchildren were settled away from the city. She lived with a distant poor lady relative from their native village who had been hired to look after her. During my visits, I noticed that the old lady was doing most of the chores herself while her relative merely hovered around. The old lady explained:

She is new. She does not know anything about the house. Before, I had Mani to look after me (referring to the woman who lives in the outhouse behind the main house). She still comes now and then. But her son is in a job and her daughter-in-law also has a job. Her younger son is doing engineering. He will get a job better than some of my children. Now it does not look good to ask her to work

for me. Her husband is earning more than I get (pension). My husband had given him the job and allowed him to stay in the outhouse so that his wife could help me. Out of respect, they are still staying here. Also, I don't charge any money, my husband never charged them. But they can afford to pay.

Such changes in family circumstances created an interesting flux in peoples' interrelationships in S1 (as they would elsewhere in other settings as well).

Despite these high frequencies of education even among the women population, the instances of working mothers were very few, as they preferred to give their full time in looking after their children. In more than one home, I found young mothers staying with their in-laws or parents for the child's schooling, even as the father was posted out of the station. Young mothers of S1 lived under great stress about their children's development, career, and future. They worried not only for children's academic standards, but also for their overall development. Inevitably, the well-educated mothers determinedly took a hands-on approach in the child's schedules, and those who felt not capable of doing so remained in constant conversation with teachers and tuition masters. For me, getting an appointment with them proved tough. Often I caught up with them outside when they were waiting for their children's school bus in the after school hour or by the market while shopping. On such encounters, we stood by the road and had our short-lived exchanges. One day, one of the mothers held me by my hand and apologised for not having invited me inside when I had earlier called on her. She explained that her son had exams at that time, and she wanted to concentrate. On this, I joked that she looked more tensed than the child himself. This opened up a flood of expressions, and the young mother spoke in a gush:

What does he understand? What will he lose if he scores a grade less? Father will scold and the mother (herself) will give some punishment. Children rather enjoy it. But I have more at stake. I stay here with my parents so that this child can get a good education. My husband stays away. If the child gets spoilt all will blame me, especially in-laws. It's a big responsibility. And now children have so many demands, school, homework, project work, and extra sports. Even my old parents have to run to get him and all his things ready. Look at my hair and my get up (a bit dishevelled). I was not like this. I was a topper, and I have an MBA. I had a nice job, and now I cannot even recognise myself.

This was a common refrain among young mothers. Home after home, I found well-educated women who have opted to not go for formal employment and devoting themselves to the cause of childcare and child education. All too often, I heard from these mothers “Once this one stands on own legs, my job will be done” (*Eta khali nija goda re thia heigale, mora kama sarila*). I decided to discuss this trend with the men of these homes. One old man, the head of the family, told me lucidly and sternly:

I have five daughters-in-law in my house. I am here with my wife. Can we not look after children? But they resigned their jobs. My youngest daughter-in-law is highly qualified. But no, she also wants to look after her child. Children education has become parents’ vocation. It has become so critical today, you need a full-time engagement with children if they have to excel. The mother is more ambitious about her child’s career than her own.

In the neighbourhood as a whole, a good performing child as a well-settled individual was seen as a proof of good parenting, and even more pointedly seen as symptomatic of the mother’s role (*Ma ra bhumika*). Invariably, I found the mothers’ of S1 pursuing it with single-minded focus. The fathers’ participation in child rearing was of course noticeable; they monitored their homework, attended to school duties and projects, and were responsible for disciplining the child. However, the overall character building and well-being of the child was seen as the mother’s prerogative (*Ma ra bhumika*). Despite the universalisation of school education and preponderance of various institutionalised activities, the sole responsibility of a child’s character, career, and health was ultimately believed as the prerogative of the family. This was true for both the sons and the daughters of the home. Girls as much as boys were encouraged and supported to excel in their performances in all the activities they pursued. The expectation, as indeed the pressure, of getting into a good college and job was felt equally by both the genders.

S1 also had a prominent joint family culture, even featuring such families with 10-15 members residing in the same premises, which further attracted me to the neighbourhood. In almost every lane there were about 2-3 such families where not only grandparents, but also the families of married brothers lived together. Such families had come up with different ways of living together. In a few such families, they still shared a single kitchen; and mostly it was the mother-in-law or an appointed eldest active woman of the house who took charge of decisions regarding the kitchen. However, in the absence of a single

elder woman, the daughters-in-law together managed the kitchen. But the more popular mode of living was where the kitchen was divided among the brothers' families even as they shared the common house. In one such house I went to, the lives of all members were casually held together. The house had a long driveway, a patch of unkempt green lawn and some tall beautiful trees. From the gate, the house looked like a rectangular tower. Inside, the ground floor was divided into the garage and a couple of other rooms. In these two rooms lived the elder brother's wife and their daughter. The elder brother and his son lived away, being posted outside the city. The mother and the daughter continued to stay there as a temporary arrangement until the daughter's college education was over, following which they had planned to move out. They did not have a separate kitchen, but ate from one that functioned upstairs or ordered food from outside. On the middle floor, which was much more spacious, lived the second brother's family. This floor was most well-furnished and organised. The elder brother's family often had their food on this floor. It was most common to see the elder brother's wife resting in bed, watching television as she had an acute health problem, while her daughter spent a lot of time with the cousin's upstairs. On the third floor lived the youngest brother's family who maintained a separate kitchen and their interactions with the rest of the brothers were limited. A portion of this floor was put on rent, and the youngest brother mostly lived away because of a traveling job. Yet another increasingly popular mode of living found in such families involved the renovation of the old house into an apartment structure with each brother occupying one apartment, running separate kitchens while their children and parents had free movement between these apartments.

Needless to say, the majority of families in S1 were nuclear families, but even in these, it was common to find grandparents coming to stay over for a couple of months. Here I would like to point out that there were also a few number of such homes where lived an old couple all by themselves, attended by a hired house help or the outhouse people; close relatives living in the city kept a check on them and other contemporary friends in the neighbourhood also visited them in short gaps. One such couple happened to be the main founding member of SRA. At the age of 95 years, he stays with his 89 year old wife alone on the ground floor consisting of 4 bedrooms, a hall, and a kitchen. The upper floor has been let out on rent. One of their sons', who lives about 5 kms away, fetches

food for them daily. The old man clarified that it was his decision to stay independently in his house and not move into his son's. He said that he was used to a certain 'independent' lifestyle. Significantly, he also saw it more as a cultural change that was unavoidable, and chose to see himself and people like him as forerunner in welcoming such a change:

This is a cultural change. It is bound to happen with members of a family pursuing diverse professions, vocations, choices, and demands. I had to travel in and out of India for work and my children also had to move out for studies. This is something we have welcomed ourselves. I want my children to have their independence.

However, other old couples experienced this differently, often laced with nostalgia and loneliness. As another old man painfully observed, "These are all empty nests". His wife added, "I grew up with four siblings. We loved homes packed with people. I have two daughters who are married abroad. We have two grandchildren and they do not believe in having a family. They want to live alone". For S1, a house full of children and grandchildren was seen as inevitably normal and desirable. A house void of these was seen as a circumstance in need of explanation or concern.

For the residents of S1, to build or own a good house was very significant. People who did not have their own house in the city were seen as people who could not manage their life well. Furthermore, to not be a house owner was to not belong to the community permanently, even to be a kind of outsider. To have a house was to go native in a real sense, and permanent. Indeed, there was a certain sense of superiority to this permanence. The SRA's 'conditional membership' had further accentuated the symbolism. The recent rule that only owners could have life membership, and that no renters irrespective of how long they had been living in the neighbourhood could vote or have a life membership, had made the feeling of separation between owner and renters more imminent.

The people of the 'outhouse', as locally referred to, did stand out in the neighbourhood. Previously built as servant quarters, most of these had been renovated to make rooms for small families. Though most of these families belonged to the economically humble background, some bigger ones housed people with decent earnings. In such outhouses,

where the same family has continued to live within the precincts of the owner's family, their relation was strongly bonded. During my fieldwork, I went to attend the engagement ceremony happening in one such old family living in the same outhouse for decades. The engagement feast was held in the common backyard of the owner's house. The children of the owner's house took part in the arrangements and the owner's family played co-host to the guests. This outhouse family was known for its services and help that it had provided to the owner's house in time of need. Strikingly, the children of the outhouse family had pursued higher studies and were doing better in life. All these circumstances put together had created an intimate bond. To be sure, such stories of bonding are becoming rare. Most of the outhouses now had been renovated, and were rented to people solely for economic purposes.

All the same, families in the outhouses were not hard to sight even though subdued by the larger private houses and congested office buildings. As already mentioned, the families in the outhouses were mostly from the lower income groups though in recent times these structures had been renovated to let in small middle-class families also. One of the regular housemaids of S1 who had been working in the neighbourhood and adjacent areas for 40 years shared her anguish about the changing neighbourhood conditions:

My children grew up here. I lived in an outhouse, and worked in the main home of its owner. I had jobs in 5 more houses, and therefore my owner woman used to get angry that I was not giving time to her housework and living free in her outhouse. So I started paying rent and she paid me for my work. But they kept increasing the rent. I cannot pay so much. My husband stopped working because of drinking and created such a ruckus in our house that the owner gave us an ultimatum that we should leave the house. But I had stayed for 15 years there and then suddenly they wanted me to leave. My eldest son's friends used to park their bikes in our house and somebody accused that it was a stolen bike. My child did not know anything about it. But the owner did not listen and asked us to evacuate immediately. So I complained to the police that they are harassing us. Now we are living near the slum. These people are responsible for putting my children in that environment. Do they have no problem in their houses; is this the way to treat?

This was a rather extreme case which was often talked about in the neighbourhood, and so I had decided to meet the maid and get her version. At any rate, these houses were

sometimes occupied by petty shopkeepers, contractors, drivers, private office staff, etc. In a few cases, these families over the period had shifted out of the outhouses to take portions of the main private houses on rent. One of the ladies who worked as a tailor in the neighbourhood told me: “In the village, we have land and house. We lived in a decent environment. We left everything and came here because of a property dispute. I want my children to live in a good environment. So at least this place has some peace”.

As already indicated, S1 is a colony, dominated by Hindus. People of other religions were sparse. There were hardly 5-6 Muslim families, and about 10-15 Christian families. Mostly, these families observed their religious festivals and other rituals privately with invited relatives or in the mosques and churches which are 3-4 kms away in the city. Sometimes they did invite their close Hindu neighbours. In wider social events, like birthdays, weddings and name-giving ceremonies, families of all religions are usually invited and entertained. I saw that in such celebrations like *Ratha Yatra*, *Dussehra*, *Diwali*, *Gurunaka Jayanti*, and *Christmas*, people of all religions took part in the common fun and fairs organised within the neighbourhood and the larger city. S1 also had a sparse presence of non-Odia families. Most of them were families of the CRPF personnel. Some others were bank employees, software engineers, NGO staff and so on. All of them lived on rent and had plans to shift out once their work duration was complete. Few others, however, like the Punjabi, Marwadi and Bengali families had acquired sizeable property in the neighbourhood and had prospering businesses in the city. These families had been living for generations in S1, but their interactions in the neighbourhood remained limited.

The neighbours, overall, clearly maintained a touch-and-go, secondary relationship. The residents gave me two different interpretations of this phenomenon. Some experienced it as an obvious result of the modern lifestyle emanating from extensive bureaucratic (welfare) measures, market services, and new avenues for leisure, all aided by technology on one hand and urban immigration on the other. As one veteran member of SRA eloquently rationalised the state of affairs: “In urban society agencies take over. Individual relations are not required. Perhaps it can’t be helped ... Now here we have

no common interest for people to bond. There is no club, no activities organised (for people to come together)”.

All the same, the formalness of the neighbourhood was also an expression of the principle of non-interference. These were often spoken out by the inmates as a fashion of ‘family privacy’ and ‘family self-sufficiency’. Indeed, family privacy as a value was strictly upheld. As one of the ladies told me emphatically, “Sometimes we go for tea and chat. But then who knows, you might be encroaching their family privacy”. Once I even raised this topic at the Sunday morning gathering of older men. A few of them chose to answer:

All these people are individual settlers. They don’t know each other beyond their professional identities. The kind of communal sharing does not exist as in villages where everyone is known since childhood days and everyone’s family and history are known. Here the plot of land is all that they own. What is there to share?

Alternatively, another lady from the private plots, who had been on rent for 15 years in the neighbourhood, spoke of the burdens of the changing life style. She remonstrated:

Where is the time? Day and night go in tidying up the house. In earlier times there were no offices in this area, and so we could walk in our home dresses. Today to go out, I have to change, do my hair. Even if I go out I cannot sit half an hour without worrying. Children have different office and tuition timings; they always have to go out. Who will guard the house? And then I have to wait for housemaid, milkman and almost every day something to repair. And then everyone wants to sit and watch TV with their family.

However, others in the neighbourhood experienced this culture as a lack of human touch: “A home should be a part of neighbourhood as an organic life ... Here we don’t bother about our neighbour. We are not concerned. There is total apathy”. Indeed, people with similar views decried that the neighbourhood culture was an expression of egoist behaviour and status pride emanating from the hierarchies of official posts and other professional achievements. Another lady who had a second house in another neighbourhood opened up to me:

People here think too much of themselves. If they are IAS officers, they don’t want to mingle with others. They still expect the same respect and honour. But after 20 years of retirement why would people still ask for them? What claim do they have to their superiority if they don’t know how to treat people? What hypocrisy ...

Peeping In: Inside Homes with Children

The mix of residential and commercial establishments, of neighbourhood inmates and strangers in Sripalli (S1), has resulted in a visible practice among the residents, which has over time become a characteristic feature of the place. I am here talking literally about the visible presence of 'locked gates'. The households that obtain have each largely chosen to draw a strong line of demarcation between the private residential space and the neighbourhood world outside. This demarcation is made in different ways, the most prominent being perennially closed doors and windows, locked gates, covering trees and walled or fenced boundaries. People were hardly seen by the gates or on the roads gossiping with one another, especially during the working hours. The roads were rarely accessed in informal clothes. Evening walks and children games on the road were almost absent. When there was a need to chat up with neighbours the people mostly preferred to use phones. Senior citizens commonly complained about the difficulty of accessing roads because of the constant movement of vehicles. Children were hardly allowed outside without adult supervision for the fear of 'stranger danger'.

The commercial presence not only affected the privacy of the inmates but also the ownership pattern of S1 as a neighbourhood, making it more openly public in nature. There is a heavy presence of commercial activities in S1. For instance, in the short street where I lived during my fieldwork, there was an electricity board office, dance class, a home tiles godown, a 30-year-old retail shop, girl's hostel, an education institute's back-office, a small start-up office, a ladies' parlour, and a mobile repair shop. Needless to say, during day-time, the street would be crammed with parked bikes and cars, which caused a lot of inconveniences for residents whose gates and boundaries were often blocked by stranger's parked vehicles. There would be constant bickering between inmates and the working people over this. The offices and commercial units adamantly claim their first right to public parking as it is their working place, while residents would often oppose it as a form of intrusion and '*dadagiri*' (bullying). Sometimes these quarrels even made their way to the Mayor's office in the form of grievances of the residents. Besides this, the overall larger size of plots and the threat of burglary made S1 residents to take extra caution in keeping their property guarded.

Getting access inside the homes was a long and demanding, if not difficult, process. A common introduction was most preferable. Also, given that the people were largely well educated, they could relate to and show some interest in my research work. But more than everything else, establishing an initial friendship during park visits, temple meets and morning walks proved much effective. The opening up of a family depended entirely on how much they could relate to my concerns and how much I could understand their situations. The number of houses with children in S1 was almost double the number of homes without children. Besides, as already specified, S1 is a well-connected, fully established, guarded and educated neighbourhood, making it favourable for bringing up one's children.

Starkly yet, notwithstanding the huge density of children obtaining in the neighbourhood, they remained astutely hidden and protected. Only during the summer vacation would one spot a few of the children cycling or playing on the road for a short while. Obviously, the children of S1 inhabited different kinds of family arrangements and attended varieties of schools. There were around twenty different schools, covering more than 5 boards of school education, which the children studied in. The majority of these students went to D.A.V. Public School, St. Xavier Convent, Kendra Vidyalay, and Geeta Mandir board schools. These were some of the oldest and trusted schools of the city as a whole. Besides these, some relatively new international schools, local private schools, government schools and those belonging to Indian-based spiritual organisations like Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Sri Aurobindo were also opted by some of the families. For kindergarten, S1 people mostly opted for two privately run schools close to the neighbourhood or directly chose the programs offered by the regular schools of the city. Alongside studies, of course, children were also encouraged to take part in extra-curricular activities. Many of the children had some history of learning dance, music, orchestra, sports or creative writing. But very few pursued it till high school. Apart from the sheer pressure of studies, the lack of proper affordable institutionalised training forums for the extra-curricular activities is also a reason for the dropping out of students.

Inside the house, in the context of the home, a child is warmly introduced to the guest by the family, but soon taken out of focus though not put out of sight completely. That is to say, children would be introduced and asked to offer their *pranam* (salutations) to the guest and then asked to carry on with their tasks or games. In day-to-day life also, children were expected to mind their own business and not interfere in adult works and conversations. However, since there was no separate nursery or study that the child could be expected to withdraw into, they shared the common space of the house/home with others and could be seen hovering around side-by-side their parents. One of the constant checks that parents had to keep was to see where in the house the child was and what was the child up to, especially if the child entered the kitchen or went out to the garden. There were separate study spaces and cupboards for children, but those were also accessible to everyone else in the house. Sometimes a room would be allotted to the child, but the room would also be the one where guests would be accommodated and common articles of the house stored. The privacy of a child, clearly, was a rare and mostly discouraged concept. It was only the exam time that brought some degree of privacy to the child's life, when the latter would be made to sit in an isolated corner and focus on studies and 'revisions'.

Often, it was quite easy to recognize and identify the study place of a child. It is a place where most of the child's possessions like school bag and school books, varieties of pens, colour boxes, other children books, toys, and video games would be spotted. I found very few children in the habit of studying on the table or in a fixed place. Mostly, they were to be found on the floor, the bed, the seating couch or the dining table. This was obviously so because it was easier for parents to supervise the homework alongside their chores. It was also because children invariably feel tired having spent long hours in chairs during school hours and tuitions. Often, if not always, in the majority of homes, the child had access to a computer or a tablet with an internet connection, though the child's time spent on the devices would be strictly monitored. This was also the most popular reason for child-parent squabbles inside the home. Most of the children, especially from around middle school onwards (the 5th or 6th standard/grade), either took tuitions for each subject at home or went for coaching nearby. When the tuition master visited the house, the drawing-room or the living room was left to the child and the

teacher. The overall house maintained a cautious silence so as not to disturb the lessons. Older grandparents half-heartedly yielded to this arrangement, as it meant missing out on their favourite TV serial or not being able to entertain guests properly if they arrive at such times. If children went to a coaching centre or group tuitions, then they are escorted by their parents or sometimes by the elder siblings. High school students were given a cycle or a scooty to commute for tuitions, especially if it was close to the neighbourhood on the same side of the national highway.

TV, video games and surfing online were one of the major activity children obsessively pursued, to the convenience and yet discomfort of their parents. Such a medium provided for an easy engagement absorbing enough for the child, while giving the parent enough time to focus on their work. This was true even for toddlers and pre-school children. During mealtime, children were often shown their favourite rhyme or children animation pictures so that the child finished food without much hassle. Such children programs today come with many educational inputs, fast and fun learning, thereby making for a strong excuse for it to be watched. But, of course, different families adopted different attitudes to this. I came across a few homes/houses in S1 where I was pleasantly surprised to see that they had no television sets, and child computer time was strictly restricted. Instead, they encourage the child to read various books and participate in various competitions and family events. These children, I found, had grown up to become gadget-shy, but they were not entirely unfamiliar with it. For example, in one such home, a standard 5 child knew how to download antivirus and run it on the computer, as well as to search on the internet and operate a Facebook page. He told me that he learnt all of it when he was with his cousins. These children still had access to the smartphones of their parents and hence remained active, though in a limited fashion on social media. In most of the houses, to be sure, parents tried to put a desperate and yet hesitant control on the child's computer and video game time. This was evidently so because parents suffered from a lack of confidence owing to their own lack of knowledge about these matters and faced confusion in taking a strong stand in favour or against computer use. One father, who had two children, one in primary and another in high school, once told me with some exasperation:

I had never seen my boy so silent. He was so sincerely engrossed; I thought that he might be doing some serious work. And schools keep writing that the child has to do this project or that for which he needs a computer. I thought better not to disturb his studies and did not say anything (about spending too much time on the computer). Then one of my relatives told me that my son is active on social media 24/7. I don't know much about these activities. I have cut down his data recharge. But now service providers have come up with unlimited data supply. So I have taken a stand. I have told him that whatever he wants to do, he has to do within 1 hour, and only on holidays I allow them little more time. But they go and play games behind my back when I am not watching. Now doctors are telling not to allow children, but schools are encouraging. What should a parent do?

In some other homes, incidentally, parents took some pride in their child's 'computer knowledge'. Parents told me about video games that their children had taught them. High school students were adept in accessing Wikipedia and various YouTube knowledge videos, surprising their parents with instant knowledge on various issues. In such homes, children also openly indulged in online shopping, recharge and booking along with long hours of internet surfing and game playing too. Though parents chided and nagged the child, they did not outright ban its use. Rather, they adopted alternative strategies where they made a deal in which the child had to study for certain hours and do certain errands to earn his access to the computer. One mother admiringly and tentatively pointed out:

He teaches me new lessons every day about this computer. I don't understand from where he is learning. Are these really necessary in his age? I don't know. But I don't want him to be left behind. How long can a child play the same thing, ultimately he will get tired, and he will want food, friends and new things to do. I have told him one thing: the computer will stay here as long as his food time and study time is not affected. The day it happens, I will take away the computer from him.

To be sure, 'schooling' forms the universal language of education for children. To study meant to do school work. Schools mostly opened relatively early in the morning, which was in keeping with the state government circular to save children from sunstroke during the long hot summers in this part of the country. A few schools, with space problems or because they were residential, ran in different shifts. Given the early morning schedule, children of all ages needed some assistance in getting ready for the school buses. Preparing children their breakfast and tiffin was one of the first activities in such houses,

even before mothers could take a bath or do puja. Once back home, children took over the house. Away from the rigidities of school discipline and the public eye for long hours, the home became a place to be their own 'self'. 'Time' took a back seat, and children would be allowed to dilly dally, laze around and refresh their mind. This mostly meant a long drawn meal, a few hours of TV children program watching or video game, loitering and a long nap. By evening children were again ready for tuitions or outings, if any. The children who were into dance, music or karate training, took lessons on alternative days or on weekends to adjust tuition and homework time. At dusk, generally, children were encouraged to offer their prayer during the evening *sandhya*, which is a ritual in most Hindu homes. Late evening, children would be allowed to watch TV, and have dinner. This time was mostly the family time, when everyone sat together to watch a family show or news on TV and had dinner together. Post-dinner, the children finished their homework and arranged their school bags for the next day. It was a common scene to see parents and elder siblings helping the school child in getting bags and projects ready for the next day. Weekends, however, were necessarily days of getting up late, taking bath leisurely and tasty breakfast. Often I found children having their breakfast as late as 9-10 a.m., watching television or just spending time with family members. Some children had to be pushed to take bath by noon-time before lunch. Sunday lunch was a long drawn process, with favourite non-vegetarian curries and many times joined in by relatives. Even during exams, weekends mark a relaxed period when a child was allowed to go slow.

I did not come across a single child who took joy in studying, even the consistent toppers. Long tuitions and school hours exhausted children. Moreover, many students complained about how things were taught in school. Most children felt deeply the lack of a sense of purpose and the sheer incomprehensible repetitions in the syllabus. One girl in standard 7, who lived on rent with her parents and younger brother near the park, told me emphatically:

How many times I have to do the same thing. Geography teacher will say minerals in India; Science teacher will say minerals in India. Same thing we have to write in 2-mark format, 6-mark format. First write in rough, then in fair copy and again in practice book. And tuition sir will make us write that 3 times before the exam. Directly and indirectly, he will ask questions with the same answers.

Why I have to know all these minerals. Am I a miner? I asked Baba-Mama about it, and they have never seen a single mineral ore in their whole life.

Computers in this sense held some attraction, as children were able to go online and see real videos of the material they were studying. However, the discontent of such disconnect in the school work with real-life reflected in the widespread disinterest that children showed for school work. Parents in their limited way and schools through various reforms have tried to deal with the situation. Smart classes with multimedia learning modes had been installed in almost all English-medium schools that S1 students attend. In order to take away the high stake examination system where the child's entire performance was graded based on a single performance, almost all English-medium schools had adopted the cumulative assessment system where children performances were assessed many times spread over the year. But this had introduced yet another tension for parents and teachers. One young tuition teacher of S1, who was known for her good ways with children and their success in exams, explained the issue aptly and with some consternation:

These weekly tests have shifted the entire attention to marks only. Every day in a week is fixed for a subject. So every Tuesday English test, and every Wednesday the Odia test ... Now every evening I am only focusing on the weekly test preparations. In any weekly test, if the child performs less, parents come with such a big face to me. Every week they want the child to do well. Tonight I noticed that one boy has attempted a sum in Maths using the wrong method. That means his concept is not clear somewhere. I wanted to give him more sums so that I can find out where he is faltering. But tomorrow he has Hindi exams. If I do not pay attention to that, he will lose marks in spelling mistakes. So I could not take up maths. And the day after tomorrow he has Odia test. The whole week goes like this.

I could clearly see the discomfort that parents, tuition-masters, school teachers and to some extent the children had to deal with such weekly tests, but I also found a kind of relaxed attitude towards exams among children. Sometimes I was surprised to see children in the market or at a wedding feast on the night before the final exam. This was something that we could have never imagined in our childhood days, but that can pass! During the summer vacations, of course, it was hard-pressed to commit children to study. But then tuitions were not discontinued, and children never did experience a break from school work as such, even if physically schools were closed. All those students who did

not have tuitions were demanded to study by their parents so as to follow the vacation homework instructions that the teachers had put in their school diaries. One such summer, I was charged with helping out a 4th standard boy with his Mathematics sums. I observed the boy was bent on rushing through the sums, and kept committing silly mistakes. I therefore made him to self-correct the sums. The child protested saying that his job was to finish the sum while correction was something that teachers did. When I pointed out that in exams there would be no one to correct his paper but cut his marks for mistakes, the boy put his head down on the table and went into a deep sulk: “I do not like studying. I have to labour my brain so much all the time. It is a punishment. All the time teachers keep nagging and I don’t understand anything. These numbers keep changing with every sum. They want us to know everything; otherwise they cut our marks”.

This atmosphere of unease and incomprehension and the constant tactics of securing marks caused much bitterness in children. This particular child had about 40 others in his class and it was almost impossible for the teacher to pay attention to each child. His parents had decided to not give him tuitions till he reached the middle class as they thought tuitions were too burdensome for little children of his age. His mother, on the other hand, had a hard time disciplining the child who was increasingly developing a habit to dislike and shirk studies. In yet another case, a girl in standard 9 – whom I shall introduce later as Samiksha - shared her dissatisfaction with the tuitions she attended:

I did not like the tuition teacher at all. He taught like the class teacher. If I pay attention to the class teacher, then I can learn all of that. Do I go to tuition to repeat the classwork? I was hoping that he will say something more. That can give some more ideas about what I am reading and writing. But he was just making me revise for the exam. That I can chart for myself.

This girl was a continuous topper. She devoted much time studying, reaching out to her elders when she needed help. On some occasions, she came to ask me for suggestions. She told me about her troubles in this regard:

I do feel frustrated. Some teachers in school explain so well. The topic gets clear as water. But some teachers, they do not even look at us. They give a lecture looking at the blackboard. Nothing comes across to us. What will you go and ask such teachers? And how to study without understanding what is it all about?

I feel worried. I keep checking in the dictionary and make my own notes point by point. Overall I get it, but that will not get us marks.

Needless to say, the children of S1, perhaps like most children elsewhere, constantly struggled not only with the concept in hand that they were learning but also with different strategies to perform in exams, to adjust to different kinds of teachers and modes of instruction, parental attitudes and ways of doing homework.

Other Folds and Neighbour/hood Crossings

Learning, however, is not the only dominant aspect of school. ‘Socialising’ seemed another great aspect of schooling in the life of the children. They would often talk about their friends and about ‘spoilt kids’, their various pranks and about teachers’ partialities and preferences. Children invariably talked about friends in terms of ‘group’ or ‘circle’ (both communicated by the Odia word ‘*dala*’), which was in some sense distinct from other groupings or collectives. These groups/circles were mostly differentiated on the basis of some good and bad attributes. Not surprisingly, every child identified their own friend circle with some good qualities like a group of ‘toppers’, group of ‘simple and decent’ (*Sarala o bhadra*) girls, group of ‘obedient’ (*agyankari*) boys, group of ‘active’ (*phurti*) boys and so on. Mostly, children talked about their recess games, tiffin-sharing, notes sharing, and classroom fun times in the context of their school friends. Many times they also confessed to unhappy circumstances and fateful stories. One high school boy, whose family owned a house and a shop in S1, while talking about his ‘circle’ and their activities, confided:

We are not the study hard type boys. Boys who get good marks are different. We are average types, like one of my friends is genius in maths but for other subjects he depends on praying to God. I am more like the science project and sports type. We mostly understand and respect each other’s talents. We cannot be too studious. We cannot even understand their (that is, topper) ways. Always asking doubts, writing notes, only talking about question-answers and during exam time they become so secretive, never share their notes. But in our group, we are all open. If my history notes are good, I share them; and if someone has good English notes, then they will share. We have ‘good unity’ (*ekata*). Once a teacher kept targeting one of us for some reason we could not understand. The teacher was unnecessarily scolding our friend, asking him difficult questions. That boy kept quiet. But we felt bad for him. So we went to the Principal’s office

to complain. The principal knows that we are not any trouble making kind of group, and so she listened to us.

‘Scandals’ (*apabada*) was another important topic of discussion. In the event of any teacher or student getting dismissed, the children would exhibit great curiosity and run associated tales with each other. One 6th standard boy divulged to me the different pranks that they would do at school and emphatically alerted me that the schools had become ‘complicated places’ (*Kitimitia*). He elaborated:

One teacher, he was very good, but then suddenly he was suspended. I don’t know the details, but he had told something insulting to a senior girl. Many things happen at our school. One boy and girl in senior classes were seeing each other. We don’t really know, but people say that. The teachers scolded them and made them promise not to talk to each other. That girl felt so bad that she stopped coming to school; and her parents, when they learnt what had happened, they changed her school.

This particular conversation took place when I was visiting one of the families at the government quarters, and the boy had happened to come over to their place. One of the elderly persons in the house was overhearing these conversations from the inner room. He came out and chided the boy for taking his mind on unnecessary things and not focusing on the ‘real purpose’ (*mula udeshya*) of going to school, which was acquiring knowledge and studying. To be sure, while the parents of S1 took great interest in the child’s performance in school and the daily academic activities, the other socialising aspects of the school remained unshared between parents and children, saving a few exceptions. When I asked children about it, the most common reply used to be: “You cannot say all these to parents, they will not understand” (*Na bapa manku esabhu kahi habani, semane bujhibeni*).

I met only one parent in S1, who pointedly remarked: “How much will he (his son) study? Let him be. No topic in the school syllabus is rocket science”. This father was an executive director in one of the multinational corporations and spent much time abroad. The majority of the parents in S1 presented studies as a ‘do or die’ situation for children. They were constantly worried over their children’s grades, whether high or low. Both the school teacher and tuition master would be frequently confronted if children’s grades fell. Exams were presented like an annual contest whose stakes the child was never made

to forget. It can be said that studying to succeed or excel was made the sole goal of the child's life. Children protested immensely, undeterred by these impositions in noticed and unnoticed manners. They (the children) would strive to get, say, an extra half hour of TV or steal in an hour of a video game, finding excuses to while away their time, putting their foot forward to join any extra-curricular activities, keeping secret diaries on cricket stars and other famous sportspersons, film actors and models. Evidently, getting children to sit and study, finish their tasks in time and doing their revisions were travails not only of the child's life but also of the parents. Grandparents often registered their complaints on this system of child education. One grandmother with grandchildren in primary school pointed out:

Now for everything they need Ma Baba. Schools have Parents-Teachers meeting. Only parents will go. If parents are busy, then why cannot grandparents fill in? My children learnt their rhymes from my parents. I could leave my children with my mother and mother-in-law. But today, in hospitals also they want parents; grandparents cannot stay. School syllabus is changing so fast that nowadays even parents fail to understand, and they have to appoint tuition masters. If you ask or instruct anything to children, they answer back to us saying, 'what do you know, you will not understand?'

Alongside all this, a lot of emphasis was also put on character building, behavioural decency as well as street smartness. Though somewhat opposite, yet S1 families encouraged it symbiotically. '*Bhadra*' and '*Shanta shista*' were the two most common qualities ascribed to children deemed good or appropriate. '*Bhadra*' refers to utter decency in action, while '*Shanta shista*' refers to 'calm and composed'. I found that '*Bhadra*', signifying overall noble or cultured behaviour, was one of the uncompromisable attributes expected in any individual, whether adult or child. With respect to children, it meant specifically showing respect to elders, keeping away from bad words or indecent speech, treating friends amicably, showing interest in creative and cultured activities and keeping a distance from undesirable habits like drugs, class bunking, gang people, telling lies, stealing, etc. '*Abhadrami*', that is to say, the lack of '*bhadrami*' (noble or cultured behaviour) was largely not tolerated or acceptable. A lack of decency in a child was seen as impertinent and a sign of bad influence.

'*Shanta shista*' on the other hand was more about the child's reserved demeanour and aptitude. It meant having a pleasant temperament, being soft-spoken, disciplined, emotionally balanced, and agreeable and not demanding in nature. However, children who were not calm and composed – as a variant of '*abhadrami*' - are not entirely repudiated, but sometimes seen as a sign of smartness and a sharp mind. Such children who were vociferous, short-tempered, impulsive, demanding and wilful were chided and cautioned but still considered accepted. They were often branded as '*chandi*' (formidable; for girls only), '*uddhata*' (naughty), '*raagi*' (bad-tempered), '*amanya*' (disobedient) and '*adharjya*' (impatient). Increasingly, I found there was also stress on being smart. A child was praised for developing independent habits and knowledge of the world, whether it be learning to ride a bike, good computer knowledge, being gadget-savvy, taking part in extra-curricular activities, knowing about the world outside and the like. Interestingly, even though higher achievement was appreciated in a child, 'showing off' (*dekhei heba*) was highly criticised. Many a college youth in S1 is encouraged to apply for higher education and further for jobs outside the state and the country. However, when they return or visit the neighbourhood, they were expected to remain connected to their roots and blend with the locality. A graduate college student of S1, who was studying in Delhi, complained to me that her local friends were making fun of her new accent and dressing style and that her relatives, especially cousins, would tease her as 'ethnic madam' (a common dressing style among Delhi college girls). One of her cousins, I was told, had even joked that "Her purse has become 'wallet' and her sunglasses have become 'shades'". The girl was a second-generation Delhi student in her family, and so her grandfather amusedly advised her to "leave her Delhi tag in the hostel as her uncles did, before coming back home".

Overall, physical activities among the children were low in the neighbourhood. Not only did the child not have a routine playtime or very few were involved in sports as a routine extra-curricular activity, even at home they were mostly to be found with class notes, TV or computer. It was also rare to see a child take part in regular chores at home. A common complaint that parents had about children was their 'lack of sense of responsibility to self-care' (*Jamaru atmanirbharashila nuhein*). Getting ready in time, keeping their own stuff arranged and maintaining a daily routine were some of the habits

that parents expected their children to develop. Mostly children in their high school seemed to imbibe these habits. Children of this age were not only independent in their personal care, but also took up other responsibilities as cleaning up the cupboards and bookracks of the house, doing the marketing, attending to guests and sometimes looking after the younger sibling and ageing grandparents. In case of younger children, while parents remained anxious about their general lack of self-reliance, the children themselves remained unconcerned. All the same, in general, there was some degree of pride attached to the child learning various skills in housekeeping and other chores. Mothers liked to talk about how their children were mastering various cooking recipes, how children were creatively decorating certain sections of the home and how they were planting their own patch in the garden. These were often leisure activities, and not regular tasks and invariably secondary to studies. One of the mothers with a daughter in high school (8th standard, to be precise) and a son in college diligently told me: “I have taught the basics of kitchen handling to both my children. If I am not at home, then they both can cook a normal meal. Wherever life takes them, they should be prepared to at least feed themselves”.

Understandably, children with working mothers were pressed for taking care of themselves to some extent. In one of the homes where the mother had to spend about 10 hours out of the house every working day, her little son in standard 2 (primary school) – whom we will later introduce as Vinayak - knew how to take his medicines and snacks on his own, take a nap and be ready for tuitions. In such cases, the homes mostly had grandparents, uncle and aunts or a hired baby-sitter to look after the child and the household work. Alternatively, in such contexts where parents could not afford a house help or had no other relatives at home, then the children of middle school age seemed to be prepared to take on various household chores like sweeping the home and cleaning the utensils, and if needed cooking rice, *daal*, and *bhaji*. But it was common to see that on many occasions, whether diverted by TV or games, children chose to shirk the work and wait for their parents to come back. However, invariably, elder siblings found themselves in a position where they had to take charge of matters for their younger brethren. On a regular day, it included things like assisting the younger sibling in homework, arranging school materials, accompanying the child outside the house and

also many times helping the younger ones out of trouble. On a daily basis, however, parents always encouraged the child to prioritise school work over any other responsibilities.

Aspirations for children were very conventionally fixed. It was about getting good grades, getting a seat in a known college, and doing and finding an early placement in a known company. ‘Posts and packages’ (*Padabi O darama*) were important in that particular order for most people. In every house, parents and grandparents worried about the child’s matriculation and secondary exam result overall more than focusing on the child’s interest and strengths. Broadly, after school education, ‘Science’ remained a preferable option to ‘Humanities’, and this was especially so if the child was a good scorer. Indeed, across such cases, the child would be encouraged all through schooling to develop an interest in science and maths. This tendency, not surprisingly, was also reinforced by schools that ran extra practice classes exclusively for mathematics and science. Not only parents, but also children felt comfortable in taking science. I came across very few instances where the children who were good in their marks showed an inclination for doing humanities. It was a common practice for children to take a year drop after ‘plus 2’ sciences, and join a coaching centre for medical and engineering classes where they attended day-long sessions practicing the syllabus for various entrance examinations. One such girl who was a rank holder in her school time told me matter-of-factly: “Last year I did not get time to prepare for my medical tests properly because of ‘plus 2’ (pre-university) exams. So everyone said I should drop and take coaching”. When I asked why she did not go for literature as she had a special knack for that, she stated emphatically: “So what! Should I have studied Arts? No”. In yet another home, where the girl had scored averagely, she showed an interest in studying psychology or fashion design. While her family was ready for it, given that she had been an average student all through school, she changed her mind abruptly and opted to do science by paying for it in a private college, as almost all her friends were doing science.

However, this preponderant trend towards science subjects would change at the graduation level. By this time, more or less parents and students seem to have a better understanding of their strengths and area of interest. I came across youngsters pursuing

a variety of options like applying for business administration, biotechnology, public health, nutrition science, literature and culture studies, applied and fine arts, social work, pharmacy, etc. A noticeable number of them also applied to other state universities and higher education institutions. Amidst this tendency, however, students were encouraged to aim at topmost universities well-known to the people of the city. Getting an early job was always preferable, but children pursuing higher education like M.Tech. and Ph.D. would also be highly appreciated. It was more important for the families that their children were doing something that most people could apprehend as preferable and desirable and not something that was way too unconventional. Thus, people working in foundations, corporate social responsibility initiatives, start-ups, non-profit organisations, and private college lecturers were not considered as important as people working in known multinational software companies, even though the former might have been getting higher pay checks than the latter. But ultimately, it was the government administrative posts and university teaching jobs that were held as most prized accomplishments. To be sure, although S1 had dancers, authors, orators, and businessmen who were highly respected in the neighbourhood, rarely people encouraged their children to take on these vocations. One of the dance teachers in the area proudly introduced her twins, who were studying in their 10th class, as two aspiring classical dancers (both of whom had earned many awards and won competitions in dancing). This was a rather rare occurrence.

‘Relatives’ (*‘Bandhu bandhaba’* for close relatives, and *‘Samparkiya’* for distant ones) played a great role in the lives of children in S1. About 40 per cent of the homes with children had at least one grandparent staying with them or visiting them for a few months; besides, as already noted, there were many houses where families of more than one brother stayed together. Even in nuclear families, people were in constant touch with other relatives, and family get-togethers were frequent. These gatherings were not merely restricted to special festivals or celebrations, for now and then relatives just stopped by to check with one another. On a child’s birthday, more than friends, relatives had a greater presence. Sometimes the relatives consisted of families of grandparent’s siblings’ (first and second cousins once removed). On one occasion, I happened to see a few birthday pictures of a girl in the neighbourhood. It was a crowded birthday,

obviously, and even as I could discern 6-7 of her school friends, they were outnumbered by her family relatives who were getting most of her attention. I mentioned this to the girl, and she promptly replied: "My friends know how close I am to my cousins. My cousins had organised so many surprises that I got engrossed in it. My friends won't mind that". Of course, all this is not to imply that birthday parties are very popular in S1; most of these would happen quietly with a special offering at the temple and a special home-cooked meal. On most such occasions, relatives and cousins would come up with surprise gifts or a party, even when uninvited, something that the children as a whole heartily looked forward to.

More or less, children of S1 grew up with a certain awareness of the larger family network and relationships. The visit of relatives and their stayover were frequent. Vacations were often spent together with grandparents and other cousins. While it was normal for relatives to pamper children, it was the parents' duty to discipline them. Children would thus be overjoyed by the presence of relatives. They took great interest in the career of their uncles and cousins, and proudly boasted about their accomplishments. Children loved to listen and retell such old stories that ran in the family about (say) their great-grandfather being a freedom fighter or some distant uncle being in the United States 'National Aeronautics and Space Administration' (NASA), and even the simple stories of how someone in the family had become a recluse and died a pious death. Altogether, vacation time, weddings and occasions of family get-togethers created a space of celebration and re-acknowledgment of children's connections with one another. Such a wider network also became the arena of adjustment and compromises. Relatives from all over the state, and especially the native village, came over to stay with the families in S1, whenever they had any work in the capital city. Thus, a lot of expenses and effort went into entertaining guests, and children would get caught up with the moment along with their parents. In one of the bungalow styled houses on the west side, lived families of two brothers together with their octogenarian father who stayed six months with his sons in the city and the rest six months in the native village. Each brother occupied a floor and maintained a separate kitchen, though the movement of children was free between the two floors. When the father stayed with his sons, guests from the native village thronged the house. The old father, though unhappy

at this habit of his village men and relatives, still expected his son's families to take care of the guests' food and stay. The daughters-in-law remained caught up in preparing snacks and meals for the guests, and a special male servant had been hired for help.

Yet, on many occasions, it came to the children of the house to help their mothers in the kitchen or do the errands, especially when guests arrived without prior notice. During a casual chat one evening, the elder daughter-in-law, who was in her early 50s, expressed vigorously, half in exasperation:

Since morning people are coming to see my *Bapa* (father-in-law). I must have made 20 cups of tea today. Other relatives will be soon arriving and if needed we will put him in the hospital. Last year also this happened during children's exam. There was so much disturbance. We used to put them upstairs to study, but their mind gets diverted because all relatives are gathered downstairs and they want to join in. My husband gets very angry with them if they don't finish their studies. But where is the 'environment' (*paribesha*)? Now I have sent my children with their uncle and aunt for vacation. Relatives will comment that they are having a good time when someone is unwell at home. At least, children will get some time to refresh their minds.

Importantly, children of S1 would often get caught between such balancing acts, which configured their world at home. Sometimes families also witnessed property disputes and other quarrels. Owing to the frequent visits of relatives and family gatherings, all of these details would get openly discussed even in the presence of children. However, children were not allowed to speak on these matters. A girl who had just finished her 10th standard when I started my fieldwork showed her irritation on the insensitivity of her relatives. Apparently, differences had erupted between her father's siblings over a property issue and each one wanted her father on their side. She gave a detailed account of that episode:

I locked up my room all the time. It was my 10th board exam, but these people (father's brother and father's sister) were here all the time to discuss their property issue. They both sat here justifying their case day after day. I complained that I was getting disturbed, but they could not understand. When my Mama, at last, put her foot forward and said that until my exam is over nobody should come to our house, they all stopped talking to her. I do not understand what kind of family is this? I feel we all cousins are more mature than the adults.

Clearly, maintaining relationships involved sensing various situations, attitudes, moods, and intentions of people around and accordingly adapting strategies of behaviour. Children of S1 seemed to be exposed to these discernments early in life.

Incidences of disconnected youth, that is to say, youth who spent much time outside the house just roaming about with friends and branded as ‘wayward’ by families, were few in S1. Towards the second year of my fieldwork, I noticed a group of college youth gathering up near the CRPF side of the neighbourhood during the evening idling away their time. On a few occasions some of them brought along costly bikes, and equally their clothing brands suggested that they came from the higher income group of the neighbourhood. One night, when suddenly it became windy and gusty, I decided to rush back home. As I ran my way back to save myself from the rain, I could see the boys getting a good drench and taking poses on a four-wheeler which was an uncommon view in the neighbourhood. Sometimes, I also saw them racing on their bikes. One of the evenings I came upon them at a popular snack shop and introduced myself. Once they heard that I was a researcher working on children of the neighbourhood, they looked curious. They told me that they had just finished their first year in college and were enjoying their college vacation. While two of them were from the neighbourhood, the rest 6-8 youth were from areas nearby. After a brief chat about their opinion on studies and career, I left. For about a fortnight, the boys kept meeting up in the same spot though their number started dwindling. Weeks after, I met a couple of them in the market complex across the NH-16 late night. Out of surprise, I asked them, “Why do you keep standing on the road for such long hours? Parents must be worried”. They smiled and replied that their parents came late from work and that since there was nothing much to do at home they had come out to be with friends. Neighbours hardly knew them, though they took notice of them. An old lady who had stayed for about three decades on that side of the neighbourhood told me that one of the houses on the west side had been sold and probably the boy’s family had moved in after that. The old lady mused:

Can you understand these things: things of a previous time and now? If I say something you may take it in wrong sense. I used to keep my neighbour’s 6-month old baby girl so that she could go and attend her college. This would be for the entire day. In the evening she would come to pick the baby and never ask a question. She trusted that I would have looked after the baby well. I had 3 boys

of mine, don't I know? That was the kind of relation: a kind of oneness (*nijara*), belongingness (*aapanapana*). If I am going to the market, then another neighbour would send their children with me and instruct them to listen to us. They will not believe their children, but believe us. We felt a sense of responsibility for those children, like our own. But today, you cannot say anything to children. They are so sensitive. Not only children, but parents feel hurt more. If you say a word or two to a child, then the whole family feels insulted. They start avoiding. Do you not see how parents quarrel with teachers? Now look at these boys spending time alone, where are their parents?

Even as children of S1 struggled to accommodate the varying influences and aspirations in life, overall it seemed as if the collocation of 'good child' (*Bhala pilla*) with 'dutiful parents' (*Daitwaan abhibhabaka*) had made the phenomenon of bringing up a child highly stressful for the parents as well.

It is difficult to pinpoint what children felt about the neighbourhood and their relation to it. A child in primary school, who we will introduce later as Mantu and who was born in the neighbourhood, having lived in the same house built by his grandfather, cogently described it thus:

The neighbourhood is like a 'non-living family' [drawing from the living and non-living being lesson in science class]. 'Family' because we have to stay together side-by-side always and 'non-living' because there is no happy exchange or talk with one another. Their doors are always closed.

Another high school girl who was also born in that area stated somewhat strait-lacedly:

There were a few houses when I was a child, and they used to take us to their houses. Now we are so busy, we cannot make out time. Also now many new families have come. There is one girl of my age in the front house. But she never comes out; once or twice we have spoken, but that too she was standing behind her closed gates. Now they have put a guard in front of their house. If she does not want to come, I cannot go on pushing myself.

By and large, children mostly went out in the neighbourhood with their parents to the snack shops, to the market complex, sometimes to the vegetable market or the clinics. On a few occasions when I took a walk with children, with permission from their parents, children told me about the old and popular spots of the neighbourhood. They knew almost all the shopkeepers, who also knew them by their faces. Though children knew most of the roads, they hesitated to take it on their own. Yet another 12 year old girl in

standard 6, who had just moved into the government quarters a year before, shared her thoughts with me on the score, expressively stating:

It was so puzzling. Before coming to this place we lived in a rented house. There was a big hall where I played with two little girls and the owner aunty told us stories. After coming here I wondered. The area was so congested and the people in the front flat hardly opened their door. Their son studies in Kendra Vidyalay, but I have never talked to him. There are so many families in the flats that I did not know whom to talk to and whom not to. Whom to be friendly with? Here everyone was elder to me. Should I talk first or not? What will they say? Then I became friends with one *didi* downstairs. And I got invited to this feast. I really enjoyed how they had planned many games for us.

Children of S1, evidently, lived in layers and layers of separating spaces - the road and residential, the inmates and the strangers and so on. But even within the residential premises as a whole, each family lived side-by-side with other families as renters, owners, kin, neighbours, next-door flat, etc. And, finally, inside the house, as it were, there was a constant stream of relatives and guests. With the demands of schooling and the pressures of a distant future, parents often best adjusted to the situation by keeping the child under their wings, out of all stranger shadows, and helping the child focus its orientations mostly towards studies and building a career than getting too much involved in other lateral priorities of life like engaging with the environment and its different aspects.

New Thresholds: The Six Families and their Children

For the purposes of my research as a whole, and as an ethnographically nuanced framework of exposition, I have narrowed down to 6 families of Sripalli (S1) for exploring facets of children family life explicitly using the lens of ‘moral sentiments’ (the socio-economic profiles of these six families is detailed in Appendix II). The justifications for, and the grounds of, the latter framework will come in the next chapter, although intimations of it have informed the orders of narration herein as well. It is imperative to reiterate here yet that I have used the ethnographic data of those families with whom I spent the longest duration of time, ranging from 1 year to 6 months during my fieldwork, and was able to draw together the ends of my data collection relatively uninterrupted over the duration. In each home or house, a major portion of the

information about and from the children was collected in a time of 2-3 months. However, the overall contact period spanned over to several months for additional observations of events, circumstances, and situations. All the same, three practical challenges in my fieldwork made me to turn my focus intensively onto children family life inside the home setting and to devote long durations of time in each family.

The first reason is that I could not find a free movement of children outside the house for a sustainable period to enable an intensive study of their life in the neighbourhood. However, once I got access to their homes, I realised further that it was not easy to get time alone with children for one-to-one conversations given the symbiotic nature of family living (about this, specifically, I have spoken quite elaborately, both in this chapter and in the previous one). The second reason has to do with the nature of questions that I wanted to probe with children. My inquiry required conversations on intimate and private matters, like the quality of relationships between the child and other family members, the child's perspective on family feuds and bonding, children's evaluation of parenting, schooling and family dignity and so on. This required immense time and confidence on my part to have an insight into the families' internal dynamics and then to empathise with the members to be able to start genuine and comfortable exchanges. Consequently, during the early months of my fieldwork, I decided to wait for the families to show interest in my subject rather than me seeking out their formal consent. The six families that I zeroed in on were some of those families where the parents or the children themselves showed interest in my study and invited me to spend time with them allowing me to access their homes without any hesitation.

The third reason is related to the method or the nature of the data that I wanted to collect, which was qualitative and immersive. Many families in S1, although comfortable with in-depth and elaborate studies, could not come to terms with the somewhat flaneur-like mode of researching without measurement tables and questionnaires and showing an overt reliance on free-wheeling conversations, observations and participation. These were the six families that accommodated the open-ended style of research and allowed me to maintain the confidentiality of the information that I collected from each family member, while giving me the freedom to carry out my work in its optimal quality. There

is, of course, an additional reason that comes from the overall requirements of both writing and representing stylistically, which necessitates that I restrict my choice to these six families and their children primarily.

As should be discernible throughout, the objective has been to explore the underlying ‘meaning system’ that children construct in conducting their day-to-day family life and not effect comparisons across the diverse family backgrounds. Accordingly, I have restricted to those families which more or less identified themselves as ‘middle class’ while simultaneously associating themselves with a better status of living in their immediate past through legacies and inheritances of some sort and/or the future through strong aspirations. I would yet like to add one further point of admission: given that I have chosen to use those families that showed more interest in my study and invited me to spend time with their children, it might carry an implication that I ended up choosing families which were already more cautious and proactive in matters of their children and issues around childhood. However, considering that my research subjects were children and the matters I wanted to access were private, I decided to stick to this choice consciously and ethically.

LUV and KUSH FAMILY

Luv and Kush (both aged about 14-15 years, being twins) lived with their parents and elder sister in a two-room government quarter towards the south boundary of Sripalli (S1). This side of the neighbourhood featured the thirty pale pink coloured three-storied government residential apartment complex allotted to its employees. As already indicated, each apartment complex is called a block, housing six quarters each, and thus there are a total of 180 residential units occupied by Grade III and IV staff, consisting primarily of section officers, clerks, office assistants and peons working in the state government secretariat. Luv and Kush’s home is on the ground floor of one of these blocks standing on the dead-end of the southeast corner of this patch belonging to the government quarters, almost hoodwinked by the dense tall trees in the surroundings and the temple plot adjacent to their block.

Getting a ground floor quarter was considered preferable as it allowed the resident to add extra rooms, with due permission from the authorities, in the front of the house and also enjoy the remaining garden space. Thus only the senior-most and influential staff was able to avail of this preference. Luv and Kush's father was allotted the quarter when he was promoted as the head Section Officer in a prominent department about a couple of years ago, following which the family had started living in S1. Their quarter already had an additional room constructed by its previous occupant. Luv and Kush's father had further added a concrete driveway with a shed, creating a comfortable space for parking their vehicles or sitting out in the evening. The shaded part of the garden consisted of a small clean patch underneath of a young jackfruit tree, with lined decorative bushes planted along the wall of the house and the boundary marked with bricks to hold the soil in place. A small colourful multi-tiered *tulsi* (holy basil) pedestal (*chaunra*) stands at the entrance gate where a small lamp (*sanjabati/dipa*) or incense sticks (*dhoopa*) are lit at dawn and dusk.

Luv and Kush's father, in his late 40's, is a meticulous, careful and dutiful person. He has a firm belief in the value of discipline, deep study and informed decisions. Being the eldest amongst his siblings, he had developed a sense of responsibility and protectiveness which was also reflected in his dealings with his children. His paternal house was a well-known family in their region with large property holdings, especially inland. However, because of the fall of the fertility of land and indebtedness owing to high investment hybrid crop farming, the family had entered a phase of a financial crisis. This had forced Luv and Kush's father to take up an early stable job close to his house so as to be able to provide for and look after his siblings. This had made him take up the first 'good job' that he could lay his hands upon, despite being a bright student with hopes for higher studies. Luv and Kush's father is a postgraduate, and continued his reading habit as a hobby to date. The same habit he had passed on to his children and it was not uncommon to find the boys rummaging through the stacks of old Odia books for a weekly read. Most of Luv and Kush's paternal uncles had opted out of farming and taken up middle rung government and private jobs as an occupation.

Luv and Kush's mother had graduated in her favourite subject 'Political Science' and had been a bright student of her time. She remains a jovial and engaging woman with a strong personality. She too came from a large joint family with huge landholding. Unlike their paternal side, Luv and Kush's maternal side had been more successful with their land produce and had a thriving business. Those of whom, on the maternal side, who had a lower income job always had the backing of the family property and support from their richer relatives. A sense of belongingness, mutual understanding, and regard for all members of the family, including good manners and prioritising family well-being were some of the important values she professed and taught her children the value of the same.

Luv, Kush and their elder sister thus grew up having a healthy social life with widespread roots; their relatives were settled outside the state and the country, and yet remained in close contact with each other. Besides this, the children's feelings of belongingness and family pride stretched over time to past prosperity and achievements overshadowing any story of struggle or misfortune of the present. This also presented the family with a complication that was sensitively handled by the parents. Their immediate family had scarce resources and yet had to stand up to a high status. This demanded not only a great sense of financial management but also emotional wisdom and social skills. Both their parents encouraged the children to reflect on every situation from different perspectives - from the specific point of view of different people involved in the situation and make a kind of 'cause' and 'impact' analysis of their conduct in a given situation. The children were always encouraged to focus on higher principles in life. Self-respect, mutual regard, emotional decorum, dignity in behaviour, dependability, foresight, patience, and proactiveness - all such virtues were carefully instilled in the children. Thus the family was known for its higher virtues than for its material possessions.

In the neighbourhood as a whole, the family was fairly well-connected and well-known. The children had made many friends and liked to visit their neighbours, unlike most of the other houses which tended to keep to themselves. In the Luv and Kush family setting, children were allowed to pursue their little joys and engagements and encouraged to take part in various activities. The children had a space to express their opinion and choices.

However, most parents negotiated the overall circumstance carefully, keeping in mind various family resources and standards. In fact, during my fieldwork, these negotiations took an acute form when one of the twins (Luv, in this instance) expressed his wish to pursue humanities instead of sciences as a future college career and much later when their elder sister wanted to take up a private job in a location outside the city. The family as a whole enjoyed the space to reject one another's suggestions in such matters, thus prolonging the negotiations for weeks and reaching a midway for an agreement which seemed long drawn and observably stressful. In such times, the family chose to act with restraint instead of giving in to quarrels and altercations. Tussles, if any, were kept aside from other normal functioning of the family's internal and social life.

Luv and Kush, as already mentioned, are twins, and were studying in the 9th standard when I started working with them, though my fuller engagements with them was carried out when they had entered their 10th standard. They both studied together, and were mostly to be found in the front extended room of their house. This room is a small 8 feet by 10 feet sized one, pale green, cement floored and a low-roofed structure with a single shallow column of shelves in the wall; two doors and two windows opened each on the one side to the front garden and on the other side to the inner room. The room was covered by two large racks, a sturdy comfortable sofa set accompanied by a sizeable centre table and a standing fan in summer. The shelves and racks were stacked with boxes and books alongside a few decorative pieces on the upper shelf. The home as a whole bore a few basic items of furniture like cots, almirah (steel wardrobe), computer desk, and dressing table. In order to save space, they had no dining table. There were few modern gadgets, with traditional kitchen wares. There was hardly any decoration, save a few family photos, and the puja shelf which the children took great care to decorate with various flowers. The house, however, was tidy and clean all the time. The house wall and flooring still bore a patchy damp look, unlike the neighbouring quarters. Even though the government had opened a provision for renovating the quarters flooring and walls with tiles, an opportunity which their neighbours were hastily availing, the Luv and Kush family had stalled the work keeping in view their impending exams; both the boys were to appear for their 10th board examination and their elder sister had her final year semester examination. The sofa set with its table was Luv and Kush's fixed study area

where they both did combined study, and sometimes their sister joined them with her books. Both of the boys were enrolled in a low-cost private Odia medium school which had several branches in the city and well-known for its students' performance. They also attended private tuitions conducted in the homes of school teachers and retired college professors close to their house.

Between their school hours, tuitions and homework, the boys got little free time to spare with their families, and noticeably they lamented this lack. All the same, the boys had regular duties delegated to them at home, like cleaning their and their father's wardrobe which stacked clothes, keeping the book racks intact, tending the garden with their sister, small repair works in their house, cleaning all vehicles and the like. They were also encouraged to take part in various neighbourhood and school events like being part of committees at school and volunteering for services at the neighbourhood during festivals. Their elder sister who had to spend long hours traveling to college, preparing for the end-semester exam and placements did her best to find out time to join her brothers and mother in sharing the chores. Each member in the house including their father was responsible for cleaning certain portions of the house as they had no hired help. Their mother, however, took full charge of the kitchen and made sure there were fresh meals four times a day. I often arrived in their house to find her waiting for her children and husband, as all of them had different timings depending on their school, college and office times. She had a habit of not eating until everyone else was fed, which meant she often had a heavy breakfast and waited for her family to gather around tea-time when she had her lunch. Her sons joined in, preferring a heavy afternoon meal because of the light tiffin in school. Her husband and daughter would stick to light snacks picked from chosen sweetshops of the city. It was during such late afternoon tea-time or the dinner that the family discussed their day's affairs, suggestions and opinions were exchanged and the father rechecked with everyone about their daily routine and to-do lists.

I had first met Luv and Kush's mother in the temple that stood adjacent to their house. I was in the process of taking down notes about my observations in the temple, which was part of my original plan of covering the neighbourhood community life, when Luv and Kush's mother took note of me and came forward to have a chat with me out of curiosity.

In our very first interaction, she expressed her appreciation at my choice to follow higher studies. As our acquaintance grew, she became a confidant with whom I could share my ordeals of traversing the neighbourhood and my challenges in getting to know its people. During one such chat when she learnt that my study was dependent on getting access to children and having open conversations with them, she instantly invited me to her home saying, “I have two very good children. You will not find such obedient boys anywhere (*Mora duita bhari bhala pilaa achanti. Emiti katha maniba pua duita tu aaau kauthi paibuni*). They will answer all the questions you want. Come and ask whatever you want to know”. This was rather surprising for me at that moment, for I had not succeeded in receiving such a frank and instant welcome into other homes where parents were constantly worried about their children’s tuitions and study time, making me feel much guarded in approaching them for the purposes of my study. Thus I came face to face with the twin boys, Luv and Kush. My first meeting with the boys was not only sudden but also quite revealing. The boys were quite aware of Ph.D. and research work as some of their cousins were also pursuing similar endeavours and had some idea about my requirements. They waited patiently for me to ask them questions, but I had no ready interview schedule. I shared with them my trouble of not knowing much about current children life to decide what and how to ask. They agreed to introduce me to their friends that would help in familiarising me with children and their day-to-day activities and thoughts.

The reason I decided to weave the twins into the structure of my thesis was because, firstly, they helped me proceed with my research and stayed with me through till the end and, secondly, their family presented a case of remarkable past legacies, current achievements, a strong familial bond, and a certain decorum and stability even in the face of difficulties. Thus, when Luv and Kush branded their family as the ‘perfect family’, I wanted to understand what made it ‘perfect’, the absence of frictions or the presence of other values that were important for the children in their idea of a family, the weight specifically of some ‘moral sentiments’.

MANTU’S FAMILY

Mantu is the child (8-9 years) that I spent the longest time with, not only in terms of the fact that I have kept going back to his house over the years but also in terms of long hours I got to spend with him. Literally speaking, his parents let open their doors for me, and I was allowed to go in at any hour, from the front gate and sometimes jumping over the backside boundary wall. This house is a few of the single-storied, utterly neglected buildings of S1, which has not seen any renovation or repair over decades. Despite the dark watermarks all over the walls and rusted grills, the house stood strong because of its superior built quality. It was a house with four bedrooms and a long hall in the middle. Mantu and his parents occupied three of the rooms, while the fourth room was locked out of the main house and put on rent. Two rooms of the outhouse which stood on the corner of their long backyard had also been put on rent. A few aged but sturdy trees dotted the backyard and the side of the house. A narrow long patch of green covered the front of the house where Mantu's mother had planted a few flowering bushes and climbers. Mantu was especially fond of the lush green garden on his mother's patch of space which he liked to show all guests.

The house featured furniture and kitchen wares of a bygone generation, all of which were in immediate need of replacement and repair. These completely mismatched with the new slick digital devices and gadgets that Mantu's father had acquired for the house with some fervour. For Mantu's father, hobbies and interests in life held greater value than immediate practical needs. He was a graduate and worked as an insurance agent for private banks. He also managed the agricultural land and other village properties, which were given on lease to people in their village. Mantu's father was the youngest amongst his four siblings, all of whom were well settled in different parts of the state. Mantu's father at a young age had begun his career with an NGO, which had given him an opportunity to travel across the country exploring its different regions. Though he had enjoyed his time traveling, his father (Mantu's grandfather), who had a dislike for the wandering NGO job, had called him back to stay at home taking up a job nearby. Upon this insistence, Mantu's father had returned and stayed with his parents looking after them and nursing them till their very end. However, Mantu's father never took up a permanent job again. After the demise of Mantu's grandparents, Mantu's father had inherited the house in which Mantu continued to live with his parents when I started

visiting him/them. Mantu's paternal grandfather was an Odia Administrative Service (OAS) officer, and had retired as a promoted IAS officer. He had held many influential jobs in the state government and was well known to people in the community for his helpful nature. Mantu's family continued to live under the past glory and often remembered the prestige and fame they had enjoyed during the lifetime of Mantu's grandfather.

Mantu's mother came from a much humbler background with her brothers owning petty shops in the adjacent city. She had been a bright student since her school days and was one of the first in her family to go to university. She held a post-graduation degree in history, and harboured a wish to be able to go out and join a job as her other university friends. Mantu's mother was a spirited plump little woman who was an extremely friendly, open-minded and hard-working person. She and Mantu's father had great dreams for Mantu, often inspiring the latter with his grandfather's stories.

The family lived modestly and had little to depend upon. On his paternal side, Mantu's family was fraught with conflict. Mantu's eldest paternal uncle was a doctor who was settled in north Odisha with his wife, who was also a doctor, and their only son lived abroad. They had completely removed themselves from the family circle and rarely contacted Mantu's parents or any other relatives. Mantu's paternal aunts were married into decent houses with husbands working in reputed jobs. However, both the aunts had retained their say and authority in matters related to Mantu's family right from his grandfather's time. After the demise of Mantu's grandparents, the sisters had started demanding their share in the family house which Mantu's father had inherited. They pursued their claim aggressively, sometimes forcing their way into the compound. Mantu's father, being the youngest of them all, found it hard to contradict them. This had led to an open confrontation between Mantu's mother and his paternal aunts, which had escalated into threats and attacks on Mantu's maternal uncles as well as harassment of Mantu's mother.

Mantu's father spent most of his time at home, rarely going out. He did not allow his wife or son to mingle with strangers out of fear of his sisters' threats. His own image as

someone who did not have a regular job, and his experience of being slighted by people who were once friendly to him when his father was alive, had created unease in him in opening up to new acquaintances. However, to close friends, he was an ever welcoming and hearty host, open to conversations. He spoke to me elaborately about my job avenues and his travels. He liked to share his opinion on various cultures and different lifestyles. Mantu's father had not been able to take up any regular jobs as most of the offers that he had were considered beneath their status by his father (Mantu's grandfather, therefore) who had a Grade I officer's job in the higher echelons of the state bureaucracy. Mantu's father was quite observant of Mantu's behaviour; he prioritised good conduct and proper development of attitudes in Mantu. He insisted on the latter being respectful to people and up-to-date with new ideas and information. He also had a habit of openly criticising Mantu's mistakes, often enjoying his son's discomfort. However, there was hardly any dogmatic insistence on his part for discipline-building or taking up of responsibility by Mantu. Mantu being the only child mostly got away with his sulks and mood swings to which his father was particularly sensitive.

Mantu's mother was quite vocal about her husband's complete indifference to 'urgent' (*atijaruri*) as well as 'mundane everyday' (*sabudiniya*) matters in home affairs. She took full charge of the cooking and cleaning of the house, attended to minor repair works needed in the house, supervised Mantu's homework and ran the errands. She also regularly complained about Mantu's dependency on her for his self-care and studies. However, she, following her husband, was hesitant in assigning any task to Mantu for fear of stressing him out. She was particular about Mantu finishing his homework and study revisions in time and keeping up his exam scores and did her best in tutoring him. Mantu, however, would keep finding ways of dodging his studies, upon which he would be frequently taken to task by his father.

The family's relation with neighbours seemed to reflect the remnants and complications of their past family life. The neighbouring houses had all grown in size with added rooms and floors and sometimes had undergone a complete makeover. Families that were once friendly with Mantu's parents had either shifted or had changed in their composition and culture so much that they 'almost felt like strangers' to each other. On the sides of their

houses, the neighbours had undertaken an extension of their home to make space for renting out rooms. This had given rise to some boundary issues between Mantu's family and them. In the house across the street, facing Mantu's home, the sons had pulled down the entire building and built a mini-apartment in its place confining their widowed mother to one floor. To this house, Mantu's mother had some access spending time with the old widowed lady, while the new daughters-in-law maintained a respectful distance. Thus, over the period, Mantu's family had lost touch with their neighbours, living a life mostly aloof of them. This was a point of constant lament for Mantu's father who had seen the neighbourhood since his youthful days.

Mantu was a highly sensitive and affectionate child. He would often be caught between his parents' arguments and also bear witness to his aunt's interference. Yet, he lived peacefully with the impression that his parents were present to fulfil his slightest wish and do his work for him. In addition, his aunt's and their children's affection for Mantu remained unaffected even though they had entered into a bitter relation with his mother and father. They continued to visit on Mantu's birthday and other ritual occasions like *Rakhi (Raksha Bandhan)* and *Durga Puja (Dussehra)*. Mantu's parents also extended similar courtesy to the aunt's children. Mantu had just passed his third standard and about to start his year in standard 4 when I started interactions with him, though I had known him for some time by then. He studied in a low-cost missionary school close to the neighbourhood. The school had once been a popular one but had lost its standing gradually with the coming up of numerous private English medium schools. Mantu was much liked by his teachers for his calm and happy manners and received many praises from them for his reading habits (which his parents also were proud to share with me). Mantu had a great interest in reading especially science fiction, animal world books, and travel stories. He dreamt of becoming a scientist like one of his elder cousins and took inspiration from various geniuses whose stories he had read.

Mantu, however, disliked studying school subjects and considered it as a punishment. He only opened his school books when forced by his parents. The latter had decided to not send him for tuition classes until he entered his middle school. So, at home, Mantu was helped by his mother in finishing his homework and studying for exams. Mantu,

despite being a good reader, was a careless writer, which made his exam scores inconsistent, causing much anxiety to his mother. Many times his parents urged me to work with him on his studies, which I did for some time but gradually withdrew from it. Helping Mantu with studies created many complications for my own studies, as it were. He started feeling conscious in front of me as I had to continuously engage in evaluating his homework.

I decided to engage more fully with Mantu because his family presented a mixture of a past legacy of reputation and current struggle where the family lacked any support from their closest relatives. While surveying the neighbourhood in my initial months, I had seen Mantu loitering around, especially on holidays, all by himself in his house garden. Mantu's mother had interacted with me during my initial survey and had spotted me while I visited different houses. On a few occasions, she had stopped me to have a quick chat enquiring about my purpose of such visits. These chats had gradually grown into friendly meetings, which were mostly short-lived and carried out on the road outside. In the following summer vacation, she invited me for the first time to her house asking me to help her with her son. She pointed out to me that her son Mantu was their only child and was hardly allowed to go out to mingle with other people or relatives, which left him feeling isolated and friendless. I was at that point of time looking out to start my interaction with children from primary classes and Mantu seemed to fit the choice. In addition, I had till then not had a chance to interact with a single child. The reason I decided to persist with Mantu and narrativise his world is because he presented an interesting case of having a highly positive appraisal of his family life and self-image despite an unfolding of struggles in his family environment in terms of finances, relationships and also a fall in his performances at school. It is, I feel, worthy of finding out what additional values a child-like Mantu took into considerations in constructing his family life as meaningful and satisfactory in the face of apparent struggles.

SAMIKSHA AND AKSH

Samiksha and Aksh (aged 14-15 and 10-11 years respectively) lived on the same street where I was staying in the S1 neighbourhood during my fieldwork. They lived in a house built by their paternal grandfather. They occupied the ground floor along with their

parents. Their father had added a few more rooms on the first floor which had been let out on rent. Samiksha and Aksh's house was always well maintained, clean and crowded with guests. The front low boundary had two gates, one rather big which opened to a spacious parking shed with a staircase at the rear that was used by the renters and another smaller gate which was used by the family to access the ground floor rooms. A narrow grilled veranda, which remained forever locked, opened on its side to a drawing-room which was covered by an old high bed and few new chairs of plastic and wood. A spongy long sofa set and a sunmica laminated wooden dining table set were placed in the elongated living area which connected the rest of the inner rooms consisting of two spacious bedrooms, one puja room, one kitchen and an alley leading to the wash area at the rear end. The house still had the old cement floor that looked smooth and shiny owing to regular scrubbing. A spare room stood in the shady backyard which was used by the family during feasts and celebrations.

Samiksha and Aksh shared one of the inner rooms. Their room had minimal furnishing: another traditional poster bed, a contemporary light study table with a soothing study lamp, a sturdy old table to keep various study materials, a few covered shelves and almirahs. A thick mattress lay rolled under the bed. Samiksha and Aksh took turns to sleep on the bed and the mattress on alternative days. While Aksh could be found anywhere in the house studying depending on his mood, Samiksha stuck to her study table in their room. Samiksha was one of the most hard-working, meticulous and perceptive students I had come across during my fieldwork. Aksh, on the other hand, was quite a different child who took less interest in study books and more in other handy works.

Samiksha and Aksh's father was a kind-hearted, happy man who was determined to prepare his children well to cope with the world and its competitive pressures. Their father was the youngest of all siblings with five elder sisters. Their grandfather had worked as a Grade III officer in the state government struggling to meet his family's needs. The extended family had entered into an acute financial strain during their father's youthful days when they had to marry their five daughters in a short span of time. Caught up in the family demands, Samiksha and Aksh's father had faltered in his studies, getting

a delayed management degree from a private institution. Once qualified, he had then gone on to start a private coaching centre in partnership with a friend. He also ran a travel agency with another group of people as a side-business. In the beginning, his business was slow to catch up. However, it had not stopped him from opening his doors to relatives, near and far, to come and stay in his house in time of need.

Samiksha and Aksh's mother who was a graduate was a reserved, cordial and strict lady. She loved to read books and opened up to only a few like-minded people. Her parental family had been a rather small one consisting of her parents and a younger brother who were settled in the adjacent city. They owned a family business of grain trading and other grocery retail which was a common occupation in that area. She urged her children to become self-sufficient and preferred a few pointed words of instruction instead of repeated nagging for disciplining her children. She, along with her husband, made sure that the children developed a sense of discipline in their daily routine and were responsible for taking care of their belongings. Both the children were also adept in treating guests well, even in the absence of their parents. While the mother took care of the kitchen, she was particular that the cleaning and up-keep of the house was distributed across all members. Children were responsible for cleaning their own room and their father took charge of sweeping the front yard and back yard, cleaning the vehicles, and if needed share the chores at home especially when there were guests.

All of Samiksha's paternal aunts were married in the same city and remained in close touch in the family. Weekends in this family felt almost like a party time as their aunts along with their families visited them to spend time together. Alternatively, Samiksha and Aksh with their parents went to visit one of the aunt's houses. There was visible warmth and intimacy among the relatives. As Samiksha once fervently commented, "They love us like their own children". Being the youngest among all the cousins, Samiksha and Aksh got special favours and accolades. Almost all of their paternal uncles held decent jobs in government and semi-government departments as Grade II and III officers. Disputes and altercations were rare. In such times when someone was disappointed or upset with others, then the relatives gathered around the person doing their best to cheer them up. The children though aware of the situation were not

encouraged to either get involved or to take sides; nor did the adults say things of any lasting impact. Children education was given the utmost priority in the family and among their relatives; it was seen to be their most promising investment. Samiksha and Aksh's elder cousins had opted for higher studies whether in terms of research, management or engineering, and a few of them had already taken up jobs in reputed corporations inside and outside India. This boosted the younger one's hopes and aspirations. In the absence of past family legacies and inheritance, this close bonding among the relatives and the successes of the next generation acted as a safety valve during difficult times of the members.

Samiksha and Aksh's family had been one of the oldest residents of the neighbourhood; in fact, their father had grown up in the neighbourhood. Yet their contact with the residents of the area was limited. The family socialised more with its close relatives. Some of the older neighbours who knew the family recalled that when Samiksha and Aksh were toddlers, they sometimes strayed into their houses and spent time there. But this had become rare with the change in the public nature of the neighbourhood which had seen unprecedented growth in commercial activities and traffic, forcing the residents to withdraw into their premises. Also, in the process of expansion of their house, Samiksha and Aksh's father had entered into arguments with the neighbouring plots, embittering their relations with the neighbourhood.

Samiksha and Aksh studied in one of the reputed private English medium schools. Samiksha was in her 8th standard and Aksh in standard 4 when I started going to their house, and they had been promoted a notch higher by the time I started working with them. Samiksha was a topper in her school and took her studies with utmost seriousness. Though her parents had found her a couple of tuition teachers, she preferred to study on her own as she did not find them up to the mark. She was a deep thinker often asking doubts beyond her age and a voracious reader. Aksh, on the other hand, was a curious boy with a temperament more oriented to doing things than sitting down to study. Both the children also had a lively social life, often spent in the company of their cousins and elder relatives. Even as their parents were particular about study routine and discipline, they put equal emphasis on the children being available for family time and larger social

occasions. Children were encouraged to be hospitable, attend guests, make friends and go out on trips and visits. Their father encouraged them to acquaint with people of all walks of life and take suggestions on matters of education and career. In the company of their elder cousins, the children had amassed a lot of knowledge about the outside world; they were up to date about various new products, markets, current affairs, different institutions and offices, and about new streams of higher education.

I first came in contact with the family through a common acquaintance (my father's colleague) and the family immediately warmed up towards me. More than my research they were interested in making inquiries about my family and relatives. During my first visit, I had a chance to meet Samiksha and her mother, as her father and brother were away from home. One of their distant relatives from the village was visiting them at that time. Samiksha's mother sat down to have a chat with me, while Samiksha turned out to be a very shy and quiet person. It was hard to get a response from her. However, I found her pretty prompt; she went inside and prepared a few refreshments for me without any help or instructions from her mother. When I expressed my surprise over this, her mother informed me that she had learnt all these from her elder cousins. During my interaction, when I learnt about Samiksha's fancy for reading books, I promised to lend her some of my books, which I did after a few days.

Few months following that I got an unexpected visit from Samiksha and her mother. They had come to return the books. Thus our communications started around our common interest of book reading; our book exchanges and conversation on it continued and Samiksha's mother too got involved in it. Almost about a year later, when I had gone to wish the family on a festive occasion, the father had a talk with me and asked if I could spend some time with his children helping them with their studies and on other useful things they should know. I reluctantly agreed as I had already started working in other houses at that time. However, my interactions with Samiksha ended up being quite elaborate and reflective. She opened up to me about her school situation, study ordeals, her affection for her family and relatives, and her views about her friends. In her talks, I got a rich account of children everyday life that I intended to explore and most of the time the sharing came without much ceremony or ado. I decided to include Samiksha

and Aksh in my study seeing the family's high priority on studies as well as its vibrant social life, both of which were managed by the children willingly on a daily basis. Though Aksh showed little interest in sitting down with school books, his interest in more practical and technical aspects of things was very sharp, which he followed with a competitive spirit influenced and guided by his elder cousins.

ATMAN

Atman (15-16 years old) lived on the top floor of a bungalow house which had been built by his late paternal grandfather. Atman's father ran a heavy vehicle spare parts retail store downstairs. His mother was a homemaker, and his only sister was posted outside the city in a multinational corporation. Atman's family had shifted into the neighbourhood a few years back, before which they had lived mostly out of the state. The family had lived in different cities of the country because of his father's frequent transfers. However, following certain health issues, his father had to resign from his job and look for something more settled and steady. Around this time, Atman's paternal grandfather's sudden demise brought the entire family back to their hometown. Being the elder son, the responsibility to look after his widowed mother, who at that time was residing in their native village with her husband, came upon Atman's father. Thus, their city house was renovated, and Atman's family along with his grandmother shifted into the neighbourhood.

Atman's house, though old and under constant renovations, was a beautiful city house with a big spacious balcony in the front, three large and well-ventilated rooms with many doors, a long glass-windowed dining space opening up to a short open terrace decorated with flower pots, a separate storeroom, bunker room and a small full shelved puja room built by his grandfather for his wife who spent long hours in her daily worships. The house wore a look of fresh paint and new curtains when I first visited it because of the series of renovations that the premises had undergone. Atman's father also owned a separate two-storied building to the north in the city, which had been let out on rent.

Atman's father was a busy person. He had a new business and many relatives to attend. He ran his office downstairs and made frequent visits upstairs, but remained mostly

preoccupied with his work. This spared him a chance for short and hurried interactions with his family. He was particular about his children's exam scores and school attendance, but hardly got the time to keep a check on their studies on a daily basis. Atman's father was the fourth among five siblings, with three elder sisters before him and one younger brother. He had worked as a regional head of marketing in the automobile industry before choosing to start his own retail store. All of his siblings were well settled. All his elder sisters were married into educated families; their children had studied in some of the topmost institutes of the country and were well established inside and outside the country. A younger brother, who owned a small business in electrical goods, was settled in Delhi, with his children studying in school there. Atman's paternal grandfather had worked as a Grade I officer for the state government and his grandmother had completed her school education. Atman's family was still in touch with all his grandfather's siblings and their families, most of them quite well placed in life. However, as Atman had spent his initial childhood away from most of the relatives, he was very gradually picking up the stories of his family history and his wider relatives.

Atman's mother was a graduate, and confessed openly to her dislike for studies as a child. Her father had worked as a Grade II government officer, and her brother was in the state administrative services. She had two sisters, one of whom was well settled and the other was divorced. Most of her siblings' children were either in school or in college, and one was just starting out on an engineering job. Atman's mother is an active lady with many friends, kitty groups and loved to socialise. At home though, it came to her to run many errands, considering that her husband was overseeing a new business. She also took an active role in the business and filled in for her husband during his absence. In addition to it, she had to devote equal attention to her parents who were in the same city. Thus, during my visits, I often found her away from the house, which left me to chat with the grandmother and Atman during his free time. When at home, Atman's mother loved to chat, giving me vivid details about her views and opinion on various affairs of the home and about her ordeals in managing multiple issues daily. She was very particular about getting her children all possible opportunities and facilities in life. She however hardly made any stringent demands on her children in education or discipline, and let them spend the day their way. She was more anxious about them not feeling deprived or left

behind in life, and especially worrying about their health and daily well-being, even as she went about her socialising ways.

The free-wheeling living style was reflected in Atman's family habits. Each member moved about freely according to their plan for the day without so much consulting one another's plans. The mother kept an overall update of everyone's whereabouts and coordinated the household activities accordingly. Atman accordingly grew up with a sense of freedom and self-choice in developing his interests and habits. He did not follow any given routine or discipline, and rather followed the tide of events at any given day. Atman disliked studying, preferring to mug up tuition notes for his exams. As long as his elder sister was at home, I was told, she helped him out with school projects and homework. But after she left to take up employment in an MNC outside the city, it had come upon Atman's parents to run around for him. However, recently he had developed a closed circle of friends and chose to share his work with them. Despite these tendencies, both Atman and his sister shared a deep sense of responsibility given the family situation they found themselves in. Their father's health condition limited his scope to have a full-fledged job or a successful business. Heavy loans and constant high expenses had made their financial situation precarious despite their property holdings. While this kept their father constantly tensed about the future of his family, their mother chose to focus on arranging funds for one payment at a time. The grandmother did her best to help the family with her husband's pension that she received, but it was not enough to cover the family spending. Both the children felt and shared this burden implicitly, trying to show their support for their father in times of need and participating in their mother's big plans for getting things done. Atman's sister, following her mother's insistence, had joined a reputed high-cost engineering college struggling to keep up with its intensive coursework and, having worked hard, secured a decent placement in the software industry. This had brought much relief to the family. Atman, on the other hand, was extremely free-spirited with little interest in studies, choosing to stand strong beside his parents at moments of emergency like aiding in supervising the house renovations, assisting his father in business, looking after his parents and grandmother when not well.

Atman's grandmother is an extremely well-read person, and knew much about the history and current affairs of the state, country and even the world. She took great pride in her father's role in the freedom movement and identified herself as a '*Gandhivadi*'. She lived an austere self-reliant life without depending on her children for her finances. She followed a great deal of discipline in her routine and was at constant work, from daybreak to nightfall. She had a monopoly on their small but blooming garden, growing various vegetable and fruit plants. She assisted in the kitchen duties and upkeep of the house; and, in the absence of Atman's mother, she took full charge as a substitute. She also had strong opinions and advice to share, which often led to arguments in the house. She openly expressed her dislike for the family's overall lack of discipline, complete neglect of health and the extravagant lifestyle. Sometimes these quarrels would spread over to involve the wider relatives on both sides who were pushed to take positions breeding misunderstanding and distrust. Children got caught up in these as well and were allowed to have their independent opinions on the issues. Nevertheless, the family, relatives, and the children had the sense to keep these differences and bitterness aside in times of celebrations and difficulty, each showing a readiness to participate and assist.

Even as Atman lived in close contact with his relatives, many of whom were settled in the same city and cherished his time with cousins, he seemed to be equally involved in his school life and friend circles. He studied in one of the oldest reputed schools of the city which taught the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) syllabus and took private home tuitions for all his subjects. Atman was in his 9th standard when I started to know his family, and it took me a few more months before I could consolidate my engagement with him. Though not an erudite student, Atman was known for his gravity and ready-to-help nature in school. He was a sports champion and a forerunner in the science project exhibitions. He had a close group of friends with whom he did most of his school activities and along with them professed strong opinions about the school culture, teacher-attitude, and children behaviour. The family engagement with the neighbourhood was rare, as most of the houses and their families were new to them. It was also affected by the shadow of a full house burglary and life threat that the family had suffered in a previous city carried out by a notorious gang. The mother thus had

developed a habit of double-locking the house and often panicked at the thought of her children being left out alone with strangers.

I came to know of this family through their grandmother, with whom I had long chats on the street even before entering the house or knowing the rest of the families in the neighbourhood. The grandmother had a reverence for higher education, especially those engaged in social sciences and social work which she saw as real service for the nation. Also, one of her grandsons was in the last phase of his Ph.D., and she therefore had many curious questions about the nature and rigour of this program to be able to figure out her grandson's situation. When I gradually came in contact with the family, I had expressed a wish to engage with Atman. His parents were casually curious, even rather amused at the thought of their son being interviewed. His father had joked, "He has nothing in his head. What you will find?". Atman, on the other hand, opened up as he found someone to talk about his childhood memories, teenage impressions and various school issues which he never got a chance to speak at home once his elder sister had moved out.

I approached the family for my intensive fieldwork and decided to retain our interactions for my narrative rendering, especially because of their seemingly individualistic style of living, the openness to reject one another's opinion and concerns, and the freedom of disobedience available to the children. I was intrigued by the sentiments of 'family-feeling' and 'pride' as well as the acknowledgment of the strong bond that Atman candidly expressed in his chatter and observations. I particularly wanted to understand the modes by which he connected with his family and his wider relatives who had a prominent presence in his everyday life.

SANIA

Sania (12-13 years old) lived on the top floor of one of the government quarter blocks. Her home was known for its beautiful decorations, although the house, as any other government quarter in the area, was small in size and crammed; in Sania's words, "so congested" (*Rundha rundhi*). But her mother had organised the house rather comfortably, and kept it spick and span. They had heavy and beautiful curtains. Each room had extra lights giving the house a bright look. In the small dining space, she had

placed a cosy cushioned sofa set and covered the floor with a beautiful carpet. A small round glass dining table had been set up in the bedroom facing the balcony, where Sania's father had his meals. Besides this, the room had a comfortable double bed, a few more light cupboards, a multipurpose dressing table, and a large fridge. The front room of the house had been allotted to Sania. It had a sturdy double bed, a couple of steel almirahs, and a big modern built light computer table which served as Sania's study table. On this table were neatly lined up all of Sania's school books and a desktop that she monopolised.

Sania's father was an extremely shy and soft-spoken person. He was an affectionate father and always eager to fulfil each of his daughters' every little wish. He held his daughters – two in all, including Sania, the elder among the two - as his pride and prayed for their happy future daily. Especially for Sania, he had great hopes and wished her to become an I.A.S officer, an aspiration which, on her part, Sania held close to her heart and was determined to achieve. Her father worked as a Grade III officer in the state secretariat. His father and their two brothers' families had lived together as a joint-family in the adjacent city. However, after the demise of his father and his elder brother, the families had separated, although still living close by. Sania's grandfather had built his own separate house in that adjacent city, where her grandmother resided when not staying with them. Sania's father was the eldest son of the family and had another younger male cousin; the rest of his cousins were female. His own younger sister was married and her husband worked in the state police.

Sania's mother was known for her beauty, hard work and many good qualities. She was a graduate and devoted her time to taking care of her family. Her father also belonged to the same city as her husband's, and had retired as a Grade III government official. Her two brothers separately ran their own small scale business in their native city. Sania's mother had a keen interest in education, which she had to forego owing to her early marriage and a heavy workload at her in-law's house. Thus she was determined to give her daughters the best possible education and opportunities to pursue their career goals. From the very beginning of Sania's schooling, her mother kept a close eye on her performance and devoted considerable time helping her revise and prepare for exams.

She and her husband granted much freedom to their daughters and allowed them a space to put forth their demands, express their likes and dislikes and voice their views.

Sania's grandmother spent a good part of the year staying with them. During that time, Sania shared her room with her grandmother. She was a god-fearing, frank and simple lady who expected her family to follow family traditions and customs. This led to much bickering between Sania and her grandmother. She complained about Sania's growing demands and lack of empathy for her parent's troubles. Sania, on the other hand, expected her grandmother to share her excitement about the modern world, its discoveries, the ebb and flow of current affairs and acknowledge her performances in school. She disliked her grandmother's constant goading about 'good old days' and what she (Sania) thought as 'blind beliefs'. Sania's parents kept a calculated distance from the arguments between Sania and her grandmother hoping for both of them to strike a peace.

During my fieldwork, Sania and her family were experiencing a situation of family discord and tension. Sania's paternal aunt had started creating a misunderstanding between Sania's grandmother and her parents. Her aunt's family had further accused Sania's father of the misuse of family property. Sania's grandfather's elder brother had been a professor, but the rest of the family members had not pursued higher studies. Most of Sania's paternal uncles were placed in middle rung posts in government and private enterprises or ran small businesses. Sania's cousins, like Sania herself, were however encouraged to excel in their education, and her elder cousins were increasingly choosing to study engineering and management. However, the family feud added to Sania's family's worries for their prospects and children's settlements and they found themselves unable to rejoice in their relative's successes.

Sania studied in a low-cost missionary school following the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) syllabus and was visibly one of their best students. Sania took private home tuitions. She was in the 8th standard when I started interacting with her. Sania was an extremely sincere student and took pride in her school activities. Her friend circle consisted of the high performers and she was known for her good conduct

and discipline. Sania had a toddler sister, Sara, who hardly left Sania's side when at home. Sania was a strict elder sister constantly disciplining the younger one. The family had friendly relations with their neighbours. While Sania's mother and Sara liked to visit the neighbours and have a chat with them in the evenings, Sania and her father chose to stay indoors. Sania was very reserved and liked to spend her time watching videos on the computer, doing sketches or sitting by the window watching the street below.

I first met Sania in a children feast organised in the government quarter. There I was introduced to Sania's family by the host, who recommended me to study the family as they had many struggles. Sania's mother was fascinated to know about my study and work experiences, although she was quite hesitant about being part of the research. In her words, "I am not well educated; how am I going to help you?" She was also doubtful that Sania's tight schedule and reserved personality might not be supportive of my study. She instead volunteered to answer on behalf of Sania to help me in my work. I started visiting them in the evening hours and spent long hours chatting with Sania's mother and grandmother at the dining space as Sania took tuitions in the front room. Sania's grandmother instantly opened up to me sharing her troubles and worries regarding her son's family. Sania's mother heard this with attention and amusement, and shared her worries about Sania's future and development. She despaired at Sania's quiet and reserved nature. "She is sincere. But she is so quiet, never shares anything. I am worried what is going in her head?" At times during my visits, Sania was privy to these interactions, but showed no reaction. One holiday, in front of everyone, I casually asked Sania about her views on what her mother and grandmother had shared. She briefly replied expressing her clear assessment of the family situations and her role in it. Following this, Sania's mother encouraged her to spend time with me, and I was able to engage more fully with Sania. I decided to retain this family in my overall work as it throws light on Sania's thoughtful acceptance and strategic actions in accommodating the complicated family relations, while retaining feelings of family attachment along with an active pride and confidence in her personal achievements as an ideal student.

VINAYAK

Vinayak (aged 7-8 years) was the youngest of the children I had systematically interacted with. Going by his age, he was much hyperactive than any other children I had worked with. It required a great deal of energy on my part to keep up with him. Vinayak's family was very comfortably placed financially. He lived in a double storied house that was partitioned into many sections. On the ground floor lived his grandparents, and upstairs to the right side, Vinayak and his mother occupied a small partition consisting of a long dining-cum-kitchen hall and two rooms with a small grilled balcony. The left side and backside of the first floor were let out on rent.

Vinayak spent equal time with his grandparents and his mother; they maintained separate kitchens. The ground floor had many rooms which were strewn with articles like medicines and medical equipment, books and old files, piles of paper, tool-kits, electrical wares, unused household goods, old souvenirs, and unopened gifts. Both of Vinayak's grandparents suffered from various health problems requiring constant medication. Upstairs, Vinayak and his mother occupied a smaller portion of the house which was rather stuffy and unbearably hot in the summer. The long dining hall was lined up with locked steel almirahs and glass cupboards and showcases filled with dresses, books, study materials, and other usable items; a large dining table was placed near the kitchen. The open kitchen had a few shelves and a fridge. The front room was used to entertain guests; it had two large almirahs, an old sofa set and a desktop table for the computer that Vinayak used. This room opened to a small balcony that had been developed into a study room for Vinayak. It had his study table, school books, numerous art and craft materials and a tall bookcase filled with varieties of books. The inner bedroom had a large bed, a rotating dressing-cum-storage cabinet and more almirahs. The house remained in much need of cleaning and tidying up.

Vinayak's father was posted outside the city. He worked as an engineer in the state government. He had two elder sisters and a younger brother, all of whom were highly placed in life. His father had worked as an accounts officer in a reputed telecom company, and his mother had worked as a Grade I officer, being the first lady of the state in her time to join the state finance services. Vinayak's father was a polished, soft-spoken person who was very strict about his son's studies. For her part, Vinayak's

mother was a Grade I officer who was posted in a rural block about 2 hours away from the city. Her long traveling and office hours spared her little time to spend at home with her son. Her late parents had lived a very humble life with little income and a large family to support. She and her elder siblings had struggled to help the younger ones to complete their education. Most of her siblings had gradually acquired decent positions in life. Vinayak's mother constantly worried about her inability to give time to her son and fretted over his increasing 'wayward' behaviour and wilful indiscipline.

Vinayak spent his after school-time with his grandparents, having his lunch with them and watching television. His grandfather checked his school tasks and insisted on him having a look at Vinayak's book, which invariably went unheeded by the latter. In the evening he had his tuition at his grandparent's house and after that he would wait for his mother to arrive. Vinayak's mother spent a few minutes chatting up with her in-laws which were mostly carried out with some cordiality and decorum. Following it, Vinayak and his mother moved upstairs to have their dinner. This time she would use in conversing with Vinayak about his homework, school events and other matters that she felt needed attention. Vinayak's father spent his weekends with the family, which involved a long hour of review of Vinayak's weekly progress and some or the other family outing that had been planned ahead of his arrival.

The relation between Vinayak's family members and other relatives were well acknowledged but guarded. Interactions were seemingly habitual with a somewhat reserved expression of affection or warmth. Vinayak's grandparents and parents maintained certain propriety in their interaction, respecting one another's privacy and individual interests. Everyone strictly maintained a separate routine, diet and engagement patterns following their doctor's instructions and work schedules. Spending time together with the entire family was limited; and, on a few such occasions, the family chose to maintain decorum with one another instead of impulsive exchanges. Vinayak, being an energetic, excitable and emotional child, was continuously encouraged to rein in his reactions and behave in a controlled fashion.

There was some degree of differences that ran across various household matters between the family members, but this was hardly exposed to outsiders nor was it broached directly amongst each other. During casual conversations with me, the individual members briefly opened up about their disappointments, although these were never explicitly mentioned in front of the other members. Especially in the midst of Vinayak, care was taken to not bring up any hint of stress that the family might be going through. Their busy schedules kept them preoccupied outside the home, with less time to pay attention to household affairs. The family's relationship with their neighbours was also limited. As the grandmother said, "No, this is not the kind of place where neighbours have a kind of we-feeling for one another". Though they were known to all the shopkeepers and other servicemen, the family had little time to socialise. Vinayak's grandfather could hardly move out of the house owing to his health problems, while his grandmother remained preoccupied looking after the house and its many demands. Vinayak's mother, on the other hand, liked to chat up with neighbours, go out on a walk with Vinayak or visit the park. She encouraged Vinayak to make friends and spend some time in outdoor activities. However, Vinayak was not fond of visiting people except very close ones.

There was one house in the neighbourhood where Vinayak used to go to play on holidays or summer vacation; the house had a child a few years elder to him. It was here that I came across Vinayak for the first time. I had gone to pay a visit to the family who as usual asked me about my work and its progress. Vinayak was privy to this conversation and had many questions about my work in the form of "Who are you? What do you do with children? What will you do talking to them?" I had happily explained my work to him. At that point, Vinayak had asked me if I would like to study him, and I had casually agreed without realising the sincerity behind his question. A few weeks later to this incident, I again happened to come across Vinayak at his friend's house and he exclaimed, "I had told everyone that you would come but you did not. They were waiting". Vinayak's friend's mother told me that Vinayak's family had been perplexed by Vinayak's constant mention of a researcher coming to study him. Thus I requested her to introduce me to Vinayak's mother.

Vinayak's mother was open to the idea of research and had many questions on sensible parenting. Vinayak's grandparents were happy to know that I had chosen to do a Ph.D. and were supportive of my study, with a condition that I was not going to put them through long hours of interviews given their fragile health. In this house, I got a lot of opportunities to spend long hours with the child without the immediate presence of his family members. Vinayak often led me to his drawing-room upstairs where we spent much time building science projects, arranging his study table and book racks, flipping through the numerous collection of books he had received as gifts and sometimes taking stock of some of his selected toys and gadgets that he was allowed to use. I decided to keep this family for my thesis-writing because of their seemingly compartmentalised style of living and their connection built around Vinayak's needs and requirements. Juggling between their many occupations and requirements, the family did its best to give Vinayak a comfortable living, protecting him from any possible stress, all of which Vinayak was too young to realise and took entirely for granted. Vinayak held on strongly to his family and referred to it as "my favourite place because they are always good to me". For him, "... a family means always good; there is nothing like a bad family". There was a sense of acceptance about the limited time that his parents could spend with him, and he seemed to focus on his time with himself. The family in many ways helped him to cope with the various aspects of their family life gradually by encouraging a sense of equanimity. He had learnt to take the achievements of his family members as well as the struggles of others as simple facts of life without making such distinctions. The same was his reaction to moments of celebration and tensions in day-to-day life. It was important to explore the sentiments and values that Vinayak assigned to his attitudes and reactions in dealing with the everyday situations that made his family life deeply meaningful to him.

By way of closure

Finally, I would like to reiterate that I chose the 6 families keeping in mind the different *situations* of family life that they represented. By 'situation' I mean both what the family in general presented and particularly what the child perceived of and experienced it as such. Undoubtedly, each member in the family experiences the family life and its situations from a different vantage point. In defining the situation I include such factors

like the nature of bonding that the child shared with the family, the presence of a familial legacy as received and nature of its ownership by respective children, the state of relationship between the family and its wider network of relatives, the nature of moral responsibilities that families expected and that children professed, and the idea of a social stability and standing that children derived for themselves from the family situation that they were placed in. Understandably, for the analysis of these situations in children's family life, I propose to use the lens of 'moral sentiments' along the lines indicated in my next chapter.

A Note on the Span of Fieldwork and Personal Integuments

To be sure, fieldwork drew me in. I visited the field many times over an extended period of two and half years, and still it never felt enough to conclude. My fieldwork unfolded in phases depending on the degree of my familiarity with the field, people's acceptance of me in their lives and my access to children. In between, I had to take relatively long breaks which gave me time to reflect on the direction and status of my work. The times when I felt the satisfaction of knowing exactly where I had arrived, and how much more I needed to finish, were rare; needless to say, I was doing something immersive, so deeply ethnographic.

As should be discernible, particularly from our preceding chapters as well as the present one, my own prior ideas and expectations about an ideal field-setting and children's life in it did not match with the reality that I encountered. This meant that I had to change my plans and adapt new strategies from time to time. In this segment, I choose to narrate my wider experiences and engagements with the field as a woman researcher and ethnographer. This will cover the journey that I took in the course of identifying my field setting, being a 'stranger' in the field and being gradually accepted in the circles of its people, to the much-needed attunement and forms of attention demanded by the study and about my own self-realisation in the field environment.

Preliminary visits

A few important points had to be decided right from the very outset of the fieldwork. For one, it was decided that I would go to Odisha for my fieldwork as Odia was my first language. I also decided to do a study in an urban context, as I had already spent much time observing rural children during my work stint while visiting government and alternative schools in various village locations. I now had a curiosity to see how children in the urban setting coped with the fast changing childhood lives. As my broad fieldwork location, therefore, we picked the state capital Bhubaneswar; incidentally, the city where I grew up. To begin with, I spent about a semester (around three months) in the city searching for an appropriate site to observe and study children in a free, informal and everyday setting (preferably in a peer group). I particularly desired to capture those aspects of children's life as found in free, informal and mundane spaces of everyday life. Thus I spent some time exploring such spaces where children were prominent in the city, and visited the following sites: two prominent parks, two children hospital wards (in a government and private hospital setting), an orphanage, a residential school, a prisoners' childcare home, and children in makeshift construction sites.

None of the above settings looked suitable for the requirements I had in mind. With reference to such sites as hospitals and public parks, the throng of children would be very fleeting and short-lived and they mostly came in the company of adults. The other settings such as orphanage, prisoners' childcare home and construction sites, all presented for extreme conditions of childhood, which was not the concern of my study. I spent some time on campus pondering over the issue. At this point, following a suggestion from a senior academician and further recommendations from veteran bureaucrats who were formerly involved in city planning and leading a retired life in a posh neighbourhood of Bhubaneswar, I shifted my attention to various neighbourhood localities in the city. I started speaking to various friends and relatives spread across the city, inquiring about neighbourhood life and the children population in it. The Sripalli (S1) option soon struck me as suitable. This was so because it held the promise of studying children in a mundane leisurely environment, with access to them for a longer period of time so as to sustain an intensive examination. As already specified in an earlier part of this chapter, I had initially chosen a section of the neighbourhood consisting of 180 government quarters resided by Grade III and IV state government employees.

However, following further consultation, I extended the purview of the field area to include the various private plots of the neighbourhood. All the same, the seemingly crowded and lively neighbourhood proved a challenge for my research, as has already been noted.

The stranger

Thus in the summer of 2012, I started doing my initial rounds of the field work. The inner world of the neighbourhood, as repeatedly noted, was ‘overwhelming’ and I panicked starting my fieldwork there. In search of informal groupings of children, I had ended up in a neighbourhood, which was not only well-populated but also about three decades old with many families staying in proximity since its inception. Thus I had assumed that there would be strong and open lively relations between the neighbours. But this was not so, as we described earlier in this chapter. How was one to then approach, access and seek help from the people of the neighbourhood for my research? Evidently, my idea of the neighbourhood as a community stood challenged. How was I to describe this place and its collective life? To add to this, no primary documents were informing me about the profile and compositions of the families staying behind those locked up tall gates. Initially, I could not even gain a sense of the size of the children population and the number of families with children in that neighbourhood. Indeed, as already specified, children could be sighted in streets, parks or shops only for a very short time, and mostly accompanied by parents. I almost found myself in a fix: where was I to start? Where and how could I access children for longer observation and freer interactions? How was I to follow the norm of formality and non-interference maintained by the neighbourhood and yet hope to conduct my study which involved probing into people’s lives?

One additional problem was that the location chosen appeared as an identified sub-area of a larger neighbourhood in the city development plan, which meant that almost all the government statistical data were available in a cluster for the larger neighbourhood area and not for the sub-area. Thus I had to plan for an initial survey of the neighbourhood to find out the houses with children and the profile of the children population. I realised that the neighbourhood was several times more populated than I had imagined, as each private plot had many tenants. During this phase, I also kept returning to campus for

discussing the fieldwork development and think over ways of having access to children groups. I was encouraged to explore the community life of the neighbourhood and generate a strong rapport. This engagement kept me busy until the end of 2012 and early 2013.

I stayed in the neighbourhood, sometimes accompanied by my family and sometimes by myself. My parents had stayed in the neighbourhood for a short while before, but they were in touch with only one family in the private plot. In addition, I knew two of my friend's families in the neighbourhood, one each in the government and private plots. Thus I approached them for help; the two families consisted essentially of the older generation with their children married and settled in other cities. They narrated me the history of their stay in the neighbourhood and how it had changed over time. They further helped in introducing me to their neighbours, but not beyond. The third family, one that my parents had got acquainted with, had two daughters who were in college, and they all showed great interest in my research. They informed me of other families in the same lane with school-going age children, but hesitated in introducing me as they were not well-acquainted with them. So I had little by way of introduction to facilitate my access to these families.

Getting familiar with the larger neighbourhood remained a challenge. In my initial days, I just spent time roaming about the streets, mapping the neighbourhood, taking notes on landmarks and various features. I saw people taking notice of me from the shops, from their balconies and verandas, but no one reacted to my presence. People were too used to varieties of strangers; they remained at the same time watchful as well as out of touch from all strangers. Consequently, to increase my involvement in public, I started following certain public practices of the neighbourhood like taking a morning walk and going to popular snack shops often. Though faces became familiar and people acknowledged my presence with a smile or just a *namaskar* (the folding of hands in greeting), the interactions were rare. Everyone seemed to be in a run from public spaces. Slowly I started talking to people by their house gates and sometimes in the shop. These interactions, however, remained confined to larger issues of the neighbourhood, people's own job and career, household engagements, common acquaintances, etc. These

encounters revealed a very fragmented and even random picture of the neighbourhood. My sense of confusion increased. Moreover, though these interactions gave me a chance to introduce myself as a researcher, these were not giving me any headway in finding my way to children.

Finding one's way in

I then had to think of a few different strategies to deepen my understanding of the neighbourhood, to build rapport with families and to access the children. On the one hand, I identified a few of the earliest settlers of the neighbourhood and sought their appointment to learn about the neighbourhood evolution and its social foundations. My house owner's (*Ghara balla*), since I had rented a place in the neighbourhood, were one of such family. They were an elderly couple who did not have any children, and mostly liked to keep to themselves. Both of them were pretty well known in the neighbourhood, and the fact that I was staying in their premises added a sense of recognition and trust to my identity in the field. My landlord also mentioned about a few early families of the neighbourhood with whom he was still in touch. Thus, very gradually, I started accessing prominent houses of the neighbourhood getting a sense of how it had come into being and how it had evolved over the years. It was during such interactions that I came in touch with the 'Sripalli Resident's Association' (SRA) and its founding/executive members and learnt more about the association's current activities. It was here that I also came to learn about what I have called as the 'old uncle's weekly meet' and the 'aunties' monthly kitty party'. These were casual events and the participating members were a closed group of 15-20 regular participants. They mostly attended these occasions as a form of diversion from their mundane and routinized home life, and also for the purpose of reliving a sort of earlier group life (as we already noted in our foregoing pages).

It was while observing and talking to these people that the divided world of the neighbourhood became prominent to me. The separation between house owners, renters and outhouse occupants, between men and women in different jobs and designation, the factions in the SRA and so on, all came into view. The earlier house owners had been, in a way, the trendsetters and gatekeepers of the neighbourhood; but, as already specified, this was rapidly changing with many houses now having new owners and a growing

numbers of renters coming in from diverse backgrounds and orientations. During my research, many times the owners of the houses restricted my access to the families on rent in the same premise by either not giving me full information or simply stressing that the latter should not be included in the study as they were not ‘permanent residents’ of the neighbourhood. This exclusivist attitude was even sharper in the context of the ‘outhouse’ families who were not considered as a part of the mainstream neighbourhood by the owners. My request to access those families was simply waved off. Thus, I had to find a way to access these families when they were outside their houses and gain their invitation for visiting their homes, even before their owner could have a say.

All the same, in order to have wider access to the neighbourhood, I decided to conduct an enumerative survey simply asking various households about their children profiles and family composition, in the process hoping to be able to get a sense of the families that I could access for more intensive interactions. This too was not easy. It was very difficult to take a prior introduction or appointment with every family that I wanted to meet and speak with for the purposes of the survey. In some houses, people confused me for a salesperson or a management college student doing some internship and wished me away. Most of the houses asked me to come back later when the men returned, restricting my visits only to evening hours. Simultaneously, the men admonished me for moving about in the neighbourhood alone (being a woman/girl) and particularly after sunset. Some residents politely declined to give time. A few professionals in the field even advised me that I should post printed questionnaires as acknowledged by some authorities and not approach the people directly. Some other sympathetic professionals advised me to be patient.

As the days passed and people saw me again and again, they started to open up. But my worries on accessing children remained unsolved. I needed to have elaborate interactions with children to be able to do my research, and I realized that it was impossible for families to expose their children to my presence without deep sense of trust. I turned the question inward, on to my own self: ‘Would I have trusted children of my family interacting so closely with a stranger on their own?’ Obviously not, and I could understand their diffidence. But I could also see that developing the required rapport and

trust with each family was a huge challenge and an imperative. It would pull my fieldwork into a different realm, both in terms of the complexity of data that I would now be required to deal with as well as in terms of the high demand on my energy and endurance levels to sustain and maintain these social relations. Thus, in the beginning, I hesitated and wanted to find some other way out.

In the meanwhile, I had started approaching the private school, tuition and dance classes to see if it was possible to get children of the neighbourhood in groups to kick-start my study right from the autumn of 2012. Some of the days I merely observed and took notes and, on other occasions, I was pulled in to assist the sessions. But then, as it necessarily entailed, the children's time and activities in these spaces were highly monitored and programmed. It was very difficult to even talk to the children beyond 10-15 minutes. Also, many of the students in these sessions were from outside the neighbourhood and from nearby surrounding areas. Having said this, I must acknowledge that my presence in these contexts gained me some credibility in the eyes of the children and parents (who came to drop and receive the children) of the neighbourhood. I also visited the neighbourhood park in the evening and found that the children gatherings there were rather short-lived. I realized that I would have to move into the houses if I had to observe children in an informal setting, have a free-flowing time with children and learn about their lives from them. I was by now struck by the variety of families and people in the neighbourhood. I found it very physically exhausting to reach out to different families individually; and even emotionally stressed in asking people to share their personal space with a stranger (me) whom they otherwise would simply avoid. I wondered about how I could be learning the ways of the field, so as to be able to live in it and converse with its people. I had to wait for people to start believing in my work and my presence. Several months passed in doing all these; and I had to come back to university regularly to take time to update all my field insights and jottings, and rethink my ways in fieldwork.

As is the usual practice of a researcher, I kept visiting the state central library and a few other local research libraries and voluntary organizations to collect literature on local childhood. It was during such visits that I came across the studies on Odia family life and vivid descriptions of children's lives. This to a great extent resonated with my field

experience. I spent the entire spring of 2013 on campus searching up for more literature on ‘familialism’ and Indian Childhood studies. I started to have a clearer sense of the spaces and the presence of my field children and people’s behaviour around children. I also discussed the initial survey results with my supervisor, and it was decided that I should reach out to children inhabiting different household structures, kinship composition, and caste and class location. We drew up a potential list of about 25 such families for my in-depth study of children’s life. However, the plan did not work out as parental trust and a comfortable family environment became the two most crucial factors in my commencing and completing my work with the children.

As already mentioned, in my attempt to search for the various forms of expression of community life in the neighbourhood, I also visited the temples in the area and absorbed the relevant observations. This step paid off unexpectedly. People began to stop by me, and asked various questions about my work. They seemed genuinely curious about the nature of my research. On a festive occasion, a neighbour, to whom I had already talked about my research, exclaimed seeing me taking notes in the temple: “What do you keep writing all the time? About this crowd? This is surprising! Are my words also your data?” As I followed other religious festivals and visited people’s homes on these occasions, my acceptance in the neighbourhood and in some of the families grew stronger. It was during one such early morning field observations at the temple that I got invited to the home of my first set of children informants, Luv and Kush. These twins opened up the world of their thoughts, views, and opinions, all of which became one of the influencing factors in helping me reorient my study further. I will remain indebted to their mother forever.

In another very different circumstance, a couple of months later during the hot summer, I got my access to the next family, that is of Mantu, whose mother had taken note of me while I was doing my initial survey. One day, she invited me to her home, and curiously inquired about my work. She pressed: “I keep seeing you going up and down the road writing something. I saw you going to people’s houses asking questions. What will you do with all these?” When she learnt that I wished to study children, she immediately asked if I could spend some time with her son (Mantu) during the vacation. As it

happened this was the home where I spent maximum time and they included me in their life as a steadfast friend. Gradually then, bit by bit and one by one, families started letting me meet their children.

Once I had access to a set of children, they further introduced me to their friends, neighbours or cousins whom I could study. While doing the rounds of the neighbourhood, besides, I had already made a potential list of families from which I would have liked to access the children. But this did not work out entirely for various reasons. For instance, a family I started interacting with shifted out of the city. In another instance, the mother expected me to be the tuition master of the child and did not appreciate free-talking with the child. The child also did not like this arrangement at all. Whenever I wanted to strike a conversation with the child, the mother insisted on answering on the child's behalf and insisted the child treat me as a teacher and focus on replying to me with 'correct answers'. I realized that building high levels of trust and rapport in order to access children in their homes meant that I had to wait for families to willingly invite me to spend time with them than me approaching and taking appointments and starting the research. This also meant that families needed to have some sense of and adequate concern for the nature of my research and the kind of engagements it could involve with their children. I had to find ways to make it clear that I was not a baby-sitter, a tuition teacher or merely a friendly visitor. In this sense, I would like to emphasise that I was not entirely assuming the conventional role of a 'participant observer' taking up roles entirely as offered by the field in doing my fieldwork. Instead, I continued to be a 'field-researcher' and participated from that capacity; one nevertheless ended up in sharing some rich portions of the lives of my subjects, including oneself, being the human researcher that I was.

By the end of 2013, my work had been going on persistently with 3 families covering 5 children and I had established contacts with 3 more families. By early 2014, I had got a sense of the dominant pattern and themes of the children's life world. I took a couple of breaks to spend some time on campus to review my work and reassess the changing direction of my study following the field inputs. As my fieldwork proceeded, I had to discontinue my work in a few houses because of certain practical reasons, such as the

families shifting out of the location, health issues and mishaps within the family, and even some parents requesting me not to write about certain core issues of their child's family life.

The 'human' researcher and 'qualitative' research ethics

For quite some time, I had no idea if people were opening up to me as a researcher or to a girl next door. This was of great discomfort to me. The neighbourhood was dominantly well-educated; and most of the people knew about Ph.D. programs and research work. But they could not get used to my sustained interest in the very mundane common life which I was observing without any semblance of a 'questionnaire' or 'interview schedule'. Thus, for most of the time, I felt they related to me more as a girl of their neighbourhood who was curious about their lives. This ended me in several errands and odd duties. I was attending the sick, passing on messages, helping in shopping, drafting reports, finding out contacts and information, helping in presentations, but more than often just being there listening to various topics that were often seen as confidential or personal.

This also makes for my ethical concern: how much, of what people told me, was I allowed to use in my work? I thus made a point to take extensive notes in the presence of people so that they knew I was recording all of it. All the time, I moved about with a note copy, which certainly amused and surprised my people. Many times, they wanted to have a look at my copy. Once the temple priest flipped through my notebook and, while giving it back, he asked pointedly: "Will this serve any purpose?" On a few occasions, people expressed their dissatisfaction on listening to my research topic. Once a bureaucrat fervently commented, "What problem will you find here? You should go to slums, small towns ... You should work on real social problems. Otherwise, it is sheer wastage of resources". About 6 months into my fieldwork, people even started asking about my final findings; they would ask me to share my publications, if any, with them. By this time, whenever I went to meet someone or during our conversations, people started reminding me to check with my professors and make sure all questions have been covered before I left, all assuming that it was time for me to wrap up.

This confusion became especially acute when I started working intensively with the children inside their homes and in the midst of the family. I had explained to the parents that I would like to spend time with the child to get a sense of daily routine and habits and to learn about the child's views and opinions on various subjects, such as family, studies, work etc. I had made it very clear that I would like to talk to the child directly. The children looked excited about it; the parents felt amused and asked if I had any questionnaire. In the beginning, clearly, I had to simply hang out getting a sense of children's activities and engagements. During this time, whenever parents found me having a casual chat with the children or found the child showing me his/her toys and storybooks, the parents would assume that I had finished my work for the day and would ask the child to go and play, while urging me to join the adult members. Mothers, to be sure, spent a long time sharing their life stories with me. Following suit, sometimes even grandparents and visiting relatives sought my time and attention.

These were times when I felt as if my research with children was moving to the background. This necessitated that I had to take the lead. I had to gradually increase my direct questions to children. I started making family trees with them and often asked questions about their relatives and parents, besides following up on other things happening in their lives concerning school, classmates, festivals, school work, projects, vacations, their favourite TV programs and sometimes about their squabbles and chastisement. I picked my topics of conversation from the day-to-day happenings or from something that parents and children reported to me while talking about their day. But more than anything, I feel my habit and action of copious notes-taking made people take me seriously as a researcher. I wrote daily, and for long hours. I wrote deep into the night and, if I still could not finish my notes, I sat by the road bench, temples, parks or even in the houses (as I waited for the children) to complete my writing. Regularly, I took a couple of days' break to rethink and plan my work and organize my notes or read up something that might help me. I made sure that I mentioned the same to my field people prior to the breaks. I carved out a visible space for my writing in the fieldwork in the hope that my work would move systematically; however, it also served the dual purpose of making my field people take the research with some formal importance and legitimizing my actions. There is something about 'writing', the discipline and formality

of it, which makes it the ultimate serious, substantial and sustainable action in our social contexts.

Very gradually, I started making sense of children's daily lives within their families and in the neighbourhood, their routines, common practices, conduct, and general beliefs and concerns. Within the home, and inside the physical space of the house, my observation and exposure remained dominated by parent-child interactions, relatives, daily hopes, fears and negotiations, household chores, study and performance, friends, child's behaviour and character, family tensions, future dreams, the neighbourhood at large, and other current affairs. Furthermore, as I became 'acceptable and more closely involved' (*Ota prota bhabe jadita*) in their daily lives, I found myself in a space where I could raise my questions, make inquiries about what I had witnessed, and even participate in the gossip with the family on various events; sometimes, they would even seek my views and advice about worldly matters. Thus I was spending long hours in each house, helping children with projects, playing, watching their favourite animation shows with them, taking them out for errands, placating them if punished, celebrating various family functions and conducting my informal focused conversations on the topics that I needed to. This certainly restricted my time in terms of the number of families that I could substantially engage with.

Even though I remained in touch with different families and other activities of the neighbourhood, it was only in 11 families that I was able to commence my intensive study with children. Out of these, two families moved out and in one family my work discontinued as one of the parents of the child developed certain emergency health conditions. I was thus able to complete my intensive study in about 8 families. In all of these families, I spent about 4 to 6 months each without a break and about a year or more with breaks. The time that I spent with their children was both planned and unplanned. Mostly, I developed a habit of having a brief discussion with parents on how I should time my visit so that it did not disturb the child's studies. Sometimes I dropped in without any notice for a casual chat, especially when another appointment elsewhere got cancelled. There were also occasions when I was invited to join for family celebrations and outings or simply if they had some free time. On a few occasions, I spent the entire

day with the child and the family, but mostly I visited at different hours of the day and stayed on for a few hours. Towards the end, families called me to give company to the child when the latter was left alone at home or wanted to go out for a game. On these occasions, children shared a lot with me about their friends, their mischief, ideas of good and bad, their views on parenting, family and the school environment. I finally wrapped up my fieldwork in the summer of 2015.

As already detailed, in formally enacting the grounds of my research, I have decided to work through 6 families covering 8 school-going age children who could all be placed under the broad ‘middle-class’ category. We have done this keeping in mind the quality and depth of the narratives available and the fullness of the extent to which we were able to capture through the children the world at home.

A little note on my gender

The field was not extraordinarily patriarchal, but my prior experience of being an independent working woman contrasted prominently with the gendered restrictions that I was now placed in the context of my ethnography. To reorient my body language, dressing styles, behaviour and thinking patterns for the latter seemed very demanding. I had to become much more docile than I was or have ever been. It was common to see that men and women maintained a distance in the public life of the neighbourhood. In public events, they seated separately. People spoke to friend’s or neighbour’s spouses with much deference and formality. Often when I went to meet people in their homes, the man would ask his wife to join in the beginning, while later on as the conversation advanced the wife would excuse and go back to her work. I had to adapt to this. I had to maintain a distance from men, talk to the elders with certain obedience, and learn not to strongly put forth my opinion. In the families I intensively worked with, I had to almost behave like an elder daughter and received similar affection, attention, and ‘restrictions’.

Restrictions were put on the time of my visits. As a girl, I was advised not to go alone to people’s houses in noontime or late evening. It cut down my worktime to merely 3-4 hours a day. Anytime beyond 8 p.m. was considered late, and I was very often

admonished "... ma you are like our daughter. We don't want to see you alone on these lanes. Ok". Gradually, as my research intensified and I had to spend more time with different families, which meant that I had to work late and move from house to house on my own, the people then insisted on me coming with an escort. But it was not possible for me to find anyone to accompany me. One night after the children feast when I had to walk home past 10 p.m., the mothers of the children who were hosting the feast asked me to call up someone who could pick me. I told them that it was hardly a matter of 10 minute's walking and I would be fine, but they did not let me go. They gathered up their sons, all of whom were in school, and teamed them up to escort me. When their elder sisters, in colleges, wanted to accompany the team, they were stopped by the mothers. On the way to my home, the boys looked scared, especially when the street dogs started following us. I had to assure them that it was quite safe as few houses had security guards on night duty and I could go on alone, but they denied returning. Once I reached my home, the boys insisted that I locked my doors and only then they would leave, as advised by their mothers.

The incident evoked mixed feelings within me. It was amusing as well as frustrating. I wondered what it did to the 'male ego' of the children who escorted me and what impression they might have developed regarding a woman's freedom to move out. I was surprised that the women themselves did not team up to escort me, if at all; the men had already gone to bed and it did not look good to wake them up. Accessing the road by women, especially young girls, unaccompanied in the night was rare in the neighbourhood. The next day I was called for a meeting by the women who advised me to be responsible and further reiterated the dangers to woman's virtues on the streets. It was suggested that I should restrict my research only to daytime or to holidays when children would be available during the day.

On another occasion, I chose to sit down in the S1 park compound around noon-time to write my notes. I often chose that place as it had sheds and seats, making for a comfortable place to write. Also, it was almost in the middle of the neighbourhood allowing me to access any house I wanted in lesser time. That noon I was approached by one of the old men whom I had already interviewed; he lived across the road

overlooking the park. He ordered me to show my notebook to him, and then directed me to look at the time and glance around the park. I saw two more people sitting at a distance discussing about something written on a piece of paper. The old man then blurted out to me:

I have been noticing you for some time. What are you doing here alone? Don't you see the park is deserted? Do you see anyone on the road? All houses are locked up. These stranger people are sitting beside you and you are not taking notice of them. Don't you know how bad things are nowadays? Who will come to your rescue? Leave immediately. Go to your home and write there comfortably.

I had to comply, moving to the temple instead to finish my notes after the morning visits.

Again and again, I had to negotiate these 'restrictions'. Increasingly, it became very difficult for me. The children seemed overly busy all day with school, project, and tuitions and were only free around evening playtime or dinner-time. Most occasions, whether dinner invitations, festivals or birthday parties, would end late in the night. I thus gradually started voicing my concern and worry about not being able to complete my fieldwork in time because of 'being a girl'. I spoke to women to come out of their houses after the offices and shops were closed and take evening walks or just stand together and chat for few moments to increase the presence of women in the streets as it would make the young girls returning from office and coaching classes feel more secure. Interestingly, the older women responded and started coming out of the house and would take a walk on the lane. Their husbands' were not necessarily happy, but did not object. Families now kept a lookout just to wave at each other around this time. But all this happened only in a couple of lanes. Young women were still not allowed to go out for long or beyond the sight of the house.

During fieldwork, it came naturally to me to ask the boys if they participated in the household work and ask for their help in kitchen work or while cleaning the house. But this was politely waved off by parents saying that the children would make a mess of the place or that they are yet to learn these chores. Neither was the girls ever demanded to take part in household tasks given the heavy school workload. But, interestingly, somehow girls managed to learn and took great pride in mastering their kitchen duties or

hospitality manners. The girls who shirked these duties or showed no interest were never forced to learn it; but interestingly their mothers expressed their worry over how any girl would manage in the future. But such worries were not to be heard if a boy shirked any house duties or showed no interest. All the same, both boys and girls were not allowed to go out alone by the virtue of them being children. Elder girls were allowed to travel to tuition classes or colleges on their bikes, but parents constantly kept a check by calling on their cell phones.

My attitude towards womanhood was a matter of great discussion. People were surprised by my lack of concern towards marriage or any domestic duties. As I took the liberty to freely probe about their lives, they openly questioned me too. Needless to say, I was surprised to see the kind of kitchen grind that women readily put in almost with the zeal of famous chefs. In some houses, I shared my alternative stories of work life, independence and the equal sharing of home responsibilities by my friends and their husbands in their homes. However, I quickly learnt to go silent on it as, in some houses, it led to arguments between the man and the wife or the grown-up daughter and the mother. In fact, many times older women keenly listened to my experiences of office life, travels and other working women, but hushed me up in front of their grown-up daughters or younger daughters-in-law. My movements, freedom, and outspokenness were to some extent entertained by the neighbours and families as they understood the demand for my public life activities. As a researcher, I had to access various settings, make friends with strangers and later on return to a work-life that needed much more independent living. It was more tolerable to them also because I was still an ‘outsider’ in the sense that I was not a permanent addition to or influence on their systems and structures of family and the fabric of their lives.

Coda

The last extended section detailing the orders of my fieldwork may be read in conjunction with our earlier Ch.2, where we engaged with some questions of method especially in relation to ethnography with children. We have tried, to the extent possible, to avoid the repetitions in the sequence of narration; the fact that some order of repetition still obtains

is perhaps inevitable and even stylistically warranted. We now move on to **Part Two** of our thesis, which will outline the conceptual and theoretical framework of our study, which in turn will be followed by our **Part Three** detailing the substantive orders of our narration in compliance with the framework outlined. The four chapters that follow across these two parts will hopefully consolidate the movement of our narration; and they remain critical to our ethnography and the practice implicating its writing.

Part Two



Heuristic Interlude: Theoretical/Conceptual Register

Chapter 4



Appropriating Children's Family Life Through 'Moral Sentiments':

Critical Notes

Me: Is affect decisive?

Professor: Affect complicates decisions.

Me: From where does decision derive its meaning? What are the sources?

Professor: For one, at the least, social action presumes an underlying acknowledgment of shared meanings, howsoever basic or complex. In the realm of inhabited intimacies, the world is staged upon a sense of 'one's own world' and not so much upon 'the others' world'. Here the acts and experiences of sharing and othering take different terms of bonding and boundaries. Overall, the multiplex of moralities, affects, rationalities, and authorities make the world.

Me: Is social life all about such acts and experiences where people know clearly what is going on, what they feel, what they want and what they follow?

Professor: The historical or sociological dimension gives us possibility of comprehension. The action gets located and makes sense in 'reflection' eventually. Agencies take their shape and form in social currencies, and these currencies have their conditions. Together these may throw some perspective on the social world. The researcher and the actor's narratives are not coterminous ...

Me: What is so much clear about conditions?

Professor: Let's not approach the locations as monolithic. They warrant action inasmuch as they dissolve, reshape or resurrect themselves in that guarantee. Any event of the assertion of autonomy vis-à-vis a perceived authority of any form could reveal what is not apparent otherwise. Often we perceive no structures when we see agency and no agency when we see structures.

Me: In the given moment of action, where it remains 'unreflected', how do we understand it? What about present moments of action/experience?

Professor: Contingency could prove a useful frame in understanding events in such an approach. It challenges both linearity and established modes of reflection. It brings the grey areas to our interpretations. And these are some important inferences.

I give the glimpse of an extended conversation with my professor indicating the difficulties and complexities of framing that I was facing with the narratives and experiences I had collected. I do so because these provide the strands that I need to weave the arguments in this largely conceptual/theoretical chapter.

To recall quickly, in my first three chapters, I had tried to clarify the ‘location’ of my study - by way of focus and limitation – situating it in the major trends of childhood studies abroad and in India by making a thorough critical appraisal of the literature and the debates in this realm. We had, along this course, engaged the challenges of ‘doing ethnography with children’, while also traversing some aspects of the ‘world at home’ in the urban neighbourhood that forms the basis of our study. Especially in the Indian context, I highlighted the limitations in the approach to studying relationships between family and child (collective and individual) and asserted the need to look for an alternative approach that would allow me to open up the ‘black box’ of family and look at its relations, dynamics, interplay in a day-to-day, immediate context, as it happens and is experienced by its members in the very moment of action. In this present chapter, by way of a theoretical/conceptual interlude, I attempt to bring to the table such a framework of study that might suit my research concerns and ethnographic field situation.

Along this course, I aim to accomplish three tasks. Firstly, I would like to highlight the essence of the everyday life activities and encounters in my field as observed by me. Secondly, I foreground the topic of family and critically dwell on a couple of ethnographies which study the familial domain from the ‘everydayness’ of its existence. In this context, I would like to bring some attention to the use of the lens of ‘moral sentiment’ to look at the day-to-day life activities in a family. Thirdly, I would like to demarcate my adaptation of the idea of ‘moral sentiment’ as a conceptual frame and thereupon discuss a tripartite thematic schema in terms of which one could comprehend aspects of children’s moral sentimental life in their family setting. The operative schema was not fabricated prior to fieldwork, but evolved in the course of the fieldwork as one became more conscious of one’s own observational field and other immersive engagements with the children of our neighbourhood context.

Everyday Encounters and Affective Cores: Another Brief Thematic Outline

Of spontaneity ...

It was afternoon time, maybe close to 3-4 pm. I was walking in one of the lanes of my neighbourhood site, heading for the house where I was probing one of the children for my in-depth studies. On the way, I met another neighbour, an old lady, standing by her house gate. I had been to that house before as a visiting researcher and also as an available neighbour. This house served as a residence to an old couple, their daughter and granddaughter; the daughter's husband worked out of the station. While the old man and his daughter were quite chatty with me about my research, this old lady had been critical about my work. She saw my work as 'wasting time in the name of research'. She was categorical: "What is the worth of all these roaming and random talks with unknown people (*Ajana loka*)? Will you get something from this ... Only many mad gossips (*Nana baya gapa*)". This day, however, I found the old lady rather lost, peering out up and down the road. Her hair was dishevelled, the saree wrinkled, and her face puffed up. Clearly, the old lady had just woken up from her midday siesta. She signalled me to come near her and asked me if I had seen her maid on the way. I denied having seen her maid. The old lady then told me that she had fallen into a deep sleep and now felt that the maid had probably knocked at the door but left as nobody had responded. The old lady kept standing at the gate, holding it slightly open and I stood beside her. She wondered aloud if she should wait for the maid or she should wash the utensils herself. She asked me again if I was sure that I had not seen the maid. I stood there listening to her and confirmed that I had not. Suddenly, the old lady who had not been very open to me on previous occasions started talking about a plethora of things: the numerous guests that her husband received any day, her worry about her daughter's health, the granddaughter's attitude. She then started talking about the buildings on the road, about the scorching heat, about markets and a bunch of other things. She just went on and on and I just stood there, somewhat transfixed. She invited no response, only a gentle nodding of my head and exclamations. She asked me no questions of what I was up to and how my work was going (something that my field people generally did). As the minutes passed, I started extending the talk by following up on what she was saying and asking a few questions as a matter of courtesy. At one point, she suddenly became

aware of the time and abruptly stopped the conversation saying that she has to rush to work. I offered my *pranam* (salutation) and moved away. This incident hung over my head until I reached my destination. It was unexpected and strange. The lady had candidly expressed her dislike for the random talks that my research encouraged. I felt that it was weird that the lady should talk to me at length on all these insignificant topics. I wondered there, what was the need for her to talk to me? What made her talk about all these?

During the first few months of my fieldwork, I engaged in a survey of the neighbourhood so as to get an idea of the houses with children and the overall neighbourhood setting (some aspects of which were covered in our previous chapter). I had been asked to get a sense of the people, about the settings in which the community obtained its group life, and an understanding of the ethos of the place. Thus I had started spending time figuring out their collective life and expressions. It was around this time that I stumbled upon the kind of encounter illustrated above. As I started approaching people and showed my interest in wanting to listen to them, they opened up too. Often I found myself talking to so-called strangers of different personalities, ages, backgrounds, and beliefs. Sometimes I was chatting with people by their gate, on the street, at the park, at the bus stop, in gardens and verandas and often in due course in their drawing rooms where I found myself on spontaneous short invitations. These meetings were initially highly disorienting for me. Given that the assumed terms and conditions of the meeting were pretty tentative and the setting very fleeting, neither my subjects nor I was very clear as to why we were meeting and what should be said in the conversation. In other words, there were no 'clear reasons' to what we were doing. Rather these were incidences of a form of sociality based on tentative 'hope' or 'giving a chance to an encounter'. A researcher friend once pointed out to me that each researcher has his/her share of groping in the dark and that gradually things will make sense. But my perplexity is somewhat different: what makes matters acceptable to the people in the field? They all knew that I was carrying out research, but the exact nature of it was not known to them. A few of them who were scholars and writers certainly could empathise with me. However, most others, like businessmen, engineers, housewives, college students or children had almost no inkling of what was exactly going on and why the conversations were important. In

the beginning, such meetings would arise abruptly in a free-flowing manner. For example, if I was visiting one of the office-bearers of the neighbourhood association and there was someone else with him, then I got introduced and recommended to meet that someone else as well and note down their opinion. Or, while conducting my survey some people would express curiosity and want to know more about my work and a conversation would just follow from that. There was a sense of trust, cooperation and being helpful that drove the people in engaging with me, and not so much the clarity of the activity.

Gradually, of course, my fieldwork became more focused and the homes and hours for visiting children became more and more fixed. And yet, I always had an open invitation almost on a daily basis from some of these other people in the field who just wanted to meet and have a chat. What made people want to have apparently aimless conversations? I kept wondering. Although overall the neighbourhood was very conscious of its privacy, nonetheless the space of casual parleys expressed itself as a common need. One way of understanding these discussions would be to brand them as a form of ‘catharsis’ and accordingly bring forth a psychoanalytical approach to study these forms of behaviour. It is important to point out, however, that these parleys were neither a depressive venting out of one’s emotions nor a form of self-making in the light of one’s deep-seated sense of despair, hope and aspirations. These conversations were very amicable and pleasant and could be characterised as just the ‘lighter moments’ that frame the ‘dailiness’ of our lives. Another way of dealing with this circumstance (and one more familiar to sociologists) would be to trace a life story of the participants in the situation and ascertain the deeper meanings fulfilled by such phenomena in people’s life; or, alternatively, to trace the forms of such ‘social encounters’ along with their variants and cluster them in a typified fashion charting out a symbolic universe. Such a form of analysis would render clear the event and its associated motivations (whether intentional, unintentional or non-intentional), thereby ‘fixing a certain clarity or coherence’ (see, broadly, Dewey 1930) to the encounters and the setting of action.

However, I would like to foreground the fact that all these actions in focus had no deliberate aim for completion or even any sort of macro-influence. Such methods of

granting coherence to action were not available to my subjects – both children and their parents. My subjects had no vision of the final picture of my research or even about the significance of their involvement. Especially, in such households of the larger neighbourhood where I had a rapport but was not conducting any in-depth study, there did not obtain any promise or purpose for the continuation of conversations that unfolded. Indeed, whenever the people met, they welcomed and renewed their parleys, even as these mostly ended incompletely and abruptly. To be sure, the everyday has a sense of continuity, a moving on, which negated any form of finality or closure (as also any need for the same). Thus, as the sociologist Piotr Sztompka has eloquently observed: “The old metaphor of social ‘life’ grasps this feature very well. Like life in the literal sense, social existence never stop, because once it stops it is no longer life” (Sztompka 2008: 4). I feel this is why the abrupt and unplanned beginning of the exchanges seemed normal to my field subjects. I realised that people often found this space of nonchalant interactions quite comforting.

... and Affectivity

Significantly, even in some real and pressing matters of existence, it was not uncommon for people to utter, “Let’s see what will happen?” (*Dekha jau kan haba*) or “It’s going on like that” (*Chalichi semiti*), “Who can say what will happen in the future?” (*Bhabisyata re kan haba kiye kahi pariba*). As a woman talking about her job opportunities in the face of oppositions from her family said:

Now I have this offer. Let’s see how they (her people at home) react. Last time I quit because my boy kept falling sick severely. My boy is growing up now. I might be able to keep a maid to look after him. I keep applying (for jobs) without telling anyone. You never know. I was not expecting to get this offer. But I got it. Let’s see if my child cooperates and everyone in the family agrees. Otherwise, next time maybe, I don’t know. My own heart is torn between my baby and my practice (job). I am so surprised at myself. I used to be so career-oriented.

Resoundingly, the urge and readiness to ‘work’ and/or the presence or absence of strategies to ‘solve issues of life’ were not the quintessence of my conversations in the field. People did not constantly live with a clarity of the kind ‘I know what the issue is and I must work it out’. Such an upfront and hands-on attitude to life looked exaggerated and not suitable for my context. The sense of surety and purpose was not necessarily

available. Abrupt withdrawals and spontaneous participation were as decisive as they were reluctant (see Adler, Adler and Fontana 1987). More importantly, this duality of determination and doubt did not necessarily reduce itself into either a singular craze for control or a universal scepticism about people's attitude to life; it rather presented itself as a grey mixture of fluctuating hopes, trust and resilience. As I indicated earlier, the everyday has a rhythm of moving on, and therefore any 'sense of culmination' or of 'achieved ends' is hard to live by. There is also a certain abruptness visible in daily life; the situation takes unexpected turns. Thus I found that my field people easily lived by a sense of 'uncertain hope' and 'imaginings' as much as by the 'certainty of accomplished reasons, meanings or purposes'. The French sociologist Patrick Tacussel has pointedly observed:

Everyday existence has to do with the ways in which we invest people, places and things with a pattern of uncertain meanings. It is the fuzzy area that extends beyond what our consciousness has arranged into fixed certainties, by ascribing to it a definite use, place or function; that is the purportless nature of the ordinary course of living (Tacussel 1989: 62).

Necessarily, this was the content of my everyday encounters as it came through the renderings of the children and their family members living in a prominent urban locale of Bhubaneswar. Being tentative and uncertain and displaying contradictory forms of behaviour was by and large acceptable in my field, being explained away largely by the needs of the situation and the intentions of the actors and not by any institutional preambles. Such mixed and sundry values and seemingly incommensurable forms of conduct were not viewed as regressive, but prevailed as an important aspect of daily existence and coexisted often culturally cushioned by social norms of acceptance and acknowledgment. This reflected in the everyday life of the children and the families that I visited. Family feelings, values, and relations were explicitly celebrated in the families I accessed, at least in the context of a socio-moral sphere visible around the child. Certainly, it is not my contention that these families did not have their share of quarrels, bitterness, and rifts. But the imperative of the child's moral-social idea of the 'family as important' made it necessary for the household as a whole to uphold itself through all the rumble and tumble of living together, consciously and unconsciously. Indeed, the fact that such a form of valuation existed both for the child and the other family members as

a lived circumstance was an important starting point for my inquiry (as has been for most of the scholars studying facets of Indian family life). The point of departure in my research interest, though, consisted in its focus on the coexistence of seemingly opposing orders of everyday family life – whether it be celebrations and conflicts, togetherness and individuality, routines and uncertainties.

Discussing the conceptualisation of ‘everyday life’ and developing an appropriate perspective for studying it, the distinguished French sociologist Michel Maffesoli writes (and we shall quote him at some length):

For one thing, we are confronted with an increasing number of affinity groups, small groups; moreover, these groups lead us to a specific method of approach. This no longer has much to do with the theories which try to analyse rational intentions, logical activities or, still less, the interaction of autonomous individuals acting together with a common goal. We ought to be aware that sociology ... had its philosophical basis on social atomism. It is from the basis of the individual that sociology attempts to encompass more complex groups, ... necessarily understood in terms of institutions (family, work, parties, unions, churches, states and so on). Instead of this schematic organisation, which was not without influence, should we not rather consider the ‘primary group’ as the true basis of all social life? The ‘*Grundkörper*’, the matrix where individuals find their various ways of being, become in some way the theme of the affective community, in opposition to rational society. ... This hypothesis is certainly better able than the various institutionalist or critical approaches to do justice to the survival of those ‘archaic’ values of neighbourliness, solidarity, and small group - in short, the survival of the structure of ‘agglutination’ which has been able to resist the rationalization of the world (Maffesoli 1989: 7-8).

Maffesoli’s explication of the context and approach to ‘everyday life’ touches upon the social reality of my fieldwork and the situations that I faced. I came face to face with the everyday dynamics of internal family relations - the various modalities of engagement with oneself and between and across family members, their moral sentimental renditions of it and so on - as indeed children’s behaviour in these affective cores. To be sure, I had to confront the challenge of addressing the seemingly mundane, uncertain and mixed/multiple social occurrences so as to capture the facets of the ‘world at home’ from the point of the children (for an associated point, see Sztompka 2008).

I gradually identified three mutually inflecting points as important and crucial for the purposes of my study. Firstly, it was important to acknowledge that children were able

to make credible claims about their experience and definitions of everyday situations. The second important point was that, underneath these claims and definitions of everyday situations, children did come across opposing experiences (or discourses) and sometimes their own behaviour would not be in accordance with their claims. And thirdly, that these discrepancies prevailed with a sense of normalcy and were not perceived as imminent threats to family stability by the children as well as the parents. As a researcher, therefore, the task that I had in front of me was to figure out ways of capturing children's definitions and claims about various situations, their specific behaviour in contradictory situations and their modes of accommodating or ignoring this plethora of claims and situations. With these dimensions and their affective cores in perspective, I hoped to arrive at a deeper understanding of children's value considerations and the wider moral sentimental fabric of their family life. Needless to say, this further entailed certain deeper philosophical questions: Were children's descriptions of their family life a form of biased ideal picture or were they equally factual? Can domestic realities be studied by bifurcating them into these two rubrics? Is not 'conflict' as much sentimental as 'celebrations'? What did children behaviour tell me about opposite values? How was this latter aspect going to shape my thesis? How is one to make a systematic inquiry into these polarities?

Now that I have laid out the epistemological facets of the everyday scenario of my field and its related methodological concerns, I move on to explore an appropriate framework of analysis that is relevant to my field requirements and research depictions. Obviously, I needed a frame that could help me grasp the affective cores of children in the context of their family life, encapsulating at once matters of belongingness, moral responsibility, mutuality, trust, the burden of demands and the spaces of their negotiation, as also an understanding of individual spaces.

The Everyday and the Intra-Family Dynamics: Critical Appraisals

I. But why family or home, and the 'world at home'?

Before going any further, I need to state about why, or rather how, the 'home and family' acquired prominence in my study. I did not have the 'family' in my mind as a point of

exploration when I started my research; my field threw me into it. In my search for an informal setting to study children, the ‘home and family’ became the site in which I finally got to access children (I have already spoken rather elaborately on this in my preliminary chapters, especially Chs.2 and 3). But this was not the only reason that made me focus on the ‘family’ and the ‘home’ as a live stage to depict children’s life in my research. I would like to attest to four major reasons for doing so.

Firstly, as I started visiting children in their houses, I was still expecting to have a one-on-one conversation with children on various issues; and the ‘home’ to me was an appended setting in which the conversations could be carried on. My professors alerted me otherwise. I was advised to become aware of the ‘home’ as encapsulating meanings that cannot be contained within the physical structure of the house which the children stayed in; pointedly, to look at the larger settings and ‘cultures’ embedding the homes of the children that I was accessing and to allow these spaces in the narratives I intended to capture. As I gradually spent time with the families of my field situation, the inner dynamics of their homes changed the tone of my research. Once inside the house, I found that the child did not have an isolated, quarantined space and time of his/her own as the modern schooling and the various children’s shows and other contemporary designs of separating the child from the adult would have us to believe. The child’s time and space were all intermingled with that of their family members, an aspect I have touched on in some detail in Chs.2 and 3 earlier.

Secondly, I further discovered that this intermingling was not merely at the outer realm of visible time and space, but also in the inner domain of the sharing and living of personal and familial stories and trajectories. The children and parents not only shared activities, but also did not mind opening up to their personal stories in each other’s presence. Not only was it common for the children to call their parents to help them recall an event that they wanted me to know, it was also routine for parents to narrate their personal experiences of job ordeals, scuffle with in-laws’, legal wrangles, etc. openly in front of their children. As I repeatedly stated in my earlier chapters, many a time when I was conversing with the child, the parents took it as natural to answer on behalf of their child. To me, as it appeared, the proximity of the lives of parents and

children had not only created a realm of shared experience and collective memory; it had also created a ‘world at home’ where the parents seemed to view the child as ‘one mind’ with them, and the children tended to find their parents’ expressions substitutable with their own to a great extent.

Thirdly, and perhaps the most important reason that made me decide on picking up family and family relations as the focus of the study, was the centrality that it occupied as the children’s reference point in their self-descriptions and conversations. As much as it might look fairly obvious and commonplace, I did find this centrality striking and worthwhile to inhabit and explore. One of my Ph.D. friends had wryly commented, “You are accessing children in their homes, what else you can expect? It is a truism. It’s a known fact”. But this was not a view that I could share. I wondered, what’s so natural about the family, as indeed the home? Doubtless, there was a particular urge in the children I encountered to see the family and parents as a site of happiness, and compounding this urge was the necessity to participate and enhance this ‘happiness’ (see also Chaudhary 2004: 105-07). Obvious as it might seem in a landscape where children are taught to be obedient and respectful to parents and family elders, I wanted to grasp the nature and understanding of these emotions and values in children as they emulated and lived through these affective cores.

Lastly, and by no means infinitely, I further constantly juxtaposed these affective cores to the complaints that the elders ever so often threw in their general conversations about modern-day children as ‘smart beyond their age’ (*bayasaru adhika budhiya*), ‘becoming very demanding’, ‘deciding their own ways’, ‘today’s children cannot be told’, etc. Particularly, I was interested in the view that the children shared about themselves as vehicles of familial unity. How so, I often wondered? To be sure, the children were also constantly experiencing the separation of spaces increasingly created by modern institutions and markets in the name of specialisation and differentiation. Given such a scenario, in what way did children weave these negotiations within their larger belief in familial unity and pride? It was but inevitable that I opened up my area of inquiry so as to observe and consolidate various aspects of a child’s life, its interests and emotional orientations, affective demands and their negotiations; indeed, facets of their moral

psychological references and decisions (or resolutions) within the home and in the midst of parents.

II. On approaching the study of everyday family / world at home

In the course of zeroing in on a conceptual and theoretical framework, which will form the basis of the chapters to follow, I attempt herewith a critical appraisal of a few selected studies on ‘ordinary actions’ and meaning in everyday family settings. Without doubt, I do not aim to be comprehensive in my framework of appraisal, and the choice of the studies that I focus on here is guided wholly by the demands of my own research and the imperative of devolving on an intelligible and sustainable framework of exposition.

Traditionally, in India, vital studies have been conducted taking into consideration various rites of passage, socialisation processes and the symbolic importance of a child in a community, and in the process describing the dimensions of the regular family life around children. However, studies approaching the role of everyday dynamics and the spaces of choices in understanding a child’s family life have been rare. The question always loomed large before me about the ways in which I could be thinking about the family so that its common daily life gets illuminated and captured. I propose to deal with this matter by examining the work of two scholars who have closely looked at the facets of everyday domestic life in South Asian family context using ethnographic methods. The two scholars in perspective are J. N. Gray, who did his fieldwork with households in Nepal, and the redoubtable Veena Das who studied Punjabi families and the dimensions of their domesticity, even as both the scholars were invested in developing a framework of analysis for studying the everyday world and the domain of the ‘ordinary’. I use this exercise in some respects as a springboard to further sound out the specificities of my research concerns and field conditions by matching the points of similarity and differences with these studies. I do this in an attempt to advance a possible alternative framing of family life suitable to my own field context, and which will lay the basis for the substantive exposition to follow.

Over to Gray and beyond

Doubtless, I am not the only person to wonder about ‘what is so obvious about the family appearing as a central point of reference in people’s life (or, as in my case, children’s lives)?’ I found a similar query raised by J. N. Gray (1995) in studying the domestic life of the Hindu Brahman-Chhetri households in Nepal (though he was not working with children, but the household *per se*). Gray, who explicitly wished to study everyday Hindu life, found his fieldwork encounters gravitating around his subjects ‘domestic life’, or what we may call the ‘householder path’. He thus declares that the ‘everyday’ for a Hindu is necessarily ‘domestic’, so that anyone who does not conform to its patterns is necessarily seen as a ‘renouncer’ or stands outside of normal conceptions of social life. Back in 1977, Veena Das too, in looking at the structural ingredients of Hindu caste organization of life, refers to ‘man in the world’ as the householder (see Das 2012b [1977]: 37-40). A similar observation we find in Usha Menon’s recent work with Hindu Odia women, when her informants assert “We are born into this world to build families” (Menon 2013a: 81).

Indeed, having thus confirmed this crucial aspect, Gray goes on to precisely ask, ‘Why so?’ or, rather, ‘What was so natural about the centrality of the family?’ In seeking out an answer, he undertakes a systematic review of family and household studies as carried forth in the West and the South Asia region, and expresses a sharp sense of disappointment with these studies. He discerns two fundamental problems in the available approaches. The first has to do with the tendency to posit and take-for-granted the *a priori* existence of the household as a distinct domain or cultural unit in society. Gray astutely suggests that what should have been the aim of an ethnographic exploration to discover has become its foundational premise. Importantly, Patricia Uberoi (1993) too, while discussing the development of the ‘joint family’ as a sociological category during the colonial scholarship, has expressed her concern about the same issue, although she targets the hegemony of modern Western methods of knowledge-making for the confusion. As she comments, the available body of research and its ‘critique’ of the Indian tradition place in perspective “how a mode of knowledge regarding the Indian family has been persuasively reproduced over the last century, but it does not explain how or why such knowledge was produced in the first place” (Uberoi 1993: 32). The second problem, as Gray points out, has to do with the unquestioned subordinate and

dependent analytical status granted to the household dynamics vis-à-vis the community or society as a whole. He specifically decries that this had led to an uncritical appreciation of 'domestic' (and family life) which has remained dictated by larger rules of kinship (membership, shared functions, etc.) and local traditions. Gray argues that there is nothing inherent in these domains that could mark them exclusively as 'domestic' (as different from, say, 'hamlet' or 'clan'). This, according to him, has thus hindered any attempt to understand the 'household' as a world by itself: as a 'holistic' cultural unit with its own dynamics, and thus granting it a 'particularity'. The household has been relegated to a very precarious, derived and remote space in the analysis of social processes (see Gray 1995: 14-19). He thus decides to approach the intra-familial dynamics by means of an alternative approach.

More explicitly, Gray abandons the orientations that he sees as predominant within the structural-functionalist school (where the part is seen as a microscopic version of the same substance that makes the macroscopic whole) and the 'practice theory' (which, ostensibly, had not arrived at a strong model of describing how diverse individual practices reorganize the system around it simultaneously). In their place, he explicitly takes recourse to what is rendered as 'ontology and chaos theory', which according to Gray is capable of providing a complete reconceptualization of the relation between 'part and whole' in human affairs (see Gray 1995: 24). Drawing further on aspects of Heidegger's phenomenological notion of ontology, Gray is categorical that understanding the sociologically and historically privileged 'states of consciousness' that upheld the realization of a given social entity as a relevant occurrence in itself (as opposed to focusing on the cohering functions of composing practices) can be a more befitting starting point of ethnographic exploration. In this context, he explicitly furthers the idea of 'intentionality', which guarantees the realisation of a social entity through mindful, ontologically informed actions. Gray, in fact, resoundingly complements this focus with chaos theory, so as to make room for the instabilities of life and the potential of 'microscopic disturbances' to affect the larger whole (ibid.: 26). Such a model, he claims, can provide for a more comprehensive schema to understand 'everyday' occurrences.

Accordingly, in implementing this theoretical model, Gray on the one hand constructs the canon of “*Grihasta dharma*” as the dominant worldview that dominates the Brahman-Chhetri household consciousness and thereby informs their indigenous theory of practice. Simultaneously, on the other hand, he looks at the dynamics of socially constituted intentionality as arising from various everyday interests and practical concerns of life. The tussle between these two orders of life – the canonical and the practical - helps Gray to understand the appropriation and reorientation of the ontological into ‘social projects’ and social relations generally, what he calls ‘transmutation’ following earlier scholars (see Gray 1995: 56). For example, he looks at how the prescribed duty of begetting children in the context of the ‘*Grihasta ashrama*’ (the ‘householder’s path, so to say) leads to an empirical reality which required the household to enter into a series of relationships with other people and engage in social actions executed through conscious human agency motivated from more practical day-to-day requirements.

Now, while I broadly agree with Gray’s problematisation of family studies as recounted above, I do not however find his solution agreeable to my field experience. Allow me a fairly involved space of elaboration. What I find deeply uncomfortable about Gray’s framework is the easy slicing of the social world of the Brahman-Chhetri households into the realm of ontology (seen as an unintentional inherent structure of consciousness emerging from ‘*dharma*’) and the realm of a socially-constituted ‘intentional’ consciousness (emerging from everyday practicalities, and resulting in ‘transmutations’ or accommodating actions). As he sharply observes: “Conceptually, practice is distinguished from ontological action by conscious human agency in the empirical world” (Gray 1995: 55). According to me, this largely ‘essentialised’ form of separation appears because of his ontological interpretation of ‘*dharma*’ as representing a domain unmediated by the everyday world and a complementary understanding of ‘action’ (which I read as the concept of ‘*karma*’). Largely, for Gray, ‘action’ in Hindu cosmology is seen as ‘autochthonous’, almost an ‘inherent substantialised’ nature of human being, and accordingly an unavoidable characteristic of human life as necessitated by the material conditions surrounding the individual (ibid.: 53). Thus he accords ‘*grihasta dharma*’ a canonical status in the constitution of Brahman-Chhetri domestic life. This

gives him a conceptual space to construct a complementary realm of social life, one of the everyday practicalities which alert people's intentions to balance their acts between the canonical ideas and the practical needs. Moreover, these two realms are often seen as exerting competing and opposite demands on human life, consequently calling for the exercise of mediating intentional action (which Gray identifies as 'human agency').

A similar illustration of such a division of socio-moral life we can see in the impressive ethnography conducted by Meenakshi Thapan (1991). This ethnography largely encountered a non-domestic realm, that is to say, the institutional context of a residential alternative school in southern India. In the course of her investigation, she astutely observes that "(t)he educational processes in RVS [Rishi Valley School, the site of her ethnography] are based on a well-articulated ideology which repudiates conventional methods of education and yet, paradoxically, participates in a formal school system" (Thapan 1991: 211). Although she does not use such involved expressions like 'ontological actions' and 'everyday pragmatism', she does subscribe to a compartmentalisation of life into the ideological and practical dimensions. In fact, she uses the tussle of "transcendental ideology and local order" as an overarching frame to analyse the patterns of life at the school at various levels, whether it be 'teachers' (constituting 'ideologues and professionals'), 'institutional organization' (largely Jiddu Krishnamurti's 'ideology' and the parameters of 'conventional formal schooling') and the pupils' perspectives. Thapan sees the two orders of 'transcendental ideology' and 'local order' as inherently incommensurable with one another. It seems to me that what makes it convenient for her to institute this distinction is the overarching and explicit assertion of Jiddu Krishnamurti's thought and ideology in the school. She proposes that in other conventional formal schools the ideology is either tacit, which did not interfere with the organization of the school, or was in sync with its structure and functions (ibid.: 214).

By and large, I find such models of explanation unsatisfactory. For one, the cleanly laid out separation of everyday life dynamics into structuring ideas, intentions and actions is, to say the least, confounding; and this is especially so when the matter is presented as a separation of ideology or discourses (largely unmediated), on one side, and practice or

action on another side (taken as mediated through alert intentions). Underlying such a division is a separation of ‘tradition’ from the emergent, of values from practicalities. Besides, the perspective seems to lend itself to an attribution of everyday demands as merely pragmatic and materialistic, which again is somewhat simplistic. Furthermore, built into this separation of ideas and practice is a paradox which the model largely fails to explain. The studies in question would have us believe that the ideas structuring individual consciousness (like Gray’s ‘*grihastha dharma*’ and Thapan’s ‘Krishnamurti’s ideology’) remain resiliently unmediated by the everyday material-pragmatic conditions. In fact, the latter sets of conditions represent both a distinct realm of existence and a space exerting opposite demands and pressures. A question thus arises about what supports the putatively unmediated continuity of the ideas structuring consciousness and the ways in which individuals and communities find them meaningful? Indeed, more pointedly, what is the understanding to be forged about the very ‘givenness’ of a structuring consciousness and the meanings that it radiates?

I feel that such a framework - where a set of established ideas in (a linear) time meets with the challenge of opposing demands calling for resolution through human action - fails to accommodate the essential characteristics of informal everyday life. In fact, in the informal realm of the everyday, what comes to be termed ‘structure’ may not be determined entirely through identifiable historical events, turning points, and anchors. Indeed, within this realm, intentions have multiple inspirations and the relation of action with intention is not always identifiably concomitant. The drivers of the everyday occurrences, so to say, are hugely dispersed along the axis of time, space, concepts and contingencies, each necessitating the demand for an approach open to the meaningfulness of action as derived from its ‘present moments’ and not from pre-given concepts only. The space of the unaccounted and the contingent and the improvisations thereon have to be accommodated.

Moving to Veena Das and the realm of the ‘ordinary’

Veena Das explicitly rejects the ‘part and whole’ model in her inquiries into the everyday lives of people. Contending with the somewhat archaic issue of the relation between ‘collective and individual’ – what she renders as the play of “genre and individual

employment of stories” – she poses the severely poignant question of “what it is to inhabit a world? How does one make the world one’s own? How does one account for the appearance of the subject?” (Das 2007: 2). Striking a kind of parallel with Gray, she also attests to a division within the social realm between the domain of ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’ relations in studying the everyday. All the same, she takes a different stand on accessing and accounting for this fabric of relations. Taking a cue from the Cambridge anthropologist Marilyn Strathern, Das acknowledges that the question of framing is that of ‘scale and complexity’. That is to say, the ‘relays’ of the everyday at the same time indicate to the presence of concrete (the relations and circumstances that we live in) and abstract realms (the relations that people make between various things and events or realities of the world). As she passingly observes:

The question, then, is not that of part-whole relations but of establishing the horizon within which we may place the constituent objects of description in their relation to each other and in relation to the eye within which they are seen. One might also express this in terms of the relationship between the subject and the world (ibid.: 4).

Taking the cue from the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, she establishes that the ‘subject’ and the ‘world’ mutually reinforce and render apparent each other. In other words, there are no pre-given subjects or boundaries; ‘experience and experienced’ construct one another in a given event. Invoking stark experiences of violence and disorder, Das contemplates, “These are complicated pictures of what it is to make and remake a world, bringing into question the pictures of totalities, parts, fragments, and boundaries that we may have” (Das 2007: 5). Indeed, later on, towards the end of her book, she vividly pronounces, “Violence of the kind ... calls into question the very idea of life - we reach not the end of some intellectual agreement but the end of criteria” (ibid.: 220). Thus, following the American philosopher Stanley Cavell (and Wittgenstein), she champions the shift as one of moving away from the ‘purified metaphysical voice’ of philosophy to the ‘ordinary’ as embedded within experiences of life (ibid.: 6).

Not surprisingly, Das is faced with the task of taking this model to the explication of the everyday, which she does in the context of tracing the stories of ‘riot survivors’. Indeed, it is in the context of grasping the latter’s experience of ‘victimhood’ and its shadow on

their subsequent retained relationships that she encounters the ‘ordinary’. She tellingly recognises that, amidst these fluxes, “... life was not recovered through some grand gesture in the realm of the transcendent but through a descent into the ordinary” (Das 2007: 7). In subsequent contributions, titled as ‘Ordinary ethics’, Das poignantly consolidates this insight, stating explicitly that the “scandal of the survivor is not that she cannot go on but that she does go on ... that everyday life can be recovered” (Das 2012a: 144). In fact, along this axis, Das fine tunes the approach to studying the ordinary. Accordingly, while attesting to the “moral as a dimension of everyday life rather than as a separate domain”, she suggestively identifies ‘habits’ as a site of inquiry, viewing the latter not so much as mechanical behaviour to peddle social or institutional protocols (see Das 2012a: 138). More emphatically, she claims that “... in the face of the precariousness of life the mundane rituals we evolve ... the way we continue to secure routine, is what allows our lives with others to be regarded as ethical and unethical” (ibid.: 142). In another more recent foray, following the Lebanese-Australian anthropologist Ghassan Hage (2014), Das emphasises that “habit has a double aspect - that of the sedimentation of experience on the one hand, and a generative capacity for responsiveness to a particular milieu, on the other” (Das 2018: 538).

Clearly, what Veena Das is attesting to in the context of her fieldwork is that paying attention to the modes of performances and appropriations of habitual quotidian acts like excuses, pretence and deception, concealment and endurance, and acknowledgments emanating in the flux of social situations revealed more than the mere adherence to social obligations. Such an understanding grants deeper insight into the cultivation of ‘moral sensibilities’ in those very situations as an attempt to make life liveable; and which, for Das, effectively is the ability to “detect the ‘human’ within actions that might otherwise be termed as the work of automation” (Das 2012a: 140). Indeed, as I read this ability to ‘detect the human’ in the context of Das, it marks the phenomenon of granting an acknowledgment to a certain form of life and agency (about which Das has adumbrated in her previous work [see Das 2007: esp. 15-16]). All the same, throughout her works, Das remains intrigued by the question of how the everyday acts of inculcating and improvising moral sensibilities help in recovering (and asserting) lives in such situations where our ‘normal sensibilities’ remain vastly challenged (Das 2012a: 144-46). Indeed,

about these ‘moral sensibilities’ per se, she explicitly opines that “they are distinguished from rules but offer opportunities to express bits of moral wisdom that can be deployed in particular circumstances to do a variety of actions - admonish, console, or help to cover up an embarrassing situation” (Das 2012a: 138).

I must reiterate, however, that in reviewing Veena Das here, I am not merely alluding to the question of the ordinary and everyday. To be sure, sociology as a formal discipline has already reserved its place in the realm of knowledge and knowledge-making, which arguably transcends the ordinary or everyday (see Kalekin-Fishman 2013). What I would like to focus on, nonetheless, is how the contexts of ideas and action, sentiments and experience, judgment and situations, are constitutive of each other and sometimes get revealed in the given moments of action. Though it might be possible to abstract from them post-facto for a stated purpose within philosophical discourse, in the given moment of action (in actuality, that is) it is hard to understand them independent of one another; this is especially so when events are fraught with uncertainties. Das’s work makes it clear that identifying the ideas/concepts behind or in an action and specifying the terms of their embodiment in human consciousness can be a highly delicate and elusive affair, especially when one takes into account the everyday doubts, indecisions and attendant uncertainties. As I interpret the orders of this work, Das encourages us to accord the spontaneous, seemingly unpredictable acts as much importance as the ostensibly premeditated ones in accounting for an ethnography of events and the lives involved, an insistence which is particularly appropriate given that certainty and predictability do not constitute the grounds of reality or even the purpose of knowledge. Indeed, in concluding her involved book, *Life and Words* (2007), Das sharply alerts:

Anthropologists cannot take comfort in any simple notion of an innocent victim or the work of culture as a pre-given script. Culture pertains not only to a conventionalized or contractual sense of agreement among members of society but also refers to a mutual absorption of the social and natural (Das 2007: 220).

Before proceeding any further, I would like to put forth this clarification. My field site and avenue of the everyday differs strikingly from Veena Das on one major account, which is that I am not tracing the everyday in the aftermath of a ‘critical event’ (as in Veena Das; see also her 1995). I did not have any reference to (or for) a ‘social calamity’

(in the sense of a violent breakdown of normalcy and its associated trauma) within the horizons of my fieldwork. Suggestively too, my foray into the everyday was not occasioned by a kind of therapeutic hope where the everyday is a site of resettling (and reasserting) of life on the part of those affected. My fieldwork was conducted in very different circumstances of mundane and even placid normalcy. Evidently, the unpredictability and uncertainty that configured my field context were not, if I may use the word, of any high stake, and allowed for the prevalence of such affective cores as the space of prolonged tensions and fellow-feelings to obtain simultaneously. My own definitive intention was to look at the everyday activities of children in their family setting; and, in the process, recover (from the children's viewpoint) the varying facets of human sensibilities as it opens up to accommodate multiple and sometimes seemingly opposite values in the lived context of the home. Words per se, gestures, and performances in themselves were not the sole points of fascination for my work, but rather the configurations of what people (specifically the children) claimed to be doing through them and actually what was happening or unfolding in the daily rhythms of home (in a word, 'the world at home'). The comparatively mundane environment of my field site, namely, the Sripalli (S1) neighbourhood and its residents, perhaps rendered the probing of sensitive and serious public questions somewhat redundant; but it also allowed me the liberty to explore daily rhythms beyond the facade of performances (especially so with children). More resolutely, unlike Veena Das, who focuses on issues of voice, speech and expression as a vehicle of human variance, I would like to focus on the human variance itself as situations of composite values and valuations. For example, if a child exalted family and family feelings at one place, then what made him/her throw a tantrum guiltlessly putting the entire family into embarrassment at another occasion? What could explain the easy existence of these different modes of behaviour in normal everyday life? It was the prevalence of multiple affective cores as reflected and accommodated in the everyday that I wanted to account for.

What I do take from Veena Das's work, however, is her disposition towards the study of the informal, the intimate and eclectic ordinary world of human subjects. She astutely acknowledges that the 'substance' of the everyday is not a mechanical one; it is certainly not a designed office where everyone fits in with known goals and means. The substance

of the everyday is lively, continuously marked by ruptures and inventions, so that the apparent regularities of everyday come to exist in the face of unpredictability and uncertainty. A focus on 'quotidian acts', the manners of capturing them and adducing narratives through them as a means of recovering the space of everyday life actions would do well to accommodate this salience of the everyday reality.

Equally critical in approaching the mundane and the everyday is the moral outlook we nurse as researchers delving into lives of subjects. Allow me here to reproduce a rather longish paragraph from Usha Menon's (2013a) ethnography on Odia Hindu women in the temple town of Bhubaneswar, the city where I went to do my fieldwork as well, in order to drive home the point that any micro-level research engagement with the day-to-day rhythms of participants has tremendous potential to reveal worldviews and the discourses on the reality that otherwise can go amiss by the researcher's disciplined focus, especially when underexposed to the 'subjectivity' of the respondents themselves.

I quote from her 'Preface':

I certainly saw myself as a modern woman not overburdened by cultural or religious baggage. And I have to admit that my initial attitude towards the upper caste, fairly orthodox, seemingly subservient Odia Hindu women of the temple town was edged with some slight superiority. However, through doing fieldwork and through getting to know some of these women and their families rather well, my attitude changed, imperceptibly perhaps but quite profoundly: I began to realise that these women and I shared certain fundamental values despite all the differences that separate us in terms of class, caste, and cultural and linguistic identity. ... There is little doubt that many of these women, especially when they are young and just married, live under enormous constraints: from a liberal perspective, temple town society is an illiberal one. But I found it hard to represent these women as victims of a misogynistic ideology. I found it equally hard to suggest that these women - even the younger ones - were proto-feminists, simply waiting for an opportune moment when they would rise up and rebel and demand a radical change in social and kinship arrangements. ... I finally began thinking that it made much more sense to portray these women as inhabiting a distinctively different moral universe in which the virtues they aspire to are not those that animate a liberal moral universe (Menon 2013a: viii).

Speaking for a 'multicultural feminism', Menon is convinced about the need to represent the issues of domestic values, individual choices and cultural constraint from an indigenous moral framework, as arrived at (in her instance) from the subjective interpretation of the lives encountered by her ethnography. Thus, at the very beginning

of her book, she declares: “This book explores the subjective wellbeing of traditional, upper-caste Hindu women ... and the opportunities they have over their life course for achieving control over their own lives, as well as empowering themselves in their relationships with others (ibid.: 1).

In a manner of speaking, my work too attempts a ‘subjective interpretation’ of the lives that I observed which includes specifically the child, parents and other family members. Having said this, I would like to again clarify that while Menon is more focused on revealing the habitual world of the domestic life of the Odia Hindu woman, my study is interested to explore how perceived deviations and differences of opinion are woven together into the habitual in the context of everyday enactments at home. I am particularly interested with grasping how given moments and events that have the potential to challenge the collective harmony are accommodated dynamically so as to allow a mutual space between the individual and the collective to emerge. In this regard, my methodological focus is closer to Veena Das’ work by way of looking at moments of reassertion and adjustments in reclaiming and re-enacting the everyday life, as often found in the spontaneous and momentary reactions of people to a given situation. Particularly, in the context of my study, I pay attention to the role of ‘moral sentiments’ in making sense of and explaining these situations. Overall, moral sentiments play a crucial role in texturing people’s social relations and conduct, while also presenting an opportunity to gaze at patterns of life as they come to be enacted on a normal and everyday basis.

The ‘Everyday’ Family and Ordinary Actions: Forwarding ‘Moral Sentiments’

In an early comment on ‘family studies’ in India, the sociologist Patricia Uberoi has eruditely observed:

In contrast to kinship studies, the general banality of theory in this area (family studies) has left spaces for the operation of ‘common sense’. Everyone has experience of family life, and everyone has opinions - and feelings - on it. ... In this case, one feels that reluctance to address the subject of the Indian family stem not from the unimportance and marginality of the field, but rather from its importance and sensitivity (Uberoi 1993: 1).

This, to me, is a telling observation, resonating as much today as it did in the early context of its framing. Needless to say, it loomed large over the spaces of my fieldwork, which as we already noted took me and the space of one's own world into the informal, private, emotional and intimate intra-family life of my subjects. Indeed, as already enunciated, I wanted to study the experiential realm of family life from the meanings and makings of its children. What did children have to say about 'family' and their family relationships? Needless to say, a lot of this covered the moral and emotional ground of family life. Not surprisingly, therefore, one of the most prominent features that first made itself apparent to me was the sense of 'aesthetics of relationship and conviviality' (see Robinson 2014: 115), which in my field context translated into a strong urge to be good in a way that made others happy and satisfied. Furthermore, in the context of my ethnography, as my ensuing chapters will help demonstrate, a strong hope of smooth transition from present to future preoccupied people's minds. Significantly, ruptures and breakdowns were as common as moments of happiness and sharing. My attention was also wedged by the difference between what people did, or thought they did, and what actually came across to be. There was a coexistence of an easy disowning of words and strongly expressed principles that intrigued me. I observed that expressions, gestures, and words could be grave and frivolous, indifferent and earnest; indeed, the sincerity and intimacy between ideas and actions, meanings and words, varied from time to time, person to person and situation to situation.

Clearly, there was more to the material and sentimental context that affected people's conduct (including that of my children subjects) and made them make different choices. The moral, emotional and aesthetic had a considerable role in influencing decisions, especially in the face of undecided futures. To be sure, while taking 'quotidian acts' as the unit of analysis had solved my problem of addressing the everyday/ordinary intra-familial settings of a child's life in the home, I still needed a frame to address the meaningfulness of the 'quotidian acts' themselves. What made these acts sensible and affectively real? Picking up the cues from my fieldwork, I started thinking about 'moral sentiments' as the dominant lens for looking at my field data and observations.

The reason I have decided to work with the idea of ‘moral sentiments’ - and not quite ‘moral reasoning’ - is because of the centrality that the children accorded to the ‘place of sentiments’ (feelings and affective states, essentially) in expressing and establishing the value of ‘family’ in their lives. Besides, the fact that the children used ‘sentiments’ to forward their claims inside the family further necessitated a foregrounding of the idea, and staging a narration along this axis. ‘Moral sentiments’, as feelings embodying an affective core, played this dual function of claiming and repositioning the family in children’s lives. I would like to cite Patricia Uberoi again in fortifying the ground of my conceptual choice:

I might point to [-] relatively unaddressed areas ... The first of these in the qualitative dimension of love, sex, marriage and family life. As a sociologist, we *have on the whole fought shy of chronicling the emotional tenor of family relations*. We have scarcely the tools or the vocabulary for such understanding beyond amateur impressionism. ... Here one might recommend a more active dialogue with psychology and psychiatry (Uberoi 1993: 36, emphasis added).

Further overtures on ‘moral sentiments’

Evidently, it now more than 25 years since Uberoi’s reminder, and obviously we need to forge new studies on this front (which is precisely what we are attempting to do here, albeit from the vantage point of childhood studies). More pointedly, by ‘moral sentiments’ I mean those shared emotions, sentiments, judgments and aesthetic values that configure the lives of my subjects and which they (my subjects, primarily the children) deployed and used in the conduct of their daily lives. I must also here stress on the varying applications of these ‘sentiments’ in different situations and contexts. This capacious concept gives me a framework to capture the content, meaning, and modes of everyday behaviour that I observed during my fieldwork, as well as providing a schema of narration encapsulating aspects of the lives of children within the home. This latter aspect I will tackle in due course; for the moment, let me stay with the idea of ‘moral sentiments’.

The philosopher and meta-ethics scholar Remy Debes, in an encyclopaedia entry on ‘Moral sentiments’, offers the following clarification:

Moral sentiments are those emotions, passions, or affective states and dispositions that play a necessary or explanatorily important role in moral

judgment, experience, or motivation. In contemporary discussion (especially in the empirical and social sciences) these are often taken to include some combination of guilt, shame, resentment, indignation, contempt, benevolence, sympathy, and perhaps gratitude, esteem, respect, and admiration. However, any such list is necessarily contentious, for it hangs on various assumptions that conceal, even betray, the real complexity of philosophical thinking about ‘moral sentiments’ (Debes 2013: 4821).

Of course, it is easy to say that ‘moral sentiments’ is not a new concept, and yet it is difficult to assign the concept a categorical position in sociological studies. In fact, any effort to do so can easily turn into a kind of heady and pretty confusing experience. In a fledgling reflection, the young sociologist Cheuk-Yin Li, working off an idea of ‘affective practice’ as a way of capturing the feelings, orientations, and aspects of embodiment relating to gender identification, has correctly observed that “(a)ffect has puzzled many of us in the social sciences for its vague definition and radical freedom” (Cheuk-Yin Li 2015: 23). Accordingly, on the one hand, the study of emotions and affects in anthropology could possibly throw us into the hedge of “materialism and idealism, positivism and interpretivism, universalism and relativism, individual and culture, and romanticism and rationalism” (Lutz and White 1986: 406), even as on the other hand the study of ‘morality’ could take us anywhere into a burgeoning space of values, ethics, sentiments, reasoning, virtue, and narratives (see generally Fassin 2012). In fact, with reference to ‘affect’ per se, we must ask pointedly: “What is affect? Is it a concept, a theory, a methodology, or a paradigm?” (Cheuk-Yin Li 2015: 18). A similar order of puzzles is pertinent for me with reference to the idea of ‘moral sentiments’, and necessarily about how I could be using it in my own work (see Sahoo 2018). Allow me some further commentary.

It has been passingly commented: “Finally, research on the importance of moral emotions flourished during the 1980s, as the cognitive revolution branched into multiple skirmishes, including the battle of intuitionism versus rationalism (Shweder and Haidt 2000 [1993]: 361). Indeed, as part of this flourishing, we have in the context of India/South Asia the work of Owen Lynch (1990), who actively sought to understand the variations between the Indian models of ideal behaviour, emotion and feelings as appearing in the folk tradition and those illuminated in the classical texts. As part of this

exercise, he attempts a quick overview of the dominant approaches to study of emotions, maintaining in particular that the Cartesian division of mind-body and Levi-Straussian structuralism's antinomy between form-practice created a decontextualized approach to the study of emotions. Indeed, such divisions (as Lynch analyses) gave primacy to reasons and rules over emotions and practices, with meanings to be arrived at from the internal definitions of the words (each defined in opposition to one another) and not from their pragmatic use. Evidently, such an approach did not allow for any possibility of 'multivocality and polyvalency' in the interpretation of emotions and meanings and as part of their creative process of applications. In fact, according to Lynch, this was true even for 'hermeneutic anthropologists', for whom the study of emotion dealt with 'cognized semantic meaning' in a community, even as the 'real' felt emotions were left out for the domain of physiology and psychology (see Lynch 1990: 92).

Needless to say, Lynch dissociates his own work from this approach, and he urges for a framework of understanding where emotions are "culturally constituted appraisals experienced by an engaged self" (ibid.: 93) and which reveals a greater reliance on the situational use of 'emotion words' and not merely on referential theory to explicate meaning. It is important to note that as culturally constituted appraisals, emotions are at the same time sentient (felt) and sensible (addressed self-reflectively); what is more, they often correspond with such emotions that are collectively known and connected to a larger gamut of the emotional web (and accordingly providing the scope to address simultaneously the individual and the collective). Lynch, in fact, further engages himself with the impact of various cultural, historical and political forces in the construction of any ideal-typical emotional category.

To be sure, in the course of my own fieldwork, I was made very conscious about the loaded emotional character of the everyday as experienced by my subjects. There was something very particular too about the sentiments that the people expressed and brought to my attention. Whether it was about their sense of belongingness to the family or their need for a more close-knit neighbourhood, even their very self-image and sense of pride in a moral self and about family values (and equally their aspirations for a brighter future and the like) – indeed all the emotions that seemed worth taking note of and describing

tended to weave a kind of moral web that had to be accounted for. Thus (as Lynch has conclusively stated): “Finally, emotions are not merely feelings of the true self lurking behind a social mask ... Rather they are moral and motivating cultural appraisals that constitute particular kinds of persons” (ibid.: 110). In this specific sense, my work does attempt to describe the moral and emotional moorings of the family as expressed and experienced by my subjects, and which are also constitutive of the latter as particular kinds of persons. But equally I would like to clarify that my work also encounters many moments where the individual actions seemed to challenge the basic emotional and moral fibre of familial bonds, although such moments were often rendered acceptable and easily normalized in the lives of the people involved.

The attendant complexity requires a framework of analysis that would enable one to reach beyond the very terms of what Lynch has called ‘culturally constitutive appraisal’, while also accounting for a broader and livelier realm of moral integration and individual orientations. Indeed, this latter imperative made it even more urgent for my own work to address more fully and freely the lived normality of spontaneity, atypicality and uncertainty within the home and across the familial bond. Accordingly, while I do take to aspects of Lynch’s framework of emotions as a ‘culturally constituted appraisal’ of the situation, I consciously attempt to limit its application to a mere context of description or as a kind of background, while striving to orient my inquiry more resolutely into the unfolding dynamic of the adjustment and readjustment of emotions and feelings in the day-to-day conduct of life within the family/home.

Even more decisively for my purposes, I have found the anthropologist Jason Throop providing an even more comprehensive overview of the topic of emotions, specifically working off the major trends in the use of ‘sentiments, emotions, affect, feelings and moods’ in the anthropology of morality *per se* (see Throop 2012). He calls attention to the work of scholars who have looked at how ‘moral emotions’ have defined the ethical life of individuals and communities, while also attesting to works that have addressed ‘emotions’ as structures of embodied moral orders particular to a given group. But even more suggestively, along a different axis, he adduces to a focus on “morally problematic or ambivalent emotions” as a key to re-examining the conventional picture of moral

systems of a given group and leading to a moral reassessment of ‘self and other’ experiences within it (Throop 2012: 150). Even as the terms of this reassessment is suggestive, I do not intend to dwell any further on this space of the anthropology of morality per se (although some further discussion will follow presently). Accordingly, before venturing into how the idea of ‘moral sentiments’ helps structure my own work in terms of the exposition to follow in the chapters that will ensue, I would like to briefly put into perspective some crucial points about this very framework that seems pertinent to my research object.

My first point relates, broadly, to the relation between sentiments, morality, and culture. Anthropology has had a long history of addressing the culturally central and patterned sentiments of a community so as to describe the salient ‘personality structures’ and ‘ethos’ of the people, even as it has moved towards grasping the moral aspects of emotion in the context of which the ‘moral’ ways of being and their cultural entailments have been seen as strongly influenced by extant modes of feeling and experiencing. Increasingly so, as Throop reminds us, anthropologists are engaging with the ‘intertwining’ of the moral and sentimental (see also Shweder and Haidt 2000 [1993]). Simultaneously, yet, as Throop again highlights, there is lack of studies that theorise the place of sentimental in the moral and ethical life of subjects. In the context of my own work though, I do not so much concern myself with the direction of the causal link between the sentimental and moral, nor do I pay attention to them as separable entities as a starting point of the research. My interest is more about capturing the ways in which children make use of particular moral sentiments in carrying out their daily family life. For instance, as we shall see in course, I come across situations where, even as for the child the ‘family’ as a form of the ‘good’ is taken to embody ‘happiness’, it is seen as ‘appropriate’ for him/her to ‘feel and express unhappiness by pressing for demands’ without necessarily qualifying the same as an interference within the prior attribution of family life. Consequently, my attention is on the different attitudes and dispositions that children adapt and display so as to make for a deeper understanding of what allows for the moral and the sentimental to cohere. Whether the descriptive nuances of this analysis will enable a fuller discussion about the relation between the moral and sentimental will have to await our substantive chapters that follow. At any rate, I believe that my work

charts the line of a ‘consequentialist ethics’ where meanings are arrived at from the acts and discourses of actors in the light of the impact they have on a situation or even series of events, and not so much from apriori rules or specific dispositions of the agent (see also Fassin 2012: 8).

A related point is a distinction drawn between two approaches to the anthropology of morality, one having to do with the supposedly unreflected ‘moral everyday’ that takes its cues from the norms and social conventions of society and the other approach directed at ‘ethical performance’, which involves a kind of ‘stepping away’ so as to reflect on one’s actions specifically in situations of ‘moral breakdown’ or ‘problematization’ (see Zigon 2007: 135-39). Indeed, for the scholar just cited – a noted anthropologist, by the way – the latter approach is vital, considering that the moments of ‘ethical demands’ are singular and unconventional resisting as they do the application of unreflected normal behaviour. In fact, Zigon takes into account two ‘communities’ facing ‘moral breakdown’ so as to explain his framework, namely, the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea (where the ‘moral tussle’ is between their traditional moral values and that of the new Pentecostal Christian church) and the Muscovite women in Russia (caught in between Communism and the Orthodox Christian church). Zigon is clear that only in these moments of ‘moral breakdown’ does the ‘ethical performance’ present itself, and that this should be the focal point of any anthropology of morality. It is precisely here that I feel the need to register my disagreement with this framework. While Zigon goes a long way in minutely eliciting the dynamics and multiple aspects of moral life, the demarcation of ‘situations of ethical demands’ as at once singular and unconventional is something that I do not find accurate. For instance, he uses such expressions as ‘perpetual moral breakdown’ or ‘constantly maintaining vigilance’ to describe the ethical dilemma that the two ‘communities’ faced because of ongoing social transformations (ibid.: 142). Even more emphatically, I cannot view these moments as singular and unconventional, but rather as constitutive of the very design of everyday life. While this alternative emphasis on my part may seem extreme as well, I take this to be the view that informs my field setting (devoid of all historical registers, of course). The homes and families that I accessed seemed to be attached to regularities, and not as separate phases or sides of daily life. Here again, I would like to take recourse to Veena Das (2019), who

in a recent paper has eloquently observed: “It is the way the ethical and unethical might be knotted together that asks for a different kind of description of forms of life than either by enumeration of virtues or evaluations of particular actions. What might such a description entail?”

(https://www.academia.edu/19629267/Ethics_as_An_Expression_of_Everyday_Life_Revised_; Last accessed 26 December 2019). She goes on to state:

Though I have argued for many years now that everyday life is shadowed by skepticism and that belief and doubt are aspects of each other ..., I have perhaps not emphasized enough that the challenge is not to find a solution to this problem of skepticism but to learn to maintain it as part of everyday life, of habituation (ibid.).

Further tracing the theme of ‘ethics as an expression of everyday life’, Das is keen to show how the fabric of experiences in kinship contexts, with their attendant ambiguities, rituals, and ‘actual’ and ‘as if’ realities, are aligned to create a life lived as a whole and not as singular individual acts that can be independently evaluated. Broadly, it is this approach of looking at ordinary actions in day-to-day life situations and occurrences, each with its given ambiguities and certainties, that I would like to subscribe as the basis of my schematisation and narration.

Another important point which is definitive on my conceptual orientation is that, in the philosophising about ‘moral sentiments’ generally, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the nature of one’s disposition towards others’ and on the various sites of its manifestation. Indeed, the Scottish moral philosophers, especially Adam Smith, saw in ‘moral sentiments’ the expression of a sense of ‘fellow-feeling’ primarily in the form of sympathy for other’s pain (as opposed to self-love and self-preservation as found in Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville), which allows for reinstating a framework of study that brings the intersubjective dimension of morality to the foreground. While the latter is an important dimension for any study of morality, the line of thinking on the question especially by those theorists who follow in the wake of Nietzsche such as Freud and Foucault has been to wholly reject the view that moral life “flows unproblematically from natural inclinations” (see Throop 2012: 153-54). More fecundly, these theorists focus on the conditions of an ‘internal split’ owing to the demands of the ‘social moral state’ over the ‘individual state’ and point towards the various ‘techniques’ applied by

the self to adjust to the external moral environment (ibid.). ‘Moral sentiment’ can thus be, necessarily, a space of conflict and ambivalence.

More definitively, given the overall context of my research where I deal with ‘one’s own world’ and where the children explicitly and evidently paid much attention to their relation to and with others in the family, this aspect of conflict and ambivalence will take dominance in my space of narration. All the same, however, I must reiterate that my perspective is more focused on the application and reference to the affective folds of ‘moral sentiments’ and not so much to other coordinates like power and powerlessness, whether existential or socio-cultural. Additionally, my ethnography also subsumes the various ‘manipulations of the external’ as exerted by the children so as to express their own sense of individuality and also collective purpose. Hopefully, the structures of my narration, in the context of its schematisation and repetitive folds, will allow for a fuller description to unfold, even as its staging will facilitate a more robust rendering of the moral nuances of multiple actors – specifically, the children of my field – in the daily rhythms of the ‘world at home’.

Operationalising ‘moral sentiments’: an analytical tripartite schema

Surely the choice of ‘moral sentiments’ as a conceptual framework of narration was an ‘emic requirement’ emanating from my field, and accordingly necessitates a particular characterisation (see Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 194). The framework as a whole emerged in the context of the themes and their underlying dynamic that sprung up from my own ethnography. Let me quickly try and elaborate on how ‘moral sentiments’ helped me in consolidating my themes and facilitated my narration. In the process, the tripartite schema that analytically unfolds itself through my three substantive chapters that follow will become strong and clear.

As frequently affirmed in my previous chapters, as also the present one, when I commenced my work with children in their family settings, I was taken in by the overwhelming reference to ‘feelings’ in day-to-day life and its dynamics. The family and ‘home’ were invariably talked about and expressed as a place of happiness,

togetherness and belonging. This was so even in the face of charged and almost routine moments of squabble and disputation and, sometimes, in the backdrop of deep family fissures and diatribes. Moreover, this understanding of family as a space of care and trust was also deliberately worked upon and induced, a performativity in which the children partook profusely and involvedly. The schema of my substantive narration registers this phenomenon under the rubric of ‘family feeling’ (largely, Ch.5), which incidentally is a register called attention to in a colloquial English by one of my children subject’s to designate the family as an organic form in its own right.

Both accompanying and interlaced with the idea of ‘family feeling’ is an almost continuous and repetitive assessment of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, of being ‘responsible’ and/or ‘irresponsible’, and which in my analytically orchestrated rendering translates into the question, ‘What is it to be a good, responsible, obedient or mischievous child at home?’ (through Ch.6 here, by and large). Given that ‘feelings’ are constitutively important, the very idea of being responsible and good would involve not hurting others’ feelings. As will become clear, considering that my children subjects had no second thoughts about their feelings for their own family, they likewise had no misgivings about thinking of themselves as inevitably good and loving children. This affective core, however, came into some pressure – or even clashed - when parents or grandparents either tried to discipline them or urged them to become ‘independent’ in their work. Children, to be sure, were bound to have a mixed reaction to parental rulings; and, as my narrations will disclose, while a few children easily yielded, some others resisted and maintained their individual ways. All along, for me, this called for a deeper engagement with children’s beliefs and perceptions, about their ideas of good and bad, responsible and irresponsible, and the place of the affirmed sense of ‘family feeling’ in this affective complex.

The possibility of a smooth transition into the future is one of the most pressing preoccupations of every person in the everyday realm, and this is all the more so in the face of an unclear or even undecidable future. This is even more pertinent in the case of children, since they are often categorised as the ‘next generation’ or ‘future generation’. Both parents and children in my field seemed to live the present in the shadow of the imagination of the child’s future. A desirable sense of ‘settlement’ for their child in the

future sometimes drove both the children and parents on a mission mode. Paradoxically, yet, the idea of a good life, with one's goals and aspirations fully met, were also deeply anchored in the child's present; in other words, in the child's self-image based on her/his own achievements and dignity of an always-obtaining family life. My children subjects had various ways of evaluating their own self-image and family life, which as my third order of narration will disclose (in the context of Ch.7 hereon) is intricately woven with morally charged feelings of pride, glory, shame and so forth.

Thus, through this analytically tripartite schema of narration, I have tried to operationalize our framework of 'moral sentiments'. The framework itself and the schema of its narration have, I believe, enabled a fairly intricate and complex rendering of children's family life as experienced and lived through in the context of the home. The tripartite schema helps me to detail fairly minutely various aspects of the children's lives - whether it be their own self-effacing structure of beliefs and aspirations, their outlook towards the behaviour and expectations of other family members (be it their own parents/grandparents and other relatives), family routines and quarrels, adjustments and assertions of space and belonging, and the general tides of everyday living with its complacencies and surprises – in a word, to echo our thesis title, 'the world at home' as borne out by my children subjects.

Part Three**Emotional Landscapes: Three Folds of Narration**

Chapter 5



Family Feeling and ‘Me’ Moments: Emotions in Children’s Daily Lives

During the last week of their trip to India, 6-year-old Shreya and her parents were invited by each of their relatives for farewell meals. Shreya liked chicken, and so there it was in every menu at each home. Shreya’s grandmother kept waiting for her turn, hoping fervently for the chance to feed her grandchild the all-time hit ‘chilly chicken’. After about four days, Shreya and her parents got a chance to be at home for a meal; and grandma prepared the dish with utmost care. Her excitement was vivid. But there was a problem. Shreya had quietly gone up to her mother and expressed that she did not want any more chicken! Shreya’s mother was now torn between grandma’s excitement and Shreya’s discomfort. She knew that it was unadvisable to force the child. Shreya’s mother kept looking at her beseechingly, but Shreya did not yield. At last, the mother urged cautiously, “Baby just one piece, I will take the rest. Grandma has been waiting for this entire week and she made it just for you”. Shreya sat with a pained expression. Her mother appealed, “I know it is difficult. But how will grandma feel? Are you making good choices?” Shreya sat silently.

Oblivious of this situation, grandma started to serve dinner in the hall, and called out for everyone to join. Shreya hastily uttered to her mother, “Ok, one piece. Promise?” Her mother nodded positively. When grandma came to the room, her face beaming, she looked at her grandchild and declared, “Shreya mama, I have made your favourite chilly chicken”. Shreya jumped into grandma’s arms, hugged her and cheerily uttered, “Yeah! I love chicken!!”, planting a kiss on grandma’s cheek. I was taken aback by this enactment. Grandma made Shreya sit in her lap and fed her three pieces that Shreya had picked. Then the little girl told grandma that she was full and she would like her to pack it for the next day. Grandma was happy; “Ok mama”, she replied satisfactorily. Before retiring for the night, I asked Shreya if she liked what grandma had made. Shreya replied in a matter of fact way, “Yeah, it was yummy. She knows how I like it”. Shreya’s mother’s face relaxed as she packed her daughter to bed. Later, I pointedly asked her, “Is not Shreya still young to understand others’ feelings?” Her mother replied, “They are taught in school that it is not a good choice to hurt others’ feelings. At home, we try to build on that. It takes a lot of talking to explain to her a situation, but I must admit that she mostly cooperates”.

Though this foregoing observation was made outside the purview of my research, I choose to begin with this piece of narration as it highlights the nature of micro-encounters

and interactions of children in the family setting, which I am going to conceptualize in order to discern the role of emotion and sentiments (as attributed by children) directed at constructing relations and bonds within their family life. How do children feel, understand and express emotions to further their family relations and build their family space? What role do emotions have in the day-to-day negotiations that children have with their family members and how does it affect decision making and actions taken in the family? These are the order of questions, consistent with the framework of ‘moral sentiments’ outlined in the fourth chapter, that I am trying to get a measure of in the pages that follow. The chapter also foregrounds the orders of narration that will sustain the chapters that follow.

Clueing into Emotions: A Quick Appraisal

“Emotions”, it has been claimed, “are central to everyday interactions. They motivate behaviour, shape agency, contribute to self-control and social control, and bear the traces of systemic disadvantage” (Fields, Copp and Kleinman 2006: 155). Emotions, more specifically, have a dual function, in that as a feeling, primarily, it is experienced in the form of a natural reaction to a certain situation (such as feeling sad when spoken rudely or feeling happy when appreciated). Indeed, while ‘feeling good’ is something everyone looks forward to, ‘feeling bad’ is something everyone wants to avoid. This precisely gives emotions their normative order of existence, where it becomes a matter of morality and ethics to ‘not hurt anyone’ or to ‘take care of other’s feelings’, ‘not to break someone’s heart’ and the like. In this latter sense, a certain moral sentimental value gets associated with different aspects of life. For example, it feels ‘good’ to be with family, and it feels ‘bad’ to be away from them. During my fieldwork, I noticed that children, from an early age, were very much aware of this dual function of emotion in the context of their family life. This awareness created a very complex set of behavioural tendencies and strategies on the part of children with regard to both family and self, each rendering emotions and sentiments as the mainstay of the child’s imagination and experience of family life.

My attention to this ‘emotional’ aspect of social living in my field was drawn by a frequent reference made by the children in their conversation about their family relations, namely, about ‘family feeling’ or, more exactly, ‘*Paribara ra mana*’ (literally ‘family’s heart or mind’). Such an indexical reference emerged as one of the major organising principles in children’s explanations, decisions, and actions in matters related to their family life. I could clearly perceive that for the children in my field, it was a ‘cherished feeling’ to be in good terms with their family; it made for a ‘feel-good factor’ and presented itself as a desirable quality of their family life. More importantly, I found that the children were aware of the fact that the quality of a relation in a family is something that has to be deliberately and continuously achieved, and not left to the natural course of time and events. Thus the children were absorbed in creating such an environment along with other family members, one that would help build and strengthen the family ties. However, this was not the entire story about emotions and family relations, for (as we shall see) children simultaneously used this understanding of emotions and its role in a relationship to advance their own demands in the family setting.

Emotions and sentiments, in this sense, were used as ‘moral resources’ to give shape to one’s own experiences and enactments of relationships within the family. Children actively read other’s emotions, varyingly interpreted them depending on their own analysis of personal and family interest, and freely used emotional performances or invocation in forwarding their material and ideational claims. This latter phenomenon I call ‘me moments’. A similar situation is described by Teresa Robinson (2014) in her study of middle-class Pune, where she found a discernible ‘youth culture’ as separate from the adults, and yet a deeper probe revealed to her that the youth continued to privilege the relationships of family ties and old friendships. As she discerningly observes: “(T)hey realised themselves not only by reinforcing or subverting, but also by performing, inhabiting, experiencing, aspiring to, and reaching for social roles and expectations” (Robinson 2014: 261). I too was intrigued by the simultaneous operation of individual and familial orientations in my field. All the different emotions that gripped the children in their varying spirits equally mobilised the family relations and animated daily manifestations and/or realizations. In particular, I was fascinated by the normal coexistence of differing paradigms of emotions: the familial as well as individual-

oriented feelings in the children's daily life. Not surprisingly, therefore, I decided to explore this easy movement of children between the individual and familial modes of existence. In the process, I am also interested in looking at the varying perspectives and applications of emotion in different situations at home by children.

Jan E. Stets and Jonathan H. Turner have brought out, at separate intervals of time, two thick volumes of the *'Handbook of the Sociology of the Emotions'* as a part of the 'Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research' series (by Springer) in which they allot 12 chapters to various theoretical perspectives on the study of emotions in sociology in each volume (see Stets and Turner 2006 and 2014). Some of the theoretical perspectives common to both the volumes include (what is termed) 'Affect control theories', 'Power status theories', 'Identity theories', 'Ritual theories', 'Cultural theories', 'Expectation states theories', 'Justice processes theories', 'Neurosociology', and so on. This sheer volume and diversity of theories gives me a sense that though the study of the sociology of emotions has been growing rapidly, there is yet no systematic attempt to synthesise the works, albeit with some rudimentary efforts in this direction. In fact, elsewhere Robinson, Clay-Warner and Everett (2008) have tracked the development of the sociology of emotions to 'divergent paths', one track having to do with qualitative descriptions that provide for an empirical base to the study of emotions and the other directed at quantitative and predictive work as a basis for formal modelling exercises. This divergence notwithstanding, they identify the moot questions in the study of the sociology of emotions as being necessarily about the impact of emotions on social structures and vice-versa. They explain that the pioneering studies around the 1970s used to be focused on normative structures governing emotions through 'feeling rules' and 'cultures of emotions', which were gradually replaced by the emergence of yet another approach (what they term 'structural symbolic interactionism') that emphasized the role of 'identity meanings' and 'ability of social interactions' within the social structure in generating emotional responses and maintaining cultures of emotions (ibid.:2-4). For the purpose of my analysis, primarily, I underplay the social structural element and focus directly on the interpretative application of emotions in daily life, which (as the symbolic interactionist work on emotions has rightly emphasized) "are not merely natural impulse [but rather] are shaped both by culture and our human capacity

to react to and make sense of our own feeling” (Fields, Copp and Kleinman 2006: 156). I would like to describe how children feel and chose to display various emotions which creates and recreates the familial as well as individual space in different situations in their home setting. Giving it a ‘constructivist’ angle, I will address how children’s understanding and attitude to emotions help them understand and define the family and their own space at home.

For the data-presentation, I have chosen four out of the six families where I did my intensive field study. The first family is that of Luv and Kush, the twins. Both the twins were studying in the 9th standard when I started my intensive field study. This family stood out in its emotional etiquette, space for mutual understanding, privileging of familial wellbeing and its coordinated daily activities. The children of the family not only made a positive assessment about their family life, but also labelled themselves as the ‘perfect family’. The second family is that of Atman, who was also in the 9th standard when I started working with him. His family seemed to show a dispersed form of living with different members having little need for coordinated activities. The assertion of individual needs and views were quite strong in the family; and yet Atman saw his family as made up of people with certain ‘inner-connection’ that distinguished them as a single naturally-related group as opposed to others in a crowd. The third family I discuss is that of Samiksha and Aksh who were in standard 8th and 4th respectively. Their family was marked by a prominent presence of relatives, mutual love and affection, celebrations and coordinated activities. The children were still given individual attention, space of expression and specific interest. Finally, I talk about Mantu’s family, who was in the 3rd standard when I started interacting with him. Mantu is a single child and was handled with much indulgence by his parents, even as they were pretty strict about his behaviour and performance. His family had witnessed some severe strife with relatives leading to intra-familial tensions. Mantu still believed in the family being the place for trust, gratification, and safety. All the same, there was a continuous tussle between Mantu and his parents over his demands and his orientation.

In a principle which I will adhere, through the logic of the present chapter as well as the next two to follow, I make use of fairly elaborate narratives (issuing from sets of data

retraceable to each family clustered across events and time) in the four families to bring about the story of ‘family feeling’ and ‘me moments’ that I witnessed while studying children’s family life. In narrativising the sections, across the children just named, I have focused on highlighting three organising points anchoring each narrative in the following sequence: (a) I start by giving a picture of children’s own interpretation of being in a family, its collective spirit and its many aspects highlighting the ‘Family Feeling’ aspect; (b) I move on to briefly look at children’s acknowledgment of their parents’ role in their life; and (c) I choose to narrate about children’s experiences and handling of such situations in which they were in a tussle with the collective sentiment of their family, highlighting accordingly the ‘me moments’. These folds of description are however not independently articulated as a sequence; rather they intermesh with each other. The condensed order of our articulation, therefore, and the resolving of these situations as described, provides us with an enriched picture of the play of emotions in different forms in children’s daily life. In putting together the narration, I have equally relied on understandings emanating from conversations and active observation.

LUV and KUSH: The ‘Perfect Family’

Luv and Kush, the inseparable twins, called their family “the perfect family”. The family was indeed very well coordinated. They made sure to spend quality time as a family, and everyone tried to match their time to the swings of the household. It was common for the mother to delay her lunch to afternoon, waiting for her children to return from school and join her. The family shared profusely. Everyone took an interest in what each one might have to say, adult and child alike. The moment their father entered the house he inquired after everyone’s whereabouts and, after freshening up, he had a chat with all on the day’s matters. If I was present, then I was included too. The parents did not hesitate to give ready advice and instructions to their children on getting involved or reacting to situations and people, which the children took agreeably. Politics and world issues were also discussed with interest. In this, the father’s view reigned as he worked in the government secretariat and often had the insider’s view or wider and multiple perspectives on political matters which he had acquired while discussing with various people at his office.

However, if the children did not wish to join in the family discussions or left in the middle of one, then they were allowed to do so. For instance, the daughter many a time moved out to call her friends, cousins or finish assignments, even as the rest of the family sat talking. The boys also sometimes took leave if they felt like completing their homework or to finish a storybook. No one was allowed to complain about another's work. Late evening, it was not uncommon to find the three siblings sitting around the sofa table in the front room, engrossed in their respective tasks silently, while the sound of the television came pouring in from the inner room where their father relaxed in his after office hour and their mother engaged in preparing dinner in the kitchen. The mother moved about checking on each one of them and sometimes asking for a helping hand.

I liked to visit this family, especially when everyone was at home. They gravitated towards each other. Everything was mostly systematic, planned and routinized; everyone had a sense of participation and involvement at the same time, with no squabbling or any last moment confusion and rush. When things went wrong, it was discussed, pointed out in a matter of fact way and hardly overstretched. I wondered if it meant having considerable discipline, obedience, and patience on the part of the children. I wanted to understand what children thought and felt about it. In what way they owned up to how the group life was conducted in their family? Kush was quick to explain:

Family is all members of the house taken together (*Gharara sabu sadasya ekathi*). Attachment or affection is important. There is a feeling. You can share everything. What you cannot tell anyone else, you can tell the family. Sharing, help and cooperation (*mili-missi*) ... mutual understanding (*paraspara buhjamana*). When decisions are made, everyone is considered. Even children are included (*shamil*), but mostly decision is taken on their behalf. Children are consulted depending on age. A 14-15 year old can say what is good or not in shopping, but a 10-12-year-old may not. But today's family is becoming like machine families ... work-oriented. Everything has to be done according to time. And there is no time for free talk and spending time together.

Evidently, attachment, mutuality, dependency, and security stood out as some of the prominent qualifications that the children attached in their description of family as a collective space. The 'togetherness' or 'unity' of a family, both in terms of coordinated activities as well as in terms of an imagination of a connected existence of self and family,

was expressively asserted as an essential characteristic of a family by the twins Luv and Kush. The over-scheduled work-life of contemporary subjects was seen in opposition to the desirable family values of being-together and spending quality time. ‘Quality family time’ (*Gharalokanka sange khushi-basi kariba* / Doing happiness with people at home), in fact, was highly cherished by the children as well as parents, and expressed as an essential indicator of the state of familial life and well-being. Equally important were individual member’s feelings, interests and dignity, all of which was also seen as the preoccupation of a ‘*mili-missi*’ or ‘sharing family’.

The boys also cherished their vacation get-togethers in their ancestral village. They often spoke elaborately about their relatives, the joint celebrations of festivals, and the overall time spent with their cousins. They diligently created photo albums for each of their vacations and outings with their relatives and friends on their computer, and replayed the albums to willing guests adding a detailed verbal commentary. Their mother often talked about her own father’s family very fondly:

Some are industrialists and scientists. But everyone is the same to us as before. All still have a similar living style (*saman chalani*). My children do not know who my real sister is and who my cousin is. Such affection (*mamata*) and belongingness (*aapanapana*) is there among us. There are no presumptions of status (*bada pania*). I tell my children about these family legacies (*bansha maryada*). No one in my family ever asked their father for money; all struggled on their own. No matter how difficult our situation is, we never make a commotion. We suppressed our feelings, and there is a need to understand others’ feelings (*mana*) as well. A lot of patience is needed. I tell them [turning to her twins], they cannot lose their manners; they cannot disregard (*bekhatir*) anyone’s feelings in the family. They must have empathy (*mana bujhiki chalibe*). You cannot go on sulking and huffing, you have to talk and share (*raga rusa chalibai, jaha hela kahiba, katha barta kariba*). My children do not demand; they know that parents will do their best to cater to their needs. And they see us doing everything possible with our limited options. I never interfere in their having their little joys (*chota chota khushi*).

Altogether, in the wider network of relatives, it was important for the members that the relationships were being advanced on the basis of the kinship connection, with the emotion of ‘belongingness’ (*aapanapana*) overlooking the differences of status and positions that family members had acquired. Strategies of living together (*ekathi chaliba*) were stressed alongside such principles as respect for others’ feelings,

maintaining emotional decorum, empathy, proper communication, trusting others' intentions and efforts for the collective space. The quality of the relationship and its aesthetics, as it were, were considered crucial, and never to be compromised.

Needless to say, I wanted to understand if children took ownership of such relationship rules and standards, as also with how they coped with the discipline of it all. More specifically, as I mentioned earlier, I wanted to see how children perceived and managed this dual prioritization of regard for family and for individual feelings? Equally, I wanted to know about situations where interests and wishes clashed? Towards the middle of my fieldwork, when I had become pretty close to the Luv-Kush family, I decided to ask the boys about this directly. The twins felt very strongly about 'trust' and accountability in family relations; to the extent that trust was explained as the staying factor that could pull the family through in times of rift. Significantly, both trust in intention and action were stressed by the children. Not only they believed that their parents' intentions behind any suggestion or decision were sincere, but each also perceived their parents' actions and habits in line with it. Kush, effervescent as ever, answered to my order of querying:

To manage fights and quarrels, you need a 'head' [of the family] (*Murabi*). It is important to obey. If there is fear (*bhaya*) of the 'head', children will obey. Children will fear if they have been taught to; it wholly depends on teaching (*sikha*). Teaching is needed. If *Baba* (Father) says, we obey. Whether I agree or not, I don't say anything at that time. But I keep thinking about the reasons. Later on, I see the reason. But there are times when I don't understand. Still, I trust he has some reasons. ... In family, conflict is the test of trust (*biswasa*). Every action will bring an effect on the family. If there is trust then the family will remain intact; if no trust, then the family will break.

In fact, on another occasion, Kush categorically reiterated: "Trust is an important thing (*Biswasa hin Bada Katha*). Can you trust someone outside hundred percent? The way you can trust family members, like that you cannot trust someone outside".

Trust was constantly at play in word as in deed. In fact, in relation to moments of conflict where the behaviour expected and the actions performed are not clear and cordial, the boys insisted that trust in the person's intention can keep the relation going. They insisted that, to begin with, children will have to be instructed on how to merely obey; and that later on they may learn and realise to 'trust' themselves. I could clearly see that the

element of trust to a great extent was dependent on the authority of parents as the ‘knowers’, though it was not limited to it. There were distinct moments where the boys felt that the parents’ were unable to understand or read their situation appropriately and/or that their parents’ conduct was not entirely fair. Still, they accepted to obey it, because (as they insisted and one could discern it in the very fabric of relations) they trusted the parent’s intention. A family is a ‘collective’ to which they belonged and it belonged to them. It was their own, as opposed to the world outside or to outsiders. The home or ‘family’ was a place where ‘trust’ could be exercised to its fullest, especially since the loss and pain of one person can be seen as loss and pain of the family itself. This will be clearer from the situations that I describe below, one after another.

Luv talked to me about an incident while we were conversing about what makes him obey his parents:

We were in the school line. All were shouting. Parents were standing at a distance. Few of them even scolded us. Our group had no fault. We were quiet. But in front of all, *Baba* (father) scolded us too. We felt ashamed, but we understood and looked with our heads bowed. But another boy snapped back at his father. ... If I am not at fault and I get scolded, then I don’t feel good. But if they (parents) come and explain to me the issue, then I understand. Sometimes if I want something and they don’t allow, then I wait and try to change their mind. But if they totally deny, then I give up. We have not spent much time outside and we don’t know much. What if I go wrong? If they get much tensed because of me, then I think it is not good ... we cannot break their heart (*Mana bhangi habani*).

It was interesting for me to see the sense of ownership that the boys had for the emotional maturity and mutual understanding which the family aspired to maintain between its members and also demanded of the children. Luv and Kush’s father believed in patience, elaborate dialogues to resolve issues or arrive at decisions, and sought his children’s suggestions to access their orientations and likings. The mother acted as a vehicle between the members helping each one to understand and show regard for each other. She was categorical, “You cannot disregard others in your family. That will not do” (*Paribara re kahaku bekhatir kariparibani*). Towards the end of my fieldwork, I got a chance to see how the family responded to a crisis situation and still upheld its set values.

The boys had been preparing for their 10th examination during my last leg of fieldwork. Months before the exam, my visits had become rare as the entire focus of the family was on the boys' studies. I had moved on to do my field study in other houses in the neighbourhood. However, I continued to be in touch with Luv and Kush's family inquiring about the exam preparation and tests. At times, I helped the boys revise their history chapters and found their hold on the topics above satisfactory. During this time something unexpected occurred. A few months before the exam, the state education department decided to change the pattern of the 10th board examination. Pre-board exams were stalled and children were called to schools in the middle of study leave to revise the new format of question paper and to become familiar with the new OMR sheets. Even the marking schemes were changed (in the sense that where the children had been preparing as long questions, now they had to prepare for shorter questions). All over the state, there was great dissatisfaction and anxiety. Luv and Kush's family, however, took to it with great patience as the boys worked hard to reorient their preparation. The family regularly tracked and discussed the situation helping the boys to cope. They explained to the boys that it was a state-wide phenomenon affecting every child in class 10th and they were not alone. The boys seemed to get a hang of the situation and settled themselves. After the exam, the children were pretty happy with their performance. Both the boys put everything behind and started planning for their vacation. They started sorting their books, cleaning their racks and tables, planting trees in the garden and visiting relatives.

Towards the end of the vacation, however, the family got a dual blow. Their paternal grandfather expired; and Luv and Kush's father, being the eldest son and very close to the deceased, took the news badly and lost his own health. The family had to spend some time in their village house to settle various affairs and support other relatives there. During this time, the state board 10th examination results were declared. It was a state-wide crisis, with the results representing an all-time low because of very strict marking. On an average, students had secured 10-20% less than their usual scoring records. Students started committing suicide.

The moment the family returned to the city, I went to visit them. Luv and Kush sat huddled with their group of friends on the sofa. Luv was fuming. He cursed the Education Director, whose new reforms had caused such a situation. As I attempted to calm them, Kush uttered prophetically: “We are branded now. No one will remember what happened or which year we belonged to. They will just ask how much mark and which college. This is going to be in our face all our lives”. The results from the other centrally administered boards, on the other hand, had come out very well that year. Both the boys lost hope of joining their preferred colleges. Their mother and sister, suppressing their own anxiety, tried to cheer them up.

Their mother took me aside and confided that she felt heartbroken, but she could not express it. She was worried if any of the boys took it to heart and ended up taking any wrong steps out of ‘depression’. She forcefully reiterated that she had no complaints about her boys as they had given their level best and that she had been a witness to their effort. Their sister acted cheerfully, often jeering the boys and kept them spirited to go through the day as usual. Their father was mostly away, busy applying for rechecking and signing petitions via the school. He was overall exhausted and grave, but hopeful. The state government opened the option for state-wide rechecking. In the first round of rechecking, only a few papers were opened and the rest were not touched. This led to another state-wide protest. Meanwhile, the colleges opened up for admission, and students were asked to apply with the tentative marks. In the interim, the state school board again opened for a second round of rechecking. Weeks upon weeks, the family was in a state of confusion and tension. Half-heartedly, they started applying for colleges which they knew were much beneath the boys’ standards. I frequently visited the family during this phase.

Amidst all this, Luv started doubting his competence to do science. Though the family never spoke about it, I learnt from the neighbours that while Kush’s marks increased in the first round of recheck, Luv’s marks did not. Luv was better in the subjects that were left for the second round of recheck. I felt that Luv took it personally and seemed to nurse a sense of guilt that his father had to run for the second round of rechecking mostly for his sake. But more than anything, he started doubting his aptitude to pursue science

and maths. He started arguing that he probably could not cope with science and could not devote the long hours of hard work (*parishrama*) that college science required. He wanted to go for the Arts (Humanities) stream, which he saw as easier and less demanding an option. Their father was distraught. He could not imagine his children doing Arts as he felt that it had no future, especially when the child did not seem motivated to do enough hard work and sit for the civil services examination. He urged me to persuade Luv. His mother also spoke to him from time to time. She had always held her own political science graduation with great pride and often referred to her subject as ‘royal subject’. Personally, she was not too worried about the choice of the stream as much as about the differences of opinion that the family was going through. She resignedly maintained, “His father thinks I am supporting him (Luv) and Luv thinks I am siding with his father. No one will understand what I am trying to do. I just want that they both should understand one another (*paraspara bujhamana*)”. But Luv remained adamant and stood his ground.

The father persisted in urging Luv to think twice before making up his mind, and sent him to consult with other people. Luv met with professors, seniors and neighbours, and sought their opinion. Almost everyone suggested that he should pursue Science through his Plus-2 (that is, 11th and 12th) and then if he wanted he could switch to Arts in graduation. When my opinion was sought, I insisted that priority should be given in getting Luv into an institution that has standard faculty, facilities, and peer-group. I gave my frank opinion that even if Luv opted for the Arts stream, he would have to work as hard as any Science student to excel in his subjects. His father too spoke to a range of people on this and decided to let Luv prepare his mind than forcing him to study Science. But his father looked visibly sad and worried about the entire situation. Luv’s twin brother and elder sister mostly watched quietly without taking any sides. His elder sister even urged Luv that he should be convinced himself before seeking the opinion of others. This went on for weeks; the tension within the home was palpable. Their mother shared with me, while visiting the temple or during morning walks, that the father was deeply anguished over Luv’s stand, but he was not expressing it so as to not make Luv feel pressurised. She told that it was affecting his blood pressure and heart problem. At that moment, there was not much to probe or question; I had to be there to share and witness

the tribulation with the family. At last, I heard that Luv had agreed to join a Diploma in science. When I asked Luv about his decision, he ventured to state, “How much do I know about the world, what if they are right?”

Everybody was extremely happy and relaxed post this event. The mother was particularly relieved, and the father looked satisfied. Luv got completely engrossed in fishing for old books and notes from seniors for his future course. The family seemed to have moved on. Before leaving my field site, I once asked Luv if it was possible for him to decide his career without his parents’ consent. He thought aloud about various options including those that might take him out of the city, but ultimately he acknowledged: “If they (parents) oppose too much, I will return. After all, the family also has a mind (sentiment/heart) ... Family happiness is foremost” (*Paribarra bi gote mana achi. Paribar khusi sabuthu agge*).

As we saw in the episode of Luv’s choice of higher study, the tussle between him and his father went on for days where Luv remained unconvinced in following his father’s advice. Importantly, at last he gave in, more on the grounds of not wanting to hurt his family’s feeling and his ‘trust’ in his parents as the authority and ‘knower’ than on the grounds of reason or informed decision of his own. The father could not shirk his own fear and anticipation that he felt in granting his child’s wish, especially seeing Luv’s inadequate reasoning (about Arts needing less labour to study). The fear of hard work (*parishram*) was not a healthy reason to choose the Arts stream. The father worried that if Luv disliked Arts and the labour involved in it in the future, then he would have no chance of getting back to Science or even Commerce. Finally, yet, Luv seemed to accept his father’s argument and dropped his own. In Luv’s yielding to his father’s stand and agreeing for a sort of ‘compromise’, one may detect the imposition of the parents’ fears over the child’s choices. Having said this though, what I want to bring to notice is about the way in which the father admirably conducted the affair, where he allowed the son to explore, collect information and make up his own mind. His tension and sense of dissatisfaction were clear, but he kept asking his son to ignore it and do what Luv discerned and decided as being right for himself. The mother quietly urged the father and son to yield and arrive at a commonly satisfying decision. She remained in great

stress too. Things cheered up as Luv decided to accept a middle way, and take up a diploma in science. Partly, Luv's change of mind came from the outside consultation where people invariably advised him to take Science for the next two years and opt for Arts if he so wished in graduation. But as I read the situation, quite apart from the influence of the outside consultation, it was also the concern for sustaining his family happiness and his confidence in his parent's choices that Luv opted for a middle path. The reconciliation phase was welcomed and appealed to every member of the house. As Luv had proclaimed, "Family happiness is foremost". Interestingly still, this very idea of 'family happiness' seemed to incorporate a certain degree of individual satisfaction and indulgence.

In fact, the boys continuously, and consciously, evaluated the worth of their own demands vis-à-vis 'family feelings' especially because the individual demands were not entirely absent. For both Luv and Kush, there existed an underlying understanding of the need for a healthy and harmonious family environment oriented towards the betterment of every member. Both the boys seemed to share a deep understanding and concern for 'troubled' families and its dire impact on children. While talking about disturbances and differences in a family, Luv once told me with a deep sense of concern:

It depends on time (*samaya dekhiki*). Sometimes some incidents (*ghatana*) happen; and for some days there will be anger and sulks (*raga rusa*). Also, if in anyone's house there is something bad (*kaha ghare kichi kharap katha thiba*), then there will be chaos (*ganda golla*), no peace (*ashanti*). I don't know the reasons ... but maybe they are fighting over money issues or showing off one's status to others. Would that kind of family do (*Semiti paribar kanchaliba*)? No ... How to live amidst the chaos? Life cannot go on. What will you get? Always disturbed (*sabubele ashanti*).

When I further wanted to understand what happens if there is chaos and disturbance in families, Kush was quick to explain:

Look, if there is a child, then it will suffer, which means an overall sense of loss (*kshyati*). The child's study will get disturbed; and, more, the child will be mentally weak. In studies, still one can catch up later on. But if the mind is not stable, what can you do? Then whatever you wish to do in life, you cannot do ... Because it is a disturbed mind (*Ashanti mana pa*). Then you will be in depression. Don't you see how it is happening (referring to the children's suicide cases in the state)?

Indeed, on quite another occasion, in the course of some casual talk I shared with Luv and Kush the situation of a single child living with frequently quarrelling parents, and expressed my anxiety about its impact on the child. Kush tried to come to terms with the situation:

If the parents fight regularly, then it is dangerous (*sanghatik*). If the child can be indifferent, then he is safe. Think about it and you will see that it is a very sensitive thing ... It's a mind state thing, a matter of maturity. If the child pays heed and thinks about the fight, his future and life are gone. But who will tell the child? (And exclaims with a sense of relief) I feel ours is a perfect family.

Kush essentially felt that theirs was a 'perfect family' because of the sensibility and patience with which he saw his parents had dealt with pressurised situations in life. The boys were aware that there were alternative modes of reacting and relating in a family and that it was not quite 'natural' in the way they as a family had built their relations and shaped their collective 'family feeling' together. They were well aware that it was a space of constant creation and re-creation and involved conscious effort. For one, the effort entailed respecting each other's feelings and the feeling of the family as a collective. This emotional acknowledgment formed the bedrock of family as a collective group ushering a sense of 'belongingness' (*aapanapana*) beyond differences. Thus both the boys found it agreeable to comply with their family rules as it aimed at fostering an intimate, affectionate and supportive space for them. The family was thus being viewed as a space of individual gratification as well, albeit an order of gratification that is not necessarily directed at the self only but also included the other members. Individual demand and space were being acknowledged in the sense that mutuality was being celebrated and recalibrated. Mutuality, evidently, was seen as a function of 'trust', where the members not only trusted on the basis of the care they received, but also on the basis of the intention behind all good and bad action. In such times when the action was not cordial or clear, the boys stressed that the intention must be trusted as 'good' because as a family they belonged to one another as a unit. In addition, to both Luv and Kush, the family space also represented the repository of higher values like harmony, collective decorum, individual dignity, and stability in life. The understanding of 'family feeling' (*paribara mana*) for these two boys thus comprised of emotions, sentiments and common regard for 'higher' proprieties that bounded the group as a singular organic animated unit.

ATMAN: 'Family People' and Getting One's Way

Atman's family seemed to spend very little time together. His grandmother had long puja hours devoted to daily worship, medically prescribed diet timings and often special meals following fasts and religious dictums; she thus followed a different and somewhat personal routine. The first thing she did after getting up would be to tend her garden, clean her room, take a bath by about 8-9 a.m., help with some chores, and then devote a couple of hours in various decorations and offering in her puja room. Atman's father, on the other hand, had to time himself according to his business dealings, which meant that his routine was never fixed. He mostly left the house by 8-9 a.m. after a heavy brunch, and kept moving in and out of his office, house, and the building. Atman left early as schools were run in morning shifts. His mother thus had to run a marathon kitchen, preparing breakfast, tiffin, brunch and lunch all in a stretch wrapping up only by late morning. She also went out often to attend to various errands and visits, which meant that she had to adjust her routines accordingly. Whenever she was in the house, she waited to have lunch with her son.

Atman had his own room, but he was often found in his parents' room as it had an air-conditioner or in the drawing-room which had the TV. It was in the drawing-room that he took his tuitions in the evenings; he took private tuitions in the house for each subject separately. It was hard to find Atman in one place as he moved about the house, the office downstairs and the garden frequently and freely. Sometimes this was because he was asked to help in various works, but even otherwise he kept roaming just to kill time. If he was stopped from doing this, he would come up with some or the other excuses like he is tired of studying or has to arrange things for a project. Atman was particularly choosy about his food, and ate only what he liked. His mother tried her best to prepare items that her son liked, but that was not enough for Atman to eat them. If the item was not tasty or if it was bland, then he would put it aside and complain to his mother. This upset his mother a lot. Atman had weak health and some food restriction in this connection. However, he often resorted to nagging his mother, who then would let him eat whatever he wished, which mostly meant some spicy treat, sweet dish or some street

food. His grandmother, who believed in a proper routine, healthy choices and austere life, often reprimanded Atman, but he simply waved her off or teased her away and, if he was in a bad mood, even screamed back. His mother remained in constant worry for his health problems and temper tantrums. The father was too busy to look at these matters; and though a few times he did take his son to task, Atman knew how to get his work done out of his father's notice. Though Atman was a tall and stout boy, reaching about 5'8'' height in his 10th class, he would often fall sick. This, I felt, made the parents a little slack in being strict with him. Atman's mother once shared her impressions with me:

I am worried about him. He still needs attention. You have to keep an eye on him. When he will do what, you cannot say. If guests come, then he will get engrossed. You have to drag him and lock him with books in a separate room. He lacks '*Dum*' (self-control). He doesn't have 'control *shakti*' (power). If he sits in front of the computer, then he will lose track of time; and even if you drag him, he will not move an inch. If there is an exam and he feels sleepy, he will sleep unhesitant. So I have to be around to check on him. And he has too much anger (*bahut raaga*). His elder sister is not like that. He is very stubborn (*bada ziddiya*) ... You never know what he will do. I don't force him for anything.

Typically, after returning from school, Atman would keep his shoes on the stairs and his school bag on his study table. If there was a cricket match or some important program, then he would straight switch on the TV or the computer. In between, he would walk into the kitchen and peep at the food made. His grandmother strictly disapproved of his roaming about especially into the kitchen in his school dress and unwashed hands. But Atman did not pay any heed. If he did not find his mother or grandmother, then he would make an inquiry about them. His mother mostly did not tell him anything until he had finished his food. He liked to have his food while watching television or doing something on the computer and then retired to sleep for an hour. After getting up, he set himself to finish his homework. In between, he would make many rounds to chat with his grandmother or check Facebook. Frequently, those at home would keep reminding or sending him back to studies. But beyond a point, his mother and grandmother had learnt to keep quiet.

Though I had been in touch with Atman's family frequently, the decision to include him in the study for an in-depth inquiry of his day-to-day life came late in my fieldwork as I

was already working with the twin brothers of the same age group. One of the reasons why I decided to include Atman was the independence that he showed in expressing his demands, views, and movements. On the one hand, often Atman's mother shared her worry about her son's habit of going out on his own or stealing a ride on his father's bike. His grandmother too was particularly worried about his seeming disregard to his parents, his rising demands and strong will. On the other hand, I also observed uncomplaining and active participation on the part of Atman in his father's business, keeping an eye on various works in the house to the extent that his parents could travel out of the city to attend various responsibilities leaving Atman and his grandmother in charge of the house. He was also very fond of his relatives and cousins and took the initiative for keeping them in touch by creating a WhatsApp group, often also willingly visiting people with his parents and welcoming people to his home. I wanted to understand the simultaneous tendencies shown by Atman, namely, on the one hand, to partake of the collective family life with great enthusiasm, and, on the other hand, indulge in independent activities formidably.

When I started my interactions with Atman, he gave me a tour of the house. He took me downstairs and showed his fathers' office rooms, the stock room, the registers, and the samples; he took me upstairs to the terrace and even to the garden outside. He kept pointing out to the various renovation works and went into great detail telling me about the rods, tiles, plywood, and labour cost. He nonchalantly expressed that ever since they had shifted to this house, it had been under continuous repair and a lot of money had been spent on it. I had noticed that he often assisted his parents in supervising such works. He also spoke in detail about the setting up of the new business by his father and the family's investment in it. I asked him generally about how his life looked like in this new city compared to his previous places of residence. He immediately started talking about his paternal grandfather, though it had been some years to his grandfather's death. Atman shared:

I miss *Jeje* (paternal grandfather). If he was there, I would have been more social service bent of mind ... which *Jeje* always encouraged. He always made me sit down and talk, like a counsellor would. He comes down to your level, the child's level, and talks. *Baba* (father) also tells us, *Jeje* always sat straight and spoke so well, his clothes were never creased. He had a personality. Whenever we came

back from school, he would ask us how our day was and tell us many good things. But *Jeji* (paternal grandmother) is different. She will say something now and the next moment she will say something else. You cannot understand anything.

This reply was rather unexpected for me, as I was hoping he would talk about the city, new friends, traffic and markets. But it was his grandfather's memory that came to his mind first. Gradually as my fieldwork intensified, I detected a stronger bonding and attachment in Atman's attitude towards other members of the family. It was not easily detectable in the daily conduct of routine and collective space of the family though.

As I spent time with the family, Atman's mother shared a lot about her own family and friends. This was mostly after lunch, when the grandmother went to read her newspapers and Atman was supposed to sleep. However, Atman would insist on joining us in the conversation. Mostly, his mother spoke about her childhood days, her siblings and her current workload. Sometimes though, his mother talked about how she felt about Atman's behaviour, and he would listen quietly or just pretend not to have heard. His grandmother was a fine orator, all the same. After her puja and before lunch, she often went out to visit the nearby temple, get her betel leaf and sometimes other daily items like milk or snacks from the shop for Atman and me. On some occasions after her outings, the grandmother sat down to tell us all about her childhood, her village life, country's independence days, and her subsequent experiences. Atman, who already knew all these stories, yet insisted to hear all over again. Sometimes he would fill in for his grandmother. At times he took video recordings of few portions, and shared it on the family WhatsApp group. His grandmother had few old items in her belongings that Atman readily accessed, opening her cupboard to show it to me. He kept teasing his grandmother of hiding those things, while the latter chided him for being irresponsible. While I was doing the fieldwork, Atman's parents had to go out for three days leaving the house in charge of Atman and grandmother. The grandmother took charge of the kitchen, and Atman looked after the office as well as took up vigilance of the house. In the office, Atman attended to emergency works like unloading of stock, filling in of the register and handing over papers to people, all the time being guided by his father over the phone. While Atman showed some alacrity in dispensing these responsibilities, he was extremely careless about his daily studies and hated exams. It took long hours of

expensive private tuitions, coaxing and entreating to get him to finish his course for the exams.

This presented an interesting case for me. Evidently, Atman did not present me a direct straightforward story of ‘family feeling’ or sentiment; rather, it was mixed with a strong sense of individual assertions to the extent of making the family look weak as a collective expression. Nevertheless, Atman’s disposition and behaviour on other occasions presented a strong acknowledgment of bonding and belongingness in family and its existence as a unit. For Atman, as he expressed it one day, a family was a “group of kind people who stayed together and understood each other’s feelings”. Noticeably, as he also conceded, friends were also a group of people who cared for each other’s feelings, but “friends could cheat, but the family does not cheat. ... Inside the family, one feels safe while it is not so outside”. He clarified thus on another occasion: “You can trust parents more than anyone else. It’s a special bond since childhood. What was the first thing you said as a child? *Baba* and *Mama*. You never said ‘this uncle’ or ‘that friend’. You saw what parents showed you ... You learnt what they said. And then the others came”. Atman insisted that family was a group that automatically felt for and cared for each other: “There is family feeling (*paribara mana*), they are indescribable expressions ... Simple antenna types that connect with each other. It is like an inner voice that tells you to go and help them, obey them”.

Atman had an elder sister who was posted outside of the state. On one occasion, I asked him specifically about his sister who stayed away. He reminisced somewhat fondly and openly:

I am a little sad that I did not get much time with her as she moved to the hostel when I was in class 4. In that sense, she is a ‘storyless’ sister (laughs). But when she was here, it was very bitter for me. She would give sermons and nag and they (parents) would believe her for anything, and not me. I had no scope. But she was also my ‘time pass’ partner. If I wanted to do something, chat, read, tease, fight, ask doubts, then she was there. I was not alone, especially when parents don’t understand me and my feelings ... I could share with her and she listened.

Atman’s bond, besides, with his grandmother was also strong. He almost shadowed her, and Atman was the first person his grandmother would call for help if she needed it.

Every night, Atman came to check if his grandmother had fallen asleep over her book in her chair; and he was the first person to notice if she fell sick. When his parents travelled out of the city, his grandmother looked after him taking care of his food and medicines. He was also the person who teased and argued with grandma all the time. There was constant bickering between the two over their behaviour, discipline, and routines. Atman believed his grandmother to be orthodox, while the latter considered Atman to be irresponsible.

All the same, 'family feeling' appeared strongly in Atman's ways of conversing. 'Family feeling', inevitably, was something natural, though he also mentioned about the importance of personal interest. I wondered what exactly he meant by this sense of 'natural' family feeling and how it is placed vis-à-vis his understanding of his personal interest. I wanted to understand about how he decided when to press for his own interest and when he decided to respond to others? This was particularly so because, in the case of Atman, it was not so much about being in a good mood or bad one that affected his behaviour towards others. In fact, even in an irritable state, he would respond to people needing help, while seemingly in a good mood he could turn a deaf ear. I decided to ask Atman about this, in the context of which he emphatically stated:

Children should take note of what parents allow and what they do not. Now we are in 'teenage confusion'. On the one hand, we are grown up; on the other hand, we are not ... For some things we are allowed, and for other things we are not. We should be aware of this state of confusion. We have to do things to help and yet not create troubles. Parents have feelings. Their feelings are important. It is almost 'natural' not to hurt them.

I was a little surprised that he spoke about considering his parent's feelings, especially when he took so much liberty at defying them. At that specific situation of conversation, I raised the point that his mother was upset for he did not finish his meal and that he called the food 'bad' and that she was really worried about his health (pointing to exchanges that happened during lunch that day). I asked if that was a context which needed attention and could be seen as one where he had hurt his mother's feelings. Atman was categorical:

Well, first I will gauge and I will make her understand why I am not eating. Then I will do something to convince her. But still, if she persists, then I might like to think more ... For she is more experienced and she might have faced the same

situation in her childhood. But you know, if I am very hungry, then I might just eat whatever it is. But right now I am not that hungry. So, I do not see why she is so angry. How can I see the emergency she feels (regarding his health and behaviour)?

Even more frontally, for Atman, family was being experienced and defined along the lines of feelings, an inner connection and belongingness (*aapanapana*) which inevitably invoked a picture of togetherness, mutuality, trust, care and support. In fact, in the descriptions and interpretations given by him, he reasserted the strong emotional bond that demarcated a family, maintaining that it was important not only to feel for and look out for family members but it is also a very ‘natural’ phenomenon. Simultaneously, yet, he was also manipulating this emotional context through sheer stubbornness (*ziddi*), sulking (*rusha-rushi*) and other tactics to turn situations to his advantage. Clearly, for Atman, family was also a space where the individual was free to act according to his/her own will, judgment and needs, and not necessarily follow others.

Atman himself once narrated to me a clandestine incident in which, just out of curiosity to see what happens to flames when different objects were burnt at a time, he had almost set the front balcony on fire. At that time, apparently, his parents were away and grandmother was asleep inside. I was somewhat horrified to hear the detailed description of his desperate attempts to douse the fire which had leapt ceiling high and subsequent cleaning up of the burnt floor. He showed me the balcony and the mark of the smoke. He ended the narration by telling me that “no one yet knows what had happened that afternoon”. I pointedly asked Atman if he felt sorry that he had done something careless and thoughtless. He gave a smile and evasively observed, “Did I know this would happen? It just happened”. I further ventured to ask if he did not feel obliged to tell his parents about what had happened as the house belonged to them after all. He was again nonchalant: “Why should I when nothing (material damage) had happened? They will get unnecessarily scared”. He reminded that he was in class 7 when the incident had occurred; and after that, admittedly, he has never dared to play with fire again.

Yet another day, one afternoon when Atman was engrossed in doing something on the computer, his mother came and asked about his studies. Despite repeating her question

three times, she did not get any reaction from him. Irritated, she turned to me and said, “Did you see his disregard?” I followed her into the kitchen, where she painfully observed:

No one has misbehaved with me as much as my own son does. I understand children are growing up in a tough time. I don’t expect him to top in his class. I never tell him to over study. Are we over-demanding parents? Not at all. Are we bad parents? Why does he behave like this? It pains me to be thinking of it.

I felt uncomfortable seeing his mother taking this so badly, and wondered at Atman’s evident insensitivity. I pondered if Atman was at all aware of the impact of his behaviour, and, indeed if this was his mother’s usual complaint, whether Atman had grown thick-skinned about it. I decided to have a conversation on this whenever I got a chance. I had by then observed that if Atman was either scolded or reprimanded, he would laugh, tease, answer back or get angry, huffing and sulking despite howsoever bad the others in the situation were feeling. At any rate, one particular incident gave me a clear indication of Atman’s understanding of family as a collective space vis-à-vis his personal interest. He was, as already noted, quite well aware of the fact that a family is responsible for an individual’s material and emotional well-being and hence his family would gratify his demands.

One morning, I witnessed a fine drama. I arrived to find Atman sitting in front of the computer, even as Atman’s mother was calling him to have breakfast although it was quite late for the purpose. The grandmother had finished her puja and gone out as usual. I sat on the bed behind the computer chair in which Atman was seated, and asked him what was going on. He pointed to a smartphone featuring on an online shopping website and asked if I knew about it. His mother was asking him to not order the phone at that moment. She looked pretty flushed and tired. I asked why Atman was buying a new phone - he already had a regular mobile phone - to which his mother replied, “This is a long story. He has been asking for months”. Atman turned towards me and, pointing at the computer, said that it had become so old that it took 40 minutes to boot; and that he needed a smartphone for e-books and applications for his projects. He then meticulously showed me the smartphone online and talked about its many features. When I asked for its cost, he said matter-of-factly, “Rs. 10, 000”. I quickly expressed my opinion that it

was too costly for a schoolchild and wanted to know from Atman about the ratings of the phone. He replied that it was a new model and the reviews were yet to be generated. His mother now intervened, suggesting “Look it is a new model, let’s wait for the rating at least”. Atman objected, emphatically stating “No, if I order the first lot, I will get it for Rs. 8000. It’s a sale”.

His mother looked worried and told me that one of Atman’s cousins in a telecom company had suggested another phone; but for some reason, Atman was bent on having this new model. Unaffected, Atman went on talking about the new model’s features, pros and cons. I protested asking him to take cognition of others’ suggestions and not be so demanding. Atman had no trace of agitation or tension in his face. He stubbornly sat by the computer, declining to change his dress, wash up or even attend to his breakfast. He had his hand on the computer mouse to click ‘Order’ on the online shopping site. This tussle continued for an hour; and, at last, his mother declared in sheer exasperation, “Okay, I will give money this time. You go ahead and order. You have been nagging me long. But you will not ask for another phone in the next six years, and if anything happens to this phone then you are back to your black and white Nokia”. Atman agreed to this readily, even as I complained to him about being extravagant. His mother gestured me to stop, insisting Atman to go and eat first. Atman plainly blurted, “No, not until I place the order. You all promise, and then don’t keep it”, and pointedly asked if he should choose the ‘cash’ or ‘card’ payment option. His grandmother arrived around this time, and wanted to know what had happened. Even as Atman told his grandmother about the new phone, she cautioned “You are buying a new one today; at least you must ask your father before that”. Atman persisted that he did not have enough time to wait as he may lose the discount. His mother, besides, was opposed to the idea of telling his father, maintaining “No, no, he (Atman’s father) would get angry. We will tell him afterwards”. Atman now reminded his grandmother that she had promised to contribute Rs. 1000 towards a new phone when he bought one. His grandmother agreed that she had, and at that instant Atman clapped his hands and placed the order. He then jumped off the chair with a huge hurrah, happily slapping the three of us (grandmother, mother and me) on our backs and going to the dining table where he called out, “Where is the food? I am so hungry”.

Both his mother and grandmother looked grave, but did not say anything. I asked his mother if she had the required cash with her. She said that Atman's father would never agree to pay, and that she had some money deposit certificates made by Atman's grandfather which she would use for this. When I moved to the dining table, I asked Atman if he would have really not eaten if the phone was not bought, did he mean it and what if his mother had not agreed? Atman was pretty emphatic:

It has been more than a year that I have been asking for a phone. *Didi* (elder sister) promised, but she did not give; and *Baba* (father), look what he gave (shows me a highly battered old Nokia). No camera, no music, no memory even. Last week, the new phone was even Rs. 1000 lesser. But Mama was hesitant. So I had told her a week ahead to prepare her mind. So now I had to do this.

Later I asked his mother about how she would handle Atman if he did not keep to his promise and again nagged for another new model. His mother somewhat resignedly admitted:

He makes us all dance to his tunes. For so long he was behind me for this phone. His uncle gave his son some Rs. 13,000 worth of phone. He (Atman) is now feeling that he is the only one who has such a tattered phone. His friends also get that kind of phone. Let his mind now be in peace, let him have it, so that I can get a moment of peace.

For Atman's mother, it was more important that her son calmed down and went back to his normal routines where his immediate health condition and studies were not affected. Somewhere though, she also seemed to empathise with her son's demands and situation where he felt deprived compared to other friends and cousins. It was also important for her that Atman's father did not come to know about it so that there could be peace in the family. Atman's grandmother, however, looked pretty pained with the incident. She kept sitting in her cot looking downcast, as I went to call her to join for lunch. She quietly said that she did not approve of such behaviour, even maintaining that such stubbornness (*ziddi*) and high demands arising out of misplaced comparisons (*baadi*) with others on the part of her grandson upset her. Even though she did not confront Atman directly, she sat thinking aloud:

I don't support all this. Such high demands seeing what others have (*baadi*) in life! Should you not think about family conditions? Should you only think about yourself? His father works so hard day-in and out. And hiding from your father!

Can they keep the family together (*Emane kan paribar jodiki rakhi paribe*)? His uncle's children did not have computers at that time, and so they got that costly phone. But that also I think was not wise. It's more 'show' (*Dekhei haba*) nowadays. How many families can afford these? Do all his friends have these things? How do all parents afford these days?

The grandmother was clearly drawing a contrast between amicable, altruistic behaviour and assertive, individualistic behaviour; while the former was largely positive for family life, the latter was negative for the same. For his part, yet, Atman was aware of others' feelings and opinions about his actions. I pondered about what Atman thought his parents and other family members felt about his behaviour and what interpretation he placed on their behaviour towards him.

One afternoon, when Atman's mother and grandmother had retired for a nap and Atman and I sat chatting between us, he again emphasized the family as an innate, deeply felt entity. I asked him, again pointedly, about whether he had ever hurt anyone's feelings in the family. Atman seemed indifferent, clearly stating that he would not know if he had. Upon some further discussion about how he figured out concerning how to respond when he is not sure of his actions hurting others, he reasoned somewhat passionately:

I see them (parents/family) and then I decide. I get to know if it is important or not. If you are part of a family, you get to know. You know the context. So you can decide ... If something is urgent, then the person will be impatient, he will shout, rush, call repeatedly. So you would get to know what is real and important. One day *Jeji* (grandmother) called me. I saw that some rope had fallen and she was holding puja water in her hand, so she was unable to pick it. She called me repeatedly as if she needed some help, but I did not go. Then she removed the rope herself. There was no emergency, so I did not bother. But one day she called out loud in a panic. I ran. One bamboo was slipping from the top. I fixed it. So I see if the problem is real or just a fear. Otherwise, family people (*Gharaloka*) will give you a run (*daudei debe*). For everything, they will call you. There will be no peace.

Upon this order of disquisition, I further asked him about how he would handle the situation if he failed to understand the emergency underlying it or if things blew out of hand (reminding him here of the fire incident, as recalled above). Atman replied with a degree of assurance: "Well, if I do not get the situation and it went out of hand, then it is for god and elders to handle. They will come to action and save the situation". He then

narrated me elaborately a couple of circumstances where his parents protected or had taken action on behalf of him.

Very gradually, I understood that Atman chose to interpret and react to others' feelings in the family conditionally. He made a distinction between, as it were, 'problems real' and 'problems of apprehension' while interpreting his parents' and grandmother's feelings and behaviour, implying thereby that he felt emotional displays were not always real but at times projected (consciously or unconsciously). This gave me an understanding of the 'theory' (incipient, undoubtedly) that Atman had developed in his mind on the dynamics of the emotional world operating in the collective space of his family. Though he acknowledged other's feelings and state of mind, he however also believed in such phenomena as faking emotions or emoting in apprehension of others and liked to hold on to the discretion of which emotional reality was valid enough to invoke a real response from his end. Needless to say, I felt somewhere that this inclined him to make use of emotions to his advantage too and use emoting as a form of strategy.

Clearly, for Atman, 'family feeling' and the 'me moments' were not contrasting or mutually exclusive. The family as a space is bound for individual gratifications. Unlike the outside world, where people are not quite accountable and responsible for one another and may cheat or abandon a person, within a family and in the home the members stand up to one another and come to one another's beckoning no matter how difficult a situation has been created by an individual in his/her endeavours. For Atman, the real 'family feeling' lay in the readiness of a family to help one another in real problems, and not so much in quality times, coordinated activities and any self-sacrificing acts of the individual. The context was important, for Atman, to make an assessment of the situation and not quite the feelings of fellow family members. 'Family feeling' was thus being invoked and used in the sense of a bond, the taken-for-granted belongingness and accountability that family members shared, and not necessarily as having regards to momentary affects or feelings of the family members.

SAMIKSHA AND AKSH: Belongingness and the 'Inevitable' Family

Samiksha and Aksh are not very outgoing or outspoken as children. They liked to keep to their parent's side; they were often very shy to strangers; and their parents insisted on good manners through and through. Samiksha particularly warmed up towards me, owing to her insatiable reading interests and the fact that I had many books in my possession. Their mother was also very fond of books. Thus, initially, our interaction grew over exchanging books. Their father was an approachable and frank man. He encouraged our conversation and suggested that his children learn something good from 'didi' (Me). Aksh was especially shy of strangers and took an unusually long time to open up. Gradually, as I learnt about the family along with their numerous extended relatives who lived close by, and the family also got used to me, I decided to include the children in my in-depth study.

On a daily basis, the household stirred early. At dusk, one could see the father sweeping the front space of the garden. The children left for school by 5.45 a.m. in the morning, which meant that their mother got up quite early to pack their tiffins and see them off. Samiksha preferred to pack her bags the night before, but Aksh often left it to the last moment and it would often take his mother or Samiksha to do it for him. Both the children went to school having had milk and *chattua* (a mixed powder of roasted grains and pulses) for breakfast. Sometimes, the children would miss the bus, and the father had to rush them to school on his bike. Their mother often finished most of the household work when the children were away in school. Both of them returned by 1 p.m. and would invariably eat an idle lunch, after which they both would sleep for an hour or two. Once they woke up, they started their homework. In between they would take a break to have a chat, talk to relatives on phone, or just roam about. By late evening, both were served milk with *haldi* (turmeric powder) or some Horlicks. Around this time their father joined them. When I started visiting Samiksha and Aksh's home, I found that they did not have a TV as their father thought that it would come in the way of his children's studies. They did have a laptop with an internet connection, and Aksh especially spent some time daily playing games, checking online shopping sites, surfing for bikes and electronic gadgets. But these were mostly done when father was away from home. Both the parents kept an eye on the progress of homework of the children; and, while they had to often implore Aksh to focus, with reference to Samiksha they had to urge her to take a break from her

books. At times, Samiksha slept as late as 1 a.m. to finish her homework, and this worried her mother.

Samiksha's mother often asked me to encourage her daughter for some exercises, games or outings. She claimed that both her children were pretty shy and did not feel comfortable going out on their own; and besides, she was unable to accompany them as someone had to stay back at home. She shared that because their house was located in such a neighbourhood that had easy access to buses, railway stations and other amenities like hospitals, banks, etc., very often relatives from outside the city would choose their home as a stay when they were visiting. She was thus left to attend to guests most of the time. She conceded that having guests made a lively atmosphere for her children, but sometimes it affected their studies especially the younger one. The frequency of visits sometimes got to her nerves, surely. Samiksha's father, however, liked to have people visit them, attended to them elaborately and often excitedly invited his entire family to take part in the welcoming of the guests.

Undoubtedly, this was a home where almost every second day there was a visitor, mostly relatives. I wondered if the family had any time to themselves. As I observed the children, I was surprised to see, on the one hand, their meticulous engagement with studies, and this was especially true of Samiksha; and, on the other hand, I was privy to the lively engagement with their social life around the extended relatives' network. Managing this on a daily basis was certainly not easy for the family, as it meant a demanding schedule and readiness of transaction. It was not uncommon to have unexpected guests to whom the family had to entertain immediately. Their father believed that studying was undoubtedly important, but maintained that it was a daily phenomenon and other things in life could not be stalled until the end of studies and should be carried on simultaneously. Their mother sometimes expressed her exasperation on such demands put on her children, but ultimately she also felt that, in the absence of any other extra-curricular activities, it was good for her children to get out of the house and have some fun. Both the parents, all the same, were equally particular about their children's studies, their progress as well as performance and kept an eye on it. They encouraged the children to find out ways and means to resolve their doubts. Both the

children did not go for any tuition classes, and were helped by parents or cousins. This was rather unusual as tuitions were common in every house, especially for higher classes. Undoubtedly, I wondered how the children coped and experienced this state of affairs: what did they feel about their time, their workload and having to spend so much time with other relatives and assorted events?

Samiksha was a very sincere student and had studies in her mind constantly. She did self-study most of the time, while at times her parent helped her out with her school work. It took her about 6 hours in the evening to finish all her homework for the next day. She studied meticulously by her study table under the table lamp. She made separate notes and points for each lesson in the textbook and reread the school notes the same day to jot down her doubts. At times she resisted her parents insisting her on leaving homework and joining them with guests or going on outings. But when it came to her cousins and aunts she never complained about their visits or involvement in their life. Though it affected her studies, she could not imagine a life without them.

For Samiksha, then, it was impossible to live without a family, viewing the latter as a place where “Everyone stays together ... It is where you have lived since your childhood. It is where you grow up ...”. She matter-of-factly stated that parents provided one with “love, affection, care, and fulfilled all our needs. They look after us since childhood”. When I pointed out to people like myself (and her cousins) who stayed away from home and often were so busy even to be in touch with the family on a daily basis, Samiksha was again very clear and succinct:

Well, if they understand (*Bujhi paruchanti*), then it is okay ... Like if they are satisfied that as a daughter you have done your bit, it is fine. If they can feel it ... that you are busy and so are not in touch, and that when there is a need you would seek them out ... if they can feel it (*Tanku laguchi jadi*), then it is okay.

One afternoon, she recalled a debate on the topic ‘Relationships in a hectic life’ (*Bhag daudke zindagi mein riste nate*) in her school. She called to mind about how her teacher had spoken of being considerate and respectful to one’s parents’ efforts and giving attention to each other in the family, insisting further that “It is already there in our family. Everyone shares and talks”. Reflecting on the present, she added that “Maybe

in our parent's time things were different and they probably had to be scared of their parents and not speak openly. But that is not so now. We are pretty free. I share everything with Ma. We say what we feel even to *Baba* (father)". Samiksha recalled specific moments when she was upset about something and in her annoyance had misbehaved with her mother; or, alternatively, if her mother was in a bad mood and had scolded her for something, leading to an argument between them. She maintained that after a few minutes of sulking, they would get back to talking and both would forget about their quarrels. "How long can you stay without talking while living in the same house", she pithily pointed out. On another occasion, while talking about the feelings of togetherness and relations, she deftly recalled, "Work, money, comfort is not all. You have to maintain your relations (*Rishta baneiki bi rakhi bara achi, Rishta barkarar rakhi bara achi*)". For Samiksha, accordingly, the family was a space of gratification and belongingness which necessarily involved the individual members' willingness to care for each other, spend their time together and have a mutual understanding. To be sure, the family as a collective was not free from quarrels and frustrations, but it was also a space where hard feelings had to be left behind as the members try to build their lives together. In Samiksha's world, it was important for the individuals to maintain the quality of the relationships, as the latter served important needs for the individual members beyond material comforts in life. The family, in a nutshell, was an inevitable part of life.

In their childhood, Samiksha and Aksh had stayed in a joint family and, even after their grandparents had passed away, they were still in touch with their extended family. One of their neighbours, an old lady, described the family to me: "They all brothers, sisters and their children have a very deep intimate relation. We have seen them from our time. They have frequent get-togethers and visits (*Semanakara Bhai Bhauni, Pilla mananka bhitare bhari nibida samparka. Ame ama belu dekhuchu. Tankara milamisa, jib aasiba*)". I felt that this bonding might have made Samiksha and Aksh sensitive towards family relations; and I wanted to grasp how these sensitivities had shaped the collective family space for the children as a whole. Both Samiksha and Aksh often spoke of their aunts, uncles, and cousins with much fondness and closeness. They saw their relatives

as a reliable support system and source of inseparable companionship. Samiksha, in fact, included her cousins and aunts in her imaginings of the family:

Mother, father, aunts, uncles, everybody should keep together (*Mili missi rahibe*) ... They are also part of the family. When we were little, we went to their houses freely and lived with them, sometimes even alone (without our parents). They think of us as their own children. They care for us. How long can one live alone (*ekaeki*)? So everybody comes together ... every weekend is like a feast. *Baba* wants everyone together. So he will just ring up and then everyone comes. We go out, have fun, play games, cook and eat together and we plan and do our work with them too.

At times, she described somewhat elaborately about the memorable family events like picnics, feasts, job-joining celebrations, weddings or even mishaps like accidents in her aunts' families. Even Aksh, who did not like talking, sometimes joined in enacting scenes of togetherness. My conversations with Aksh was always around something new that he had learnt – whether it be computer programs, games, cars etc. - and each time he would speak of some cousin brother who had taught him about these things.

I was part of a few such occasions when the extended family got together. One such occasion was the *Rajja parba* (which is a festival of merry-making by young women for three days marking the onset of monsoon around mid-June, and involves the preparation and distribution of numerous traditional dishes, getting decked up and playing varieties of swings and rides in groups). In the morning, around 9 a.m., I went to Samiksha's house. A double rope had been tied at the veranda from the ceiling with cushions placed as a seat, making for a small swing. As she had informed me earlier, the home was full of people. All her five aunts (father's sisters) and their families had arrived to celebrate *Rajja*. Samiksha invited me to the dining hall, where I sat on the sofa by the dining table, even as her mother introduced me to all. In another room, I could see Aksh and a few more cousins huddled together. One of Samiksha's uncles' (father's sister's husband) alerted me that the children were playing computer games; Aksh, however, clarified that he and his cousins were repairing a gadget. Samiksha was being called by people now and then, and she was unable to give company to me. One elder cousin asked her to get the bike keys; another asked her to fetch a rope; her father implored her to attend phone calls; and her mother kept calling her to prepare a plate of food for me. She gave me

sherbet (juice), and then her mother got me a plate of *pitthas* (a traditional general term for varieties of pancakes and soft fried eatables).

Samiksha's elder cousin sisters' who had each taken off from their jobs to join the celebrations spoke to me and shared stories about Samiksha and Aksh's childhood. All the ladies were helping one another in getting decked up for the celebration. Samiksha changed into a new dress, and immediately complained that it was loose. While her mother asked her not to bother, her aunt offered to fix it up for her. Samiksha's father came in from the back door drenched in sweat. He informed that the outhouse had been cleaned and food was being prepared and that the children were required to assist. Samiksha's mother was continuously in the kitchen inside the house serving food to all the children one by one with the help of the other ladies present. There was a lot of laughter, greetings and verbal exchanges going on despite the unbearable heat that was showing on everyone's face.

This extended range of relatives including uncles, aunts, and cousins was seen as a large family by both Samiksha and Aksh. There was a deep sense of connection, belongingness (*aapanapana*) and sharing among them. The children felt as comfortable with their uncles and aunts as they were with their parents. The cousins made for a larger support group upon which the children relied for their emotional, intellectual and social needs. In Samiksha and Aksh's family, besides, the wider relatives had a prominent presence on a daily basis. Almost every little detail was commented openly starting from exam marks, health issues, job packages, outings, and shopping. With such a big circle of relatives where people were differently placed in life situations, I wondered if there were unwanted incidents of anger (*raga*), avoidance or sulking (*rusa*) and pride-remorse (*mana-abhimana*, which, in context, can mean a feeling of being let-down by dear ones). Indeed, if so, I wanted to understand how the children reacted, thought and/or spoke about it? Samiksha, for one, betrayed no signs of probable strain in the relationship between the wider networks of family relatives; and, in fact, she spoke of such events as part of family life and the basis for maintaining relationships (*Sambandha rakhiba*).

On a quieter day, I did ask Samiksha about moments of friction, arguments and heated exchanges within the family. She laughed and exclaimed, “Of course it (misunderstanding) happens. Will it not happen with so many people around? Then all will come together and coax (*maneyibe*) the person and try to ‘cool them’ (*shanta karibe*)”. She narrated about times when either one of her aunt or uncle had been seriously upset for feeling sidelined or because of misunderstandings:

One time, the eldest uncle and aunty went to the village without telling anyone. They are retired and they live closer to the village. So it is easy for them to just go and finish their work. But others also wanted to visit the village. So first it happened that the next weekend two families decided to go and attend to their work as the other two were busy. But at the last moment the other two families wanted to join in. So there were more people, and fewer vehicles. Somehow arrangements were made; and nobody thought of asking the eldest uncle and aunt as they had just gone a few days before. But it became a huge issue with them. They both felt very bad and thought that everyone had planned a get-together excluding them for some reason. They felt so bad.

In such situations of misunderstanding, Samiksha pointedly added that the family reacted unanimously with everyone persuading the upset member to come back and join the group or effective plans were changed in their favour. As she observed, “You have to respect everyone’s feelings”. She went on to relate about several occasions when her cousins had troubled her, and how her uncles and aunts had always taken her side, even scolding her cousins for being mean to her. She particularly noted that all these unpleasant occasions were “part of the fun”. Samiksha conceded that she did feel uncomfortable in the beginning, but that with the scolding her cousins were given she had her turn to laugh at them. She expressed her sense of disbelief about how families could go on living with long-drawn conflicts. She observed prudently to me on one occasion: “Sometimes it is a situation, and misunderstanding just happens. Sometimes, its bad mood, and you have to just wait for it to go. Also, it could be a bad habit and the person is helpless (referring, in particular, to the short-temperedness of her brother Aksh)”.

Thus, for Samiksha, the situations of tension or frustration were mostly unseen and unintended factors that the family confronts unaware. More emphatically, such situations cannot be seen as resulting from ‘intentional’ ill-willed actions of family

members. In this context, she analysed her own tendency of quarrelling when in a bad mood, as also her brother's habit of losing his temper, as leading up to an uncomfortable situation in the family; but which, as she maintained, were not intentional or planned. For Samiksha, the family's readiness to accommodate and understand the individual's situation was an integral characteristic of the family collective. On another occasion, she narrated me an episode on how she went against the wish of her father and the happenings thereafter:

In the 4th standard, we had a pre-version of Scout and Guide. It was called Cubs and Bulbul. It had various extra-curricular activities, special uniforms, and separate teams. So I felt interested in joining that. But it also had separate admission fees, material costs and extra school hours, which meant that the parents would have to pick and drop the child, wait for them and arrange for all the things needed. This was too much of a hassle ... And so Baba declined. I sulked and sobbed. The entire night I went and slept near *Jeje* (grandfather) and cried. In the morning, Baba said 'Ok'. I do not know what happened; maybe *Jeje* said something to Baba favouring me ... So then it all started. Every day I had to get ready to reach one hour early to school and Baba had to drop me. Ma had to help me with everything. And I did not like those classes too. I thought they will teach us something nice, habit-building, discipline, and helping others. But no ... All they taught were kinds of salute, handshakes, clapping, parade and how to tie uniform and clean it. Often they organized some camp and asked for money like Rs. 400. And what happened in that ... We had to reach a place in the city and carry posters and walk, like 'Save water'; and then we all gathered at a place and they gave us breakfast packets. That's all, over. What activities were these? So I stopped going for it. Every day Baba had to drop me and he got late for work, and so many expenses and extra trouble for all ... In school also every summer they have 'Summer Camp' for Rs.2000. What they do is some science and frequent theme parks around. But that much I can do with my family and cousins. So I never went ... Some students go.

I was taken in by the clarity with which Samiksha remembered and described each aspect of the situation. Initially, she had got emotional when her wishes were not granted. She could not appreciate her father's stand of not agreeing to her joining the extra-classes. She did not yield and wanted to have her way. She knew that her grandfather had a soft corner in his heart for her, and so she went and cried in front of him. The next day her wishes were granted. However, soon after she started reviewing her action and demand. She observed that her wish and demand had put her family into trouble. Her parents had to readjust their routines and take the extra burden for her on a daily basis. Furthermore, she also made a thorough appraisal of the activities she was herself engaging within the

extra-classes, which according to her were not beneficial for her. And in this wake, finally, Samiksha decided to drop her extra-classes. She was, above all, concerned about the inconvenience that she was causing her parents and also duly found her father's opinion to be the correct one.

Reverting back to the order of our description, it is important to note that in moments of differences between family members, the involvement of the wider group of relatives was pronounced. Whenever the extended family got the news of any relative being upset or grounded, they would each group up to visit that relative in an effort to cheer up or placate the tension. In fact, during my fieldwork, Samiksha entered her 9th class; and inevitably the course became tougher and the teachers started grading the students very strictly. Samiksha's score had dipped by a couple of percentages in one exam. Her father immediately acted stern, and took her to task for this. The girl cried and remained downcast for a day. She obviously felt bad that she had failed her father. Her mother tried to cheer her up, but to no effect. Immediately, Samiksha's aunt's family came and took her to their home to change her mood. They even complained about Samiksha's father for being so strict with the child, while expressing their trust in her sincerity.

But, of course, the availability of such emotional recourse was more apparent in the case of Aksh, the younger one. More than once I witnessed Aksh's sulking and huffing episodes. It was also very hard to have Aksh opening up and speaking his mind. Whenever I persisted, his mother and sister would politely take me away; they were worried that he might lose his temper on me or get irritated with them. Aksh, though, took great interest in talking about computers and their applications, different websites, online shopping, electronic gadgets, games, cars, and outdoor activities. Sometimes if Samiksha teased him or pressed him to behave himself, he would charge back at her. This would lead to small skirmishes between the siblings. At times too, Samiksha would initiate mock fights, but Aksh took them very seriously, often losing his temper, breaking down or throwing an angry tantrum. His mother thus often asked people to leave him alone and let him be. His father, however, saw the situation as a form of excuse that Aksh used in order to avoid being disciplined and dominated.

One morning, as I entered the home, Aksh opened the grill and we started chatting about his breakfast and morning activities. His father soon came in searching for his tie. He urged Aksh to finish some portion of his homework that he had left unfinished the previous day. Suddenly, without a cue, the father asked Aksh if he had done *pranam* (a reverential form of greeting) to me. I interjected to say 'yes', even as Aksh kept looking at the floor without replying. His father got angry with him on that and started scolding Aksh, "Is that what your school teaches you? Can you not answer when an elder is speaking to you! This is becoming your habit (*Abhyasa heigalani tora*)!". Surely enough, Aksh started crying silently. His father, then, looked at me and exclaimed, "He is crossing his limits. He is forgetting to do *pranam* to people. If someone is talking to him he is not listening. Are these manners (*Eta kana shistachaara*)?" Aksh roughly climbed down the bed and stomping his feet, walked away, snorting angrily and wiping his tears. His mother walked in, curious to know what had happened. The father narrated the situation, even as I sat silently looking at them not knowing what to do. The mother, on her part, urged the father not to tell Aksh anything, for he would sulk the entire day making things difficult for all. She seemed irritated too; and, as the father left, she called me to join her at the dining table. Samiksha was putting down some snacks for me. I asked if she and Aksh won't join us, but Samiksha stated that they all had their breakfast already. I asked if we should call Aksh, and talk with him. His mother whispered that we should leave him alone for some time. Samiksha even added quietly, "He is like that ... Very short-tempered (*Bhari raagi*). If I go close to him now, he will beat me". The mother assured that soon he would cool down and then would come on his own. Aksh at that moment walked out of the bedroom with a book in his hand, rushed out of the hall bypassing us and went to his and Samiksha's room. We watched silently. After finishing my snacks, I went to see what he was doing. He was mugging up some spellings, his face red and tears still rolling down his cheeks. I offered if he wanted any help in studying. He simply walked out of the room. There were more such episodes where Aksh broke down, fretted and fumed on being taken to task. Once again when Aksh got scolded by his father and stormed out of the room, his father asked me if I could do something about it. I replied in a subdued tone, "He is little sensitive probably". His father laughed on hearing this and admonished:

He (Aksh) is very shrewd (*maha chalu*). He knows exactly that if he reacts like this, no one will tell him anything and let him be and in the end, he can get away with his wish (*mana iccha*). Everyone else pampers him ... What to do? He knows his mother, sister, and if not them, then his aunts would come to his side. So he can keep doing all these.

Emotions, sentiments and the sanctity of relationships, obviously, played a great role in the living, experiencing and advancing of family life by Samiksha and Aksh. Understanding and companionship were of utmost importance to them. They cherished their relatives and the time spent with the extended family. Particularly, sentiments of love, care, belongingness, and respect for feelings were highlighted by Samiksha as distinctive features of the family. At the same time, individual expressions of demands and anxieties were seen as an expression of intimacies, while also providing moments of reasserting the familial virtues by taking deliberate steps towards bringing all members closer and resolving any complaints whatsoever. For Samiksha, clearly, the quality of differences lay more in the situation, personal state of mood or habits, and not so much in the intentions of the family members. Aksh seemed to rely on this space of family as a setting of emotional display and attention in which the individual's expressions were being addressed amicably. Both the children used this space to put forth their individual assertions, sometimes even against their parent's liking, and yet remained shielded from their annoyance in the embrace of their other relatives' show of affection and sense of protection.

MANTU: Becoming Family

Mantu was a single child who always craved for company, even as both his parents mostly remained at home. His mother was a housewife, and his father had no regular employment. They owned the house that they lived in, and had a property in the village which the father managed by visiting it once a fortnight. Mantu remained the centre of attention of both the parents, who were to some extent overprotective of him and, as a result, he mostly found himself friendless, confined to his house and parents. He and his parents thus welcomed my research readily: for the parents, I was a good company that their child could have, and for Mantu, I was his unconditional friend. Mantu was a very

reflective child, even though I met him when he was in the 3rd standard, and often had a say in what I should talk to him about and write about him in my Ph.D. ‘book’ (as he believed).

Mantu studied in a school near his house, and it was his mother who dropped and picked him. She attended to most of the household work, while his father mostly attended to phone calls and worked on the computer. Around lunchtime, once Mantu was back at home, he liked roaming about, observing the trees and stray animals in the garden or simply checking his toys and collections. It took some hard pushing to get him ready for his lunch, which the family always had together. Following it, they watched movies or some TV serial, and the mother engaged in cleaning and washing. Late afternoon, they all preferred to take a nap. In the evening, Mantu was allowed some time to play on his computer, that is, until the time his mother finished cooking and called him for studies. Mantu studied only under supervision; and, as his parents had decided not to send him for tuition until he was in middle school, so it came upon his mother to help him with homework and preparation. His father did keep a check over his study-time, daily routine and other healthy habits which Mantu found easy to skip on a daily basis. During my fieldwork, I had free access to Mantu’s house and could visit them at any time of the day. All the same, I was assigned the duty of motivating Mantu to develop a sense of self-caring and independence.

On a holiday one late morning, as Mantu’s mother was down with a fever, Mantu and I took to kitchen duties. Mantu had never helped in the kitchen. I made him do sherbet for all; and he seemed to attend to the instructions with the seriousness of a first-time scientist. His parents were very proud of his performance (although, it must be mentioned that both of them were not comfortable seeing him work and worried that he would make a mess, but they could not say anything to me knowing that I was a great believer in children having their share in work). They came in to check on us regularly and monitored the cooking. Once the simple lunch was ready, all of us sat down to eat at the dining table. I immediately reminded Mantu of his promise to share his ideas on ‘family’ with me, even as he dodged my reminders until his father encouraged and urged, “Why don’t you say ... What is there difficult about it?”

After the lunch, Mantu started playing toy car racing with me; and it was in the course of this that we had a ‘private’ (*sic*) conversation. His parents had moved to other rooms, although our conversations most probably were audible to them. I expressed my probes in many ways, egging him to tell me about his family. In reply, initially, Mantu pointed out the obvious, “You can write that yourself, you have seen all (referring to his family)”, and kept on playing. So I rephrased, and asked if he had to tell me more about what he thought were the characteristics of a family? This caught his attention. Mantu promptly asserted, “All those who stay together, and do a lot of happiness. Happiness means ... all good work and happy work, like at night after everyone is free they sit together and chat and watch TV”.

I asked him specifically about his maternal grandparents (as his paternal grandparents were no more, having lived with them till their last days). They stayed in another city, and I wanted to know if they were ‘family’ for him. Mantu replied, playfully as ever, “In that city, they are our family. Do we know anyone else there? ... When mama was a child, they were her family, her *Baba-Mama* (father-mother). So they are family”. When I asked about his cousins, who visited him sometimes and they all had lots of fun together, Mantu thought for a while and enigmatically noted “Sometimes family gets added. They are added family”. His father joined in, and pointedly asked Mantu, “How can cousins be family, do they stay in this house?” Mantu delightfully explained that “Uncles and aunts get married, and then cousins are born. First you don’t know them, but then they grow up and then you do things together (*missiki*) and become family”. His father then pointed to me and again asked Mantu, “What is *Didi*?” Mantu fuzzily stated: “First she was neighbour, but now she is becoming cousin”, acknowledging the fact that I was a frequent presence in his house those days.

I then turned to pointing out to Mantu that I stayed away from my own family in the hostel and visited them occasionally, spending little time with them together. Mantu was quick to respond: “Yes ... For now. No matter where you are, you ultimately come back to your family”. I could immediately relate to how Mantu felt about this; he had never lived away from his parents. College and working life were still far away for him to

relate to that prospect. Both of his parents never had the experience of staying away from their homes for studies or work; and even they probably did not relate much to my experiences either. Mantu's paternal grandparents, besides, had stayed with them till their last breath. But for me, one who had been staying away from home for about a decade, Mantu's representation looked a bit stretched. I again broached that, in a hostel, it was my friends who helped me when I needed and took care of me when I was sick. Interestingly, Mantu chose to counter me, saying all at once that, "If you have gone to market with friends, and you forget something, then you can call home and they remind you, but your friends may not know what you need. A friend can remind you if you have told him before. But that doesn't happen ...". Intrigued, I asked Mantu if he could tell something more. To this, he muttered out that it was my turn to answer, and asked for my opinion. What was family according to me? I realised that I had never thought of this myself. But I had to give in; and so, thinking hard, I added "It is a place where I feel homely, familiar, at home, my own". Mantu quickly picked it up, excitedly exclaiming:

Yes, correct. I have not spoken about it, but you can write it. (Pointing to my note copy) True ... Our's own (*Nijara*). I am at home now and I can switch on and off the light. I can walk anywhere I wish. I can touch things. In a family, all the things we have are our own. But can I do that outside on the road?

With his parents in close quarters, I was not sure if I could directly ask about quarrels and misunderstandings with Mantu. Doubtless, there were many scuffles in Mantu's family on a daily basis, and I feared that he might start talking about events which his parents might not want to be openly discussed. Once, in the course of an interaction, I ventured to ask Mantu, 'Why was happiness so important to a family?' Mantu was prompt and precise: "Because happiness means *khusi* (joy)". The inherent circularity of his response seemed to bother him, for he continued to explain after some time: "Okay, there are families where people just work and work, come home and then eat and sleep. Then it is a 'single-family' ... Like, if you are alone, only then. But if you are living with other family members, then it's difficult". I made sure that I noted this articulation of a 'single-family' carefully. I had read in research contributions that children lay more stress on the quality of the relationship than form; also, that family life has to have a routine as it goes about the collective practice of happiness and caring, with the practice itself being something done or accomplished and thus having a very specific ring to it

(see Morrow 1998; Manson and Tipper 2007; as also Goldberg and Carlson 2014; for the Indian context, see Madan et al. 2018). I saw the filters that Mantu had put into categorizing everything ‘good’ as part of the family. It could very well be because his parents were somewhere close, within earshot of our conversation, or, alternatively, it could be because that is what he had been told and retold and believed in it to be so.

But what struck me most was the acceptance of belongingness, the expressed need to be together (*aapanapana*). The sense of separation was built into the child’s consciousness as a kind of trauma. Thus, for instance, ‘hostel’ represented punishment and estrangement for most of the children. Parents often used it as a threat to discipline their children; the same with Mantu. When he disobeyed his parents, they would make me narrate my challenging stories about hostel life and then threaten to send him to a boarding school. The imagery of the outside world as ‘bad’ and inside the home as ‘good’ was reinforced in many such big little ways.

Undoubtedly, Mantu and me kept moving about the house and the backyard, and had a few games. Mantu would always reach out for some snacks, though he was not allowed to. He kept peering at my notebook in which I was invariably writing. Once Mantu, having finished his snacks and clambering up a window grill, even as I forced him to climb down lest he fell, started talking on his own telling me about how his parents looked after him, helped him when he is in trouble, and in effect loved him. He was clear that “family means safe”; and that (as he quickly reasoned) “If there is a thief in the house, then the family will rush. But if you are alone and want to call your neighbours, by that time you will be killed (by the thief)”. So the family, Mantu seemed to be idealizing, kept him safe from dangers like crimes and accidents of the outside world. We kept roaming from one room to another until Mantu settled to play ‘Brainvita’ (a popular board game often gifted to primary school children). I protested as Mantu’s mother did not allow him to take out games without her permission, especially in the presence of guests. But Mantu assured me that he was allowed to take out one game at a time, and not more than that.

Mantu had witnessed severe differences and distrust within his family, mainly involving his father's siblings. His mother had narrated overwhelming stories to me in Mantu's presence. But Mantu never seemed to show any reaction or acknowledgment of this. Certainly, I was intrigued. Children in my field often knew that such matters were out of bounds for them, and were to be attended to by adults exclusively. Children were 'not to pay any attention' to these, and 'to make no remarks' about it. I decided to raise those topics with Mantu later on after consulting his parents. Mantu's mother was open to these conversations, but his father was somewhat hesitant. Mantu's father was the youngest, and had stayed with his parents in his father's house; Mantu had been born in the same house. After the demise of Mantu's paternal grandparents, the family had continued to stay in the same house. Mantu's mother related to me that her sisters-in-law had been claiming a right on the property and kept harassing her over the matter. Her elder sisters-in-law would often come for a long stay and take charge of the house even when the in-laws were present. Mantu's mother narrated about how she was once hospitalized because of the overload of housework; and that when she (Mantu's mother) started raising her voice against the sisters-in-law, they had sent goons to her brother's house and got the latter so severely beaten up as to be in a state of coma for months.

Mantu was aware of all these family disturbances. His relatives' attitude towards Mantu was however affectionate; and Mantu's parents too treated their relatives' children cordially, despite the discord. The cousins continued to visit one another, attend birthday parties and other festivals which required the relatives to come together. Mantu's mother never displayed any sense of dread or fear while discussing the family tension. At the end of our conversation, she would point out to Mantu, if he was present, and say laughing, "He has promised me that if he gets a job, then he will take me with him away from all this". It is to be noted that most of these conversations happened in the absence of Mantu's father. It was only on a few occasions that Mantu's mother would joke lightly, in front of her husband, about the hard work she had to do and the neglect of the household on his behalf. Mantu's father generally left with a smile, without a murmur or response, though at times this led to fights between Mantu's parents where both openly complained about each other. Mantu's common reaction to all of this was to sit quietly with his head down or continue with his work. Once while I was talking to him in his

room, his parents had a short outburst in the hall. Mantu walked up to the door, and came back to talk as normal. In another episode following a fight, at a time when Mantu's mother was very ill, she left home with Mantu and went to her brother's house. She returned only after Mantu's father had made a phone call informing about his own illness. When I visited Mantu after that, his mother narrated me about the fight. She spoke easily and normally, as if it was all a funny event. When Mantu's father arrived, he also candidly complained about his wife's behaviour and defended his side of the bargain.

Mantu however never spoke about it nor gave any hint acknowledging these situations. My few attempts at discussing these matters were not successful, as he would merely shrug his shoulder and simply mention, "In all homes, these things happen. Can children do anything?" or even "How do I know, Mama and Baba are looking after it". Mantu, on the other hand, spoke more about the games that he played with his cousins, their education and the trips he had made to their homes. On a regular basis, Mantu's mother would ask me to get him more storybooks to read, informing me that whenever there was a quarrel at home or that Mantu got a scolding, the latter went into his room and immersed himself in reading the books. Mantu's parents had a regular habit of complaining about their son though. His father mostly worried about Mantu's obsession with TV cartoons and his inconsistent exam scores, while his mother was apprehensive about his habit of shirking work and overeating. Mantu loved to eat and was mostly caught stealing snacks from the kitchen that he was not allowed to nibble. He was also extremely fond of TV shows and computer games on which he spent hours. All this led to him being punished on a daily basis. Though Mantu was scared of his father and mostly sulked after being scolded, he hardly paid attention to his mother. He would receive daily beatings from his mother, but this hardly affected him. In fact, his mother often joked that she needed a stronger build to handle her son. At times, however, Mantu would lose his temper at his mother, crying aloud and banging the doors and windows, and arguing back. On such occasions, his mother mostly kept quiet and waited for her son to cool down. After some time, she would invariably call Mantu back and give him whatever he might be wanting, with a caution that he had to give half an hour more to his studies. She once, almost self-deprecatingly, noted, "He hardly has any mode of recreation. There is already so much tension that he sees in the house. So these little 'things' (*Jinisa*), let him have".

Mantu's father also seemed to take a stand about not pestering Mantu, if the latter lost his temper or cried. He (Mantu's father) once confided:

What can you say? That day I shouted at him. I always scold him if he wastes his time. Does he not know? But yesterday he started crying, and shut his door. I got scared. Today's children, you can never say what they think (obviously indicating to child suicide). What if he took some wrong step? He is a single child; he obviously cannot share much. I got so tensed till he opened the door. So I have asked his mother not to say anything when he is upset. Let him cool down. He is all we have. In school also you see children are facing so much. The affection between teachers and students is missing today. They insult children who don't score well or don't attend their tuitions. Children also learn all kinds of things at this tender age from the internet and share with each other. Not everything is healthy. How will the child deal with all these? We parents don't get to know everything. So we feel a little scared to be any stricter with him. He is a particularly sensitive and introvert kind.

All the same, the parents were very strict about Mantu being well behaved, respectful of elders and caring for younger ones, careful with money, being cautious about strangers and the outside world, reading 'good books' and avoiding anything that might make him sick. However, when it came to asking him to do things on time, whether relating to studies or sharing work at home, they mostly let Mantu have the last word, and not force him about matters at hand. The parents seemed to strongly identify with Mantu's emotional need, and prioritised attending to it.

On one other occasion, during tea time, Mantu's father broached the topic of his friend's child who had committed suicide. The friend's family lived on the same street, and almost 3 weeks had passed since that untoward incident. It was for the first time that Mantu's parents were speaking about it in front of their son. [His parents had earlier spoken to me about it, but had chosen to keep it a secret from Mantu at that time.] Mantu's father asked me directly about my views on suicide, and about what could have gone in the child's mind to take such a drastic step. I shared my thoughts briefly. But he seemed oblivious, and quickly went on to narrate in some detail that entire day's events. Both of Mantu's parents took turns in rendering an account of the past of the deceased child, especially the latter's struggle with studies, even as Mantu's father also reflected upon the child's parents' perspectives, the school's attitude and the child's very

state of mind. As this conversation proceeded, now and then we all kept glancing at Mantu, who was listening to it without any visible reaction. Clearly, his parents had by now informed him about it and explained the situation. Mantu brought the 'snakes and ladder' game and made me play, as his parents chatted with me dwelling on the unfortunate suicide in its various aspects. Only once did Mantu speak up, when he urged his mother, "Mama, how much mark did he (the child who had committed suicide) get?" His mother cautiously replied, "75%", while Mantu merely exclaimed "Oh!" and went back to the game. As the conversation between us elders went on, Mantu moved to open the computer and started to play games on it.

About a month or so later, in a different context, Mantu broached the topic with me, explicitly holding that a 'miscommunication' (*Bhul bujhamana*) between the child who committed suicide and his parents could have led to a misperception on the part of the former and thus to such a drastic step. Like his parents had done, Mantu too mentioned that the school's unhealthy culture of competition had affected the child's mind. I realized that Mantu had accepted his parents' explanation and analysis of the situation. The parents did ponder if those bringing up the child who had committed suicide may have been callous at any point. But these thoughts were immediately brushed away by the fact that it was impossible to imagine such a thing for 'sane parents'; after all, the death was the family's loss.

Undoubtedly this sense of pain and suffering at the child's loss as experienced by the family attest to the latter's stature as an organic extension of the individual and 'the ultimate abode' of the individual. Thus, from within the situations described, it is not that a family does not experience scuffles, feuds, loss and separations; rather, these are seen as incidents that happen non-deliberately and unconsciously primarily because of miscommunications and circumstances. More precisely, the understanding seems to be that such incidents are unavoidable and even woven into the dynamics of family life, and consequently have to be dealt with positively. Indeed, it seems to be the case that the sense of loss and pain experienced by an individual reverberate through the collective space as kind of loss and pain of the entire unit. In this sense, the family was essentially a space that could be identified as 'one's own' (*nijara*), a space that belonged to the

individual and to which the individual belonged. Thus Mantu chose to characterise the family as a space of ‘becoming’, which celebrated living together, safety and happiness, even as disputes or fractures within this space were somewhat transient matters that had to be looked after and resolved by those responsible to do so (namely, the parents). Despite the presence of quarrels and conflicts, Mantu had taken particular note of his parents’ emphasis and concern for his emotional comfort, happiness and their overall efforts towards it. One aspect of such effort certainly entailed shielding Mantu from the immediate fear and worries of troubled relations. Another step involved taking deliberate steps towards normalising tensions by calmly discussing all disturbing events in some detail, with all their pros and cons, while also modulating quarrelsome situations with jokes and a sense of camaraderie and further by rendering individual assertions and expressions (even, at times, specific forms of misconduct) acceptable as part and parcel of collective family life.

Enlarging the Space of Discussion: Experiencing Family Life

As the above cases reveal, the children clearly are experiencing and articulating family life as a singularly bonded unit. They did not so much experience any entitlement in terms of property, inheritance or family name; rather, there obtains a palpable taken-for-granted sense of acceptance and belongingness among the family members (see also Menon, 2013a; and Sharma and Chaudhary 2009). The family is being viewed necessarily as an inclusive space constituting members as bounded by an ‘innate’ and natural feeling for each other. To be sure, ‘family feelings’ were each being experienced by the family in the form of a singularity. Luv – of the Luv and Kush twins described earlier – was explicit, when he evocatively described to me the following, “*Paribarra bi gote mana achi*”, which can be translated as “Family also has a mind” (or, we can say, sentiments’). It seems to me that the mind (*mana*) here stands to represent the collective sentiment and emotions as viewed with a certain sense of solidarity and belongingness. Evidently, the family was their “own”, with the children further viewing the sentiment as something embodied in them. That is to say, the values and ways of a family resonate with its members, even when they are away from each other. The ‘belongingness’ (*aapanapana*) is lived and represented through multiple modalities like the sharing of

time and space, joint resources, the partaking of risks; but what the children seemed to be highlighting to me the most about this condition of ‘belongingness’ is a ‘oneness’ of an embodied form of emotional connect, the ‘family feeling’ (see also Chaudhary 2004).

In addition, with reference to the families that I immersed myself in, the quality of the relationship was extremely important for the children. Doubtless, family relations were being perceived as integral to an individual’s life, with the belongingness and acceptance that the children experienced taken as an expression of the shared space of trust, accountability, and understanding which the family shaped and nurtured as a sentiment. These were all being highly valued by the children that we encountered. In fact, Virginia Morrow (1998) in her study of children’s perspectives and understandings of family life shows that, instead of the structure and kinship norms of a family, children prioritized duties performed and the emotional content of the relationships in charting out the essence of the family. As she observes: “Rather, caring, love, and the quality of the relationships involved, and fulfilling roles, defined family, and this was clear across age, gender and ethnicity” (Morrow 1998: 19). Thus, for Luv and Kush in particular, the family’s harmony and synergy were so important that they attributed it as a qualification for (what they self-referentially termed) ‘the perfect family’.

More interestingly, the children also imagined family happiness as a practice, which needs to be proactively promoted and worked for. They did see family quarrels and tensions as antithetical to a ‘healthy’ family space. As we disclosed through Luv and Kush and Samiksha, all expressed their disapproval of families with long situations of discord. But they also showed a tendency to ignore or accept disagreement and conflict as part and parcel of collective life, and hardly seemed to show any expressive form of resistance to the same. Such occasions as differences of opinion were evaluated by the children as constituting emotional outbursts and emerging from unexpected situations which could not be attributed to any single person’s intentions. For example, Atman attributed ‘bad mood’ or ‘ups and downs in business’ as the causes for his father losing his temper at him. These emotional states or misunderstandings were clearly seen as momentary, which could be resolved over time through persuasion and mollifying gestures. More than often, such moments were also seen as occasions for taking positive

steps in bringing together the family by a show of trust, patience and regard for the individual's expressions of sentiment.

The robustness of 'family feelings' in the children's home lives did not mean that they were bereft of a sense of individual need and conduct. The 'home' was evidently a space where they could be themselves, without feeling too conscious of the same, and always articulate their demands. The children held personal feelings quite close to their hearts and exhibited it with varying degrees of intensity. Sometimes, they were very clear on how they felt about the various situations at home, and even had strong opinions about the same. To be sure, 'family feeling' and personal interest coexisted and intersected, providing them with a sense of individuality within the collective called 'family'. Indeed, the family was seen as a suitable place where individual demands could be placed and legitimately expected to be adhered. At the same time, the children seemed to identify with the responsibility and mutuality of relations in the sense that they felt obligated to cater to each other's needs. As Teresa Robinson has also affirmed in her study of young middle-class adults in Pune, "... though they longed for more autonomy (within the family), they continued to value caring and mutual involvement" (Robinson 2014: 118; see also Sinha *et al.* 2001). The family seemed to give them (the children in our study) the material and immaterial resources and security to pamper and even explore their individuality, even as feelings of affection played a huge role in the operation and maintenance of these dynamics in the child's life within the household.

It must be reiterated that the significance of 'family' was not only restricted to its immediacy and prominence in the day-to-day conduct of life. It also, as it were, stretched beyond the present and preoccupied the imagination of both past and future for the child. Even as the family was being experienced and articulated as the first group of their life into which they came to find themselves, in the future too (as was being held) the family would have its place in their independent lives. Thus, quite apart from the emotional, material and aesthetic needs that the family catered to, it is also the qualities of 'durability' and 'intimacy' as attributed by the children which lent the family a certain fundamental importance. In this sense, the family was a 'permanent' phenomenon.

Within the family, and especially between the parents and children, the place of emotion was not quite only as a form of substance facilitating all interaction; emotions were also a factor in the decisions internal to family interaction. Interestingly, in the social psychology of emotions, a lot has already been spoken about ‘feeling rules’ and ‘emotional competence’ in the context of individual strivings to acquire the cultural dictions of emotions and learn about their collective forms of usage as opposed to merely expressing the ‘felt emotions’ (see Erickson and Cottingham 2014). But, as our case studies hopefully help to illustrate, forms of ‘emotional etiquette’ were also important in the contexts of family life and ‘family feelings’. Thus, for instance, Luv and Kush’s mother’s insistence on ‘not disregarding other member’s feelings’, the importance of ‘mutual understanding’, equanimity (or not losing one’s temper and/or not creating scenes) and so on. The sanctity of family life and the role of parents were all being unequivocally upheld in all the families we have talked about in the foregoing pages.

All the same, consistent with the sense of individuality alluded above, the families also acknowledged that it is possible for individual members, especially children, to not fall in line with the ‘feeling rules’ and even act differently. In such situations, as I observed, the child was being allowed to express and display the ‘felt emotions’. Without doubt, sometimes, this space for ‘display of emotions’ was allowed at the cost of the desired ‘emotional etiquette’ to be maintained in the family. Evidently, the presence of a differing feeling on the part of an individual member was not seen as a threat to the collective moral space; rather it was allowed to prevail simultaneously. What is more, this coexistence was not seen as chaotic. Besides, as we saw in the foregoing pages, this space of display of emotions was strategically appropriated by the children to assert and succeed with their demands. The children were often using ‘emotions’ as a sort of ploy to present not necessarily what they felt (or were feeling), but what they thought would make their parents yield. Atman’s buying of a new phone episode and Aksh’s huffing and puffing to avoid his father’s rulings are some of the examples of this pragmatic deployment of emotions. In fact, Junehui Ahn, while researching ‘emotional socialization’ among middle-class American children, also found that the latter “strategically appropriate and transform expressive forms to have them fit into their own social goals” (Ahn 2010: 109).

At any rate, in the final analysis, and specifically in the context of my own fieldwork, it was the emotion as perceived - and not quite the emotion felt, displayed or strategized - that influenced the decisions in the family. In other words, the supervening element was what people thought about how other people felt, or what people thought about how they made other people feel like. For example, Luv's decision to choose a kind of middle path was not because he felt entirely good about it, but because he perceived that it would bring relief to others, especially his father, to whom he felt that he was causing great distress with his insistence of avoiding the Science stream for his college education. His father, on the other hand, agreed to the middle path, perceiving that his son was convinced about it. Similarly, Aksh's father perceived of his son's tantrum as a strategizing act, and attempted to counter it. However, Aksh's mother, sister and other relatives perceived it as a real or felt emotion, and did not question him on his behaviour. Atman himself seemed to comprehend this phenomenon through his articulation of 'problems in real' and 'problems in apprehension'. As he tended to explain: while he (that is, Atman) did not see it necessary to respond to his parent's fears (for instance, their worrying over his food habits), he felt it was more important to help them in 'real problems' (for example, the problems in his father's office). In fact, though his mother was really worried and upset about his food habits and behaviour towards elders, he seemed to merely consider changing his habit and behaviour in this regard.

We now move on in the next two chapters to illustrate further the moral grid of sentiments and emotions that the children tended to be weaving around the facets of their world at home.

Chapter 6



‘Good’ Child and ‘Bad’ Child: Of Participation, Responsibility and Keeping a Clear Conscience

In that spirit, I argue in what follows that we have not really come to terms with human beings - ourselves - until we come to understand human persons as fundamentally moral, believing animals (Smith 2003: 4).

Have you done a paper boat? You tear a paper from the copy, make a boat and play with it. If you have more papers, then you will make more boats because you really enjoy it. Then your copy will get over before the term ends, and you have to buy another copy paying 30 rupees. That is your loss. But soon you will forget about the loss because you have a new copy with even more paper. And then you want to experiment on new ways of doing it, new designs, etc. You cannot stop doing it. It will pull you. It will feel like that. And you will feel that it is possible to go on doing it and you will not see anything wrong in it. After all, you are just trying to see how it works. Then some of the friends will show interest and ask you about it. So you will feel like, ‘Oh people will know me’. You will not realise what kind of popularity it is. Actually, it varies from child to child; someone may think, ‘what a loss of paper’, and another one may think, ‘I am just enjoying, what is wrong in it?’ And it will go on, for after watching you someone else may get interested and come to join you in it. So these are all kinds of ‘influences’ (*prabhaba*).

A child’s brain is like an onion. [Brings an onion from the kitchen and shows me] What do you see? [I describe]. Well, look how it is on the outside; it is all dry, hard, rough and brittle. Inside it is soft, smooth and fresh. That is how a child’s brain is. Outside, because of various impacts, it becomes rough and flaky given the hard impact of the environment. But inside it is shiny and white. Schools should look at the inside of the child and help in bringing out their inner talent. Parents should also give guidance at the right time.

- Atman (our key child informant)

‘*Thakka*’ (literally thug), *Gadha* (literally ‘donkey’), *Daitwabaan* (meaning ‘responsible’), were some of the common words used for children by their families in my field setting. ‘*Thakka*’ idiomatically referred to someone who was not good at

keeping a commitment, one who shirked duties altogether. *Gadha* (donkey) referred to someone who was lazy and not active, in the habit of procrastinating. In contrast, *Daitwabaan* (responsible) was one who was in control and self-reliant. A child who was self-conscious about his/her daily routine, school tasks and delegated chores at home, while requiring no constant reminding or guidance was seen as self-reliant. The habits of readiness for hard work, self-care, helping others and sharing housework were extensively appreciated in all the homes. A child exhibiting these qualities was invariably called a 'good child' (*bhala pilla*). A similar discourse can also be found in the 'theories' around children's attitudes towards household work. These understandings posit that corporeal participation in household work is necessary for building a moral self in a child: "We suggest that children's routine assistance in housework, childcare, and self-care is a crucial path for gaining ... ability to think in common-sense ways that assume the standpoint of others" (Ochs and Izquierdo 2009: 392). Thus a readiness towards undertaking household duties is seen as an indicator of moral personhood among children and as the qualification of a 'good child'; the lack of it is to be seen as the qualification of a 'bad child'.

Thus, in the initial scheme of my plans, this chapter was to address a simple query - how much did children help in household work? I intended to focus on household chores, errands that children carried out voluntarily or at the bidding of specific commands (including their academic work). Following Munroe, Munroe and Shimmin's (1984) division of household responsibilities among children into 'instrumental activities (chores)' and other 'social activities', Susan Seymour had sought to trace the dimensions of Odia children's involvement in childcare, cleaning and cooking, running errands, hospitality and school studies at home (see Seymour 1988: 358). Attending to these dimensions at my end too, I thought, would help me in having an understanding of the child's role in family life, as well as throwing light on household attitudes towards the role of children in the family. I further wanted to understand how the different labelling's of 'good' and 'bad' child based on the assessment of a child's attitude to household work, self-care etc. affected the child being so labelled. Did children internalise these attributions and accommodate them into their self-imaginings? How did children react to it all?

To begin with, during my fieldwork, I was intrigued by the ‘indifference’ and lack of reaction that children showed to such attributions. In most cases, there was no active ownership or opposition registered by the children to their constant branding. Gradually, I realised that in order to make sense of this apparent phenomenon it was necessary to understand the spirit of the ‘branding’, the moments of its invocations and the values assigned to it in the children’s worldview. In this chapter, accordingly, I try to explore children’s moral attitudes and associations in the context of multiple role expectations. Following their everyday exchanges, I try to understand the modalities and substance of these moral attitudes and emotions, as it were.

Significantly, as I proceeded reading through the children’s responses, my attention turned to a larger frame of reference of ‘being responsible’ than merely carrying out a certain amount of work at home. ‘Being responsible’ for children did not necessarily mean empathising with parent’s workload, but upholding family values and ‘being good’ (*Bhala manisa haba*) per se. Children visualised their roles and responsibilities in everyday family life as a ‘good daughter’, ‘good in studies’, ‘obedient’ etc. Thus the children’s talking on these aspects was heavily adorned with references to ‘good and bad’ (*bhala o kharap*). I have decided, therefore, to devote this chapter to a fragment of everyday morality bordering on ‘responsibility’, its role and applications in children’s daily life in the home setting, and self-image making in the child.

More significantly yet, attached to this schema of good and bad is children’s understanding of trouble-maker or, more particularly, the idea of ‘mischief’ (*Badmaasi*). In fact, once I had arrived at an understanding of children’s overall categorisation of ‘good child’ as ‘being responsible’ in my field setting, I found it equally curious to comprehend ‘what made ‘mischief’ acceptable to children?’ To be sure, the ranges of ‘mischief’ were regular grounds of contested moralities between children and parents. Thus I decided to look at the incidences of disobedience and trouble-making that formed a part and parcel of their everyday lives at home. It is here that I actually encountered children’s application, adaptation and appropriation of ‘good and bad’, ‘responsible and irresponsible’, in a constructive manner. Thus, following Veena Das, I propose that

moral agency is not only experienced by “... orienting oneself to transcendental, objectively agreed-upon, values but rather through the cultivation of moral sensibilities within the everyday” (Das 2012a: 134). Accordingly, in the course of this chapter (as indeed in the chapter that follows), we look at the children’s modelling of moralities in their attempts at positioning themselves in the collective of the family and in their day-to-day activities at home. One interesting phenomenon that I encountered was the children’s active appropriation of the identity of ‘small child’ (*chota pilla*) as a kind of defence mechanism for avoiding the demand of ‘being responsible’ and thereby giving themselves an easy movement between the good and the bad with a clear conscience. In this present chapter, therefore, I also talk about the nature of innocence or clear conscience that children in my field setting adapted for their purposes.

Schemes and Orders of Description: Narrative Folds of Responsibility

For the purpose of the description, I have taken children from 4 families based on their attitude to household work, school work and their self-description concerning ‘sense of responsibility’ (*Daitwa gyana/bodha*). I first talk about Sania, who (as we already noted in Ch.3) is a regular topper in her class. She is also quite popular and active in her friend circle. However, she had a noteworthy disinterest in household chores. Between her grandmother and parents, Sania faced multiple role expectations on an everyday basis. We move on then to discuss Mantu’s attitude to work. As we had noted, he is a single child, and shirks work to a great extent. He maintains a similar dislike for school work as well. Both of his parents remain unsure about putting any demand on Mantu in this regard. Following this, I move on to Vinayak, who is a single child of two working parents. Even though he is left in the care of his grandparents, the pressure on Vinayak for becoming self-reliant and self-conscious is very visible. However, the pressure of school work seems relaxed given that he is merely in his 2nd standard. Finally, I talk of the twin boys, Luv and Kush, who can be seen sharing various household duties along with other family members on a routine basis. This participation, however, is seen as something very ordinary and as a routine process of their everyday life. Both the boys are above average students who remained sincere with their school work. For the orders of my description, besides, I have aggregated the data across time and space into a

thematic cluster in order to arrive at children's understanding of their role, responsibilities and negotiation at home. For each child, in each of the 4 families, I have recreated a separate account, which has the following underlying structure and sequence – (i) Child's participation in household work and parental concerns; (ii) Children's 'take' on their role, responsibility, and conceptions of 'mischief'; and (iii) Child's take on the good and the bad. Needless to say, since I did not have any formal interview schedule and instead had free-ranging conversations over the duration of my fieldwork, the occasions and references to these topics in the context of each child occurred differently and varied independently.

Over to SANIA

Sania, we know, is a meticulous student and always held the first or second position in her class. On a typical day, she would go to school early in the morning and return around noon, have her lunch and then take a nap. She took home tuitions in the evening, which were sometimes as long as 3 hours. Following this, Sania liked to watch a movie or a serial on the laptop while having her dinner. Before going to bed, she would arrange her school bag and check on pending homework. There was some gravity about Sania and, though she loved to chill out at times, she mostly kept to herself. Her parents were very particular about her studies. She was much pampered by her father who had high hopes for her. But it was her mother who guided and supervised her studies. It was not uncommon that during exam times the mother woke up Sania as early as 4 a.m. to check all her revisions for the day's paper. She often worried about Sania's hobbies and interests and whether Sania had enough knowledge that would help her in higher studies. Both her parents did their best in catering to Sania's needs and demands. Sania's grandmother, on the other hand, expressed her constant concern about Sania's disdain for household chores and indifference to her parents' sacrifices for her. Sania showed no reaction to these expressed and unexpressed worries. She remained focused on her studies and loved to talk about her school, friends, movies and other topics like great leaders or new discoveries.

Of household work and parental concerns

In the period I visited her house, Sania's mother was undergoing a series of health check-ups because of severe exhaustion and weakness issues. Later she was diagnosed with a neurological condition and kept under medication. Both her parents often had to spend the entire day in the hospital for examinations and review. Sania's grandmother stayed back to look after the children. The grandmother looked visibly upset and stressed. She shared that her daughter-in-law was the eldest *bahu* (daughter-in-law) who had got married at an early age. She had to work 24/7 as they lived in a joint family, to begin with, and then with two children of her own to look after she got no rest. The grandmother also added that Sania's mother worried day and night about Sania's studies and her future. She pointed out that Sania's mother worked in the kitchen till 12 in the night and got up early in the morning at 4 a.m. to check Sania's school work, while going on to keep herself busy through the day with her other daughter, the little Sara.

On a regular day during such a chat, the grandmother asked Sania to start helping her mother at home. However, Sania made no reply and kept looking at her computer. Annoyed, her grandmother complained:

I tell her, you are so grown-up. At least you learn to make *daal chawal* (rice and lentils). At least that much help to Ma. No, she will sit day and night on that computer. ... Sania will keep complaining that Sara is so wayward, but she does not remember how naughty she was at that age. She was the only child in a house where lived all three pairs of grandparents (brothers of paternal grandfather). Her grandfathers pampered her completely. No one could dare tell anything to Sania, and whatever she requests had to be done immediately; she should never cry. Sania grew up becoming so stubborn and demanding. And now if we ask her to teach the little one (Sara), then she will rule her and slap her on little mistakes. What is the point in so much learning if you cannot teach letters to a little child? ... When her mother went to the hospital, the little one kept crying till the doctors released her mother. She got scared about why doctors were checking her mother. She understood something is wrong. But Sania, she kept doing her homework and then washed up, came over to dinner and asked me to serve her food. She did not ask about her mother or her health. No concern. ... She will order today she wants *puri*; then she will say that for two days I have been taking *rotis* and now I will not take the same thing. ... She will not even arrange her bed after getting up or polish her shoe ... She keeps ordering others. She keeps nagging her father that he does not take her out to visit places ... Nobody can tell her anything, for she will sulk or be grumpy.

Sania was privy to most of these diatribes by her grandmother. But generally she did not show any reaction and kept looking at her computer or merely stuck her tongue out and

rolled her eyes. The grandmother's pestering was a regular phenomenon though. She would encourage me to talk to Sania on the matter so that the latter (Sania) could help her mother once the grandmother left back for her native village. Visibly, in front of me, Sania would never reply back or pick up a conversation with her grandmother. Rather, Sania would invariably change the topic and start talking about what was going on in the neighbourhood or something that she might have read in the newspaper.

One day, her grandmother kept nagging Sania to do her *namaz* (prayer) in time, but Sania kept chatting with me without paying any attention. The grandmother then turned to me and said, "Tell her something. See how she is being lazy for everything. All the time she is sitting on the computer and mobile. ... How will she run a house and work in her office? How will she manage life?" At this point, Sania lost her patience and curtly replied. "*Dadi* (grandma) don't keep nagging all the time. Everything that you have said I cannot do. There are many useful things in the computer worth learning. But you don't know that. Don't keep talking about me always". The grandmother left the room in a huff, staunchly stating "Do whatever you wish. Keep sitting".

Sania's mother never coerced or nagged her daughter for doing chores. She would call out for Sania to help, but if Sania did not respond, she did it herself. She took care to point out to Sania's indifference, and sometimes asked Sania to think seriously about what her grandmother had been saying. But beyond a point, she left the two of them to settle the matter. Sania's mother was more concerned about her daughter's prospects, her orientations in the present and about whether Sania was using her time well to prepare herself for the future:

How is her knowledge? Is her standard good? Can she handle it in the future? I am so worried. ... She says she will become an IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officer. Big talk! How to become an IAS? She does not think about that. Her father has big dreams for her. 'Daughter will become IAS' ... He is ready to give everything she wants ... I do whatever best I can (regarding Sania's education). ... But, look at Sania, is she taking it seriously? No ... In the shop, only costly dresses will catch her eyes. That day one dress was Rs. 5000/- and she liked it. Nothing else appealed to her. So her father was ready to pay. I left the shop and stood outside in protest. There is a limit. Sania does not care about all these. She is still not responsible. How will she handle her life ... I feel worried.

As a child, we grew up with restrictions. I was good at studies but my marriage was fixed early. I could say nothing to my father. Somehow after marriage, I finished graduation. But you see how free Sania is with her father. Unbelievable! But I think it is important and good. Otherwise, everything she will hold inside and it is harmful. I was the only daughter-in-law when I was married, and everyone loved me. I worked non-stop trying to please everyone. But there Sania was getting spoilt. She cried that she did not want to go to the nursery. So her eldest grandfather said that she should stay at home and study. Whatever Sania wanted that should happen. If I scolded her for not studying, they would take her away from me. I had no control. Her education was at risk. If she does not study and does not stand on her own legs, what will happen to her? She will be married early and then she has to go through what I went through. I want her to be in a position where she has a say (that is, Sania's opinion matters).

Her father is a shy person. So I decided to shift out of the joint family. I became a 'bad' woman. For her studies, I shifted out. And now if she does not study and perform well, what will everyone say? The blame will come to me double-fold ... I wonder if Sania has started thinking about all these seriously. She does not take much tension. *Damn-care* (meaning 'careless'). She still needs pushing and monitoring ... If I speak to her teachers, they all say that Sania is a '*heera*' (jewel) and I should not worry. They praise her and it goes into her head. But they don't know our family situation.

She keeps sitting on the computer. I don't know what she is doing there. She does not share much. She keeps doing something in a diary (where Sania had pasted pictures of beautiful heroines, lovely dresses and nice sceneries, and had made beautiful designs and crafts to decorate it all over) and I wonder what is she doing? Is she spending time in something good and useful for her growth?

Now I don't have as much patience left. I let Sara do what she wants. ... Sania is more than a mother to Sara (laughs). Very strict; have you not seen her how she slaps the little one? I asked Sania to teach Sara the letter, and Sania said that she has taught Sara 'U'. That is her contribution ... But Sara wraps herself around Sania 24/7. She wants her books, she wants to eat from the same plate, sleep with her, sit in the same room. She will cry and hold on to Sania when she is going to school or to her friend's place. Sania gets annoyed.

As the foregoing order of disclosures reveals, Sania's mother is quite expressive of her concerns regarding her daughter's education and future. Evidently, her own life impressions have heavily shaped her wishes and desires about Sania's life. She had hoped to study and secure a stable career achieving independence and credibility to have 'her say' in life without subjugating herself to familial restrictions. However, she had received little support from her family on the matter. Hence, as a mother, she had decided

to make every possible contribution in making Sania a well-educated, career woman with an ability to assert her independent opinions. She saw this as a way out of the social evil of early marriage and an over-burdened domesticated life. The mother's resolution kept her vigilant about Sania's overall development and performance on a regular basis. She worried constantly about Sania's examination scores, her hold on school subjects, sense of responsibility about her own life goals, etc. She expressed her anxiety that, even though Sania's father and Sania herself held high hopes of becoming an IAS officer, they both were not proactive in making efforts towards it. Her own exposure and abilities to guide Sania were also limited. All of these gave Sania's mother a lot of stress.

It is important to mention here that Sania's mother's worries about her daughter's indifference and reservations to participate in immediate household works or even her demands for enjoying life were not pointing at the danger of 'de-skilling' her children or lack of familial empathy on the part of Sania. Rather she saw it as Sania's careless attitude and overconfidence towards her life goals. Sania's mother wished her daughter to become more aware and alert about the burden of liberation that Sania's life faced in the prevailing context of traditional role expectations in their family. In the same vein, we can see that Sania's mother's complaints about her daughter spending time on the computer is not about Sania wasting time instead of helping in household chores, as believed by Sania's grandmother. Rather, the mother worried if Sania was wasting time instead of doing something that would help her advance her life goals. Sania's mother's sense of leniency in the daughter taking up household work is reflected in her joke on Sania's treatment of Sara's letter writing. It was more important for Sania's parents that she fulfilled their and her own dream of achieving a good position in life. They expected Sania to become serious and sensitive to this more than she lending a hand in household tasks.

On responsibility and 'mischief'

Most of my conversations with Sania's mother and grandmother happened in front of Sania. Her mother often looked towards the daughter to get some reaction, but Sania either kept herself busy with a book or computer or merely made funny faces at her mother, making all of us laugh. I did notice Sania's indifference to do chores, even her

own work and her habit of turning deaf ears to orders and requests of help at home. Sania, though, was very sincere and diligent with her studies and liked to keep herself busy with diverse activities like newspaper cutting, surfing about scientific discoveries, planning visits, and activities with friends. I hence wondered what made her think that it was fine not to lend a helping hand in the household chores despite being an 'active' child. I also wondered how she put up with the constant pressure of performance and anxiety over her career and future. So I decided to probe these further with Sania and elicit her views on what she felt about it:

I cannot be so disciplined and routinized. I study but at my pace and mood. Like after tuitions I cannot sit down and study anymore. I have to go out and eat something or do something on the computer because there is no TV ... I cannot take so much stress. Sometimes I feel I should learn some musical instrument or do something else. But this tuition takes all my time ... I do not like doing chores. I am not acquainted with it. If I feel like doing, then I am sure I can do it, but I don't bother myself. Anyway, all work gets done, no work stops because I am not doing it. ... There is still time for me (*abhi bohat time hai*) to go away to a hostel or outside. I can learn quickly. If I see once I can figure out. Once I had to make tea. So first I thought how much of tea leaf and sugar should go in it and did it on my own. In the middle, I could see that it was too watery, so I mixed more milk and stirred it. Once I was satisfied, I served the tea. It was tasty. So I can learn these as and when needed and I will catch up.

Dadi and I are hardly on good terms ... *Dadi* sticks to old thoughts (*purane khayalat*) and blind beliefs like a black cat, evil eye, spells and curses ... she never talks about anything new. No talks on great men, success stories, developments ... like these computers. If I try to talk about it with her, then she will turn her face and go away...

When I asked Sania further about her role at home, to my surprise she categorically said that she had 'no role' as such, but mostly saw it as:

Being a good daughter, a good sister and a good granddaughter ... Respect and listen to them (elders). They are older than us. They have experienced what we are experiencing. They know more than we know. So we should listen to them. They take care of us, stand by us. So we should respect and show our gratitude. At home sometimes I obey and sometimes I do what I wish. After all, I also have my wishes and personality (*Aakhir apni bhi koi marzi hai, koi personality hai*) ... If there are relatives or outside people, then I quietly listen and obey everything. Because if I make a scene in front of them, they will not understand everything; they will just talk about how bad my behaviour is ... But at home it is free ... at home, I can be myself. It is my space ...

It is not always bad to be wilful (*ziddi*). Like one time this computer stopped working. I told mama that I can handle it, but she did not believe and did not let me touch lest I spoil it. So, at last, I decided to do it on my own and it started working. We saved mechanic money and our time ... So when I know I am right, I do not change my point so that they come to know what is right ... So here being wilful was not wrong ... But if the situation worsens then we must give up ...

I generally don't bother them too much. I am almost always in my work or in my thoughts doing something that I like quietly ... I don't want them to bother me also. Only in the food, I show *nakhra* (tantrum, in this instance, although it also connotes mischief); that is how our family is. *Bade dadaji* (paternal grandfather's elder brother) used to say 'we live for food'...

By showing *nakhra* (tantrum/mischief) ... people will give some attention, listen to you ... it feels good to get importance sometime.

Sania clearly stated her dislike for household work and her confidence in catching up with it when the time comes. She felt that it was too early for her to think of household chores, albeit expressing that she saw her role as a good daughter who respected and obeyed elders. However, she did not see a problem in asserting her own will. Sania said that home was a space where she could be herself, relax and express her demands. She believed that being wilful was good if it saved the situation; otherwise it was needed to be given up. She was clear that sometimes doing '*nakhra*' and putting demands is good as it brings into focus the other's attention.

It is imperative to note that Sania did not see the act of doing chores or being of help to her mother at home as a real role expectation. Rather she saw 'no role' as such at home specified for her. Evidently, this is so because there was no serious job or contribution that her parents expected from her. Conversely, Sania identified her possible role and responsibility in being a 'good daughter', which necessarily meant upholding the integrity and decorum of the family. Interestingly, for Sania, her efforts to be a good daughter upholding family values did not get threatened by her wilfulness, daily demands and assertions. They coexisted, and her near-moral commitment to the family ran deeper, as we shall see in a while.

Sania admitted that her parents rarely punished her for anything. She said that mostly it was younger children who tend to be naughty as they don't know the impact of their action, but as they grow up they do not repeat the same mistakes. She observed that as a young child she used to cry, not study and trouble her mother too. But now as she is a grown-up, she has become more conscious. Sania conveyed that even in school her close group of friends consisted of students who were studious and mostly 90 per cent scorers. "We play together, sit together, talk about what is going on, share our copies and mostly just time pass". On one occasion, her mother specifically informed how one of the boys in the group started stalking Sania which made the latter severely upset and had to counsel her to ignore it and focus on studies. Sania's mother held forth:

He was not that kind of boy. He was very studious and he was in the same friend group. These children shared their notes, helped one another and had a healthy competition between them. They don't indulge in all these. But that boy did like this ... Who could have seen this coming? I told Sania not to take load. Did Sania do anything wrong? Did she stare or stalk in return? Then why should she feel bad? I told her to not worry about it.

However, Sania strongly resented the situation and spoke against it quite touchily:

No, I don't like all this. In our class, there is a girl. She is very good at studies. But what can I say? She is friendly with a boy from another section. He is not a good person. Even the teachers know that he is not a good boy. His elder brother is a pass-out and loafer. When first we saw this, we kept quiet. After some days, we started making faces so that she knows that we disapprove of her behaviour. But she did not change her ways. So one day I went to her and told her that the boy was bad and she was not doing the right thing. She replied that she knew everything, and still she does not mind being friends with him. I was so irritated. This girl is an elder sister; she has a younger brother. What 'influence' will she be? I felt so bad for what she was doing. And the way she spoke back to me as if I had no business interfering. Everyone in the class knows that if Sania [in a reference to herself] is saying something means it will be something good. But that girl did not listen.

Though Sania did not empathise with the immediate needs of her mother in doing chores or being obedient to her grandmother, she was conscious of their deeper worries and wishes. She did her best to keep her scores and do well in school, which was her mother's major concern. She also determinately nourished the aspiration of becoming an IAS officer as her father dreamt for her. She did not see her role in active engagements at home, but she considered it supremely important to uphold her family values of good

conduct and character. When her classmate went to befriend a boy of ill-reputation, she reprimanded her and felt that the girl had failed her duty as an elder sister by being a wrong influence on her younger brother. Sania thus took onto herself the role of a moral upright daughter, student and elder sister. She would keep ruling and disciplining her younger sister in many different ways, not because she was annoyed but because she feels it is morally important to teach good conduct.

The good and the bad

Though Sania felt that home was a space where she can relax and be herself, she also had some set ideas about 'good conduct' in the house and seemed to be keen on maintaining it. This comes out clear when she talked about 'fights' and the 'art of handling situations' at home.

I don't like all these gossips and fights. When I listen to it, I get surprised. Some old tales they keep recalling and fight over it now. I wonder how they remember such old things. I leave that place and open my computer and watch something nice, some good movie or serial ... Like in this (*Hum Saath Saath Hai*) movie, there are 3 sons and 1 daughter and all are together ... There is no difference between daughter and daughters-in-law. All sisters-in-law are friendly, free. All of them celebrate together and keep happy. There is no difference between step-son and son. Even friends are like family ... I like it. The moral of the story is a good one. You get to see the 'art of handling situations' (*Paristhiti sambhaliki*). Like when the son-in-law loses everything, the whole family stays calm and supports him adequately to settle him back. When the step-son is asked to move out by the mother, everyone else acts with great patience and works to bring back things to normal. No blames or fights. ... If there is a situation, then you must deal with it thoughtfully (*Bhabi-chinti*, or as in Hindi '*soch samajh ke*'). My papa is always in a hurry, very restless and he says whatever comes to his mind even without meaning it. And sometimes *Dadi* gets hurt and annoyed, and then they fight. Sometimes you should think before you reply; otherwise the situation worsens and goes out of control. You should be patient, think and not react every time.

Sania's emphasis on the handling of the situation and her thoughtful response was in consonance with her behaviour in avoiding conflicts and not showing reactions to her grandmother's nagging and in not over-empathising with her mother's concern. Rather she chooses to do her best in keeping her rank and wishing to become an IAS officer as the appropriate response to the family situation. Thus being responsible for Sania was rooted in a different plane than how her grandmother perceived the same (which for the

latter had to do with the sharing of household chores). Talking from this plane, Sania once reasoned with me about why it is important to be good while we were having a chat on her school friends:

It is like there are ‘good’ children and ‘bad’ children. Like my friends, we are the good children group. We are straightforward, simple, we discuss studies and lighter matters like what happened in a serial. But the bad children’s group will do backbiting, backstabbing. In your face, they will say something and behind your back, they will change ... They will add *mirch masala* (spice-up) and lie ... Maybe because they are jealous and cannot see others being good and having good friends. They will keep talking about other people’s faults ...

‘Being bad’ means being on a bad path. In your behaviour, it is like cussing, disrupting, showing of attitude, being never satisfied and always irritated. In your action, it is like teasing, lying, passing comments, bad-mouthing, troubling others, thoughtless ...

It is important to be good because if you are on a good path then to become bad it takes very little time. But if you are bad and you want to reform yourself, you want to change, like *sudhaar* (improve oneself), then it takes a long time. It is difficult.

(While speaking about why she wants to be an IAS officer) I want to do something good. Like so many poor people on the road. They cannot get even the basic minimum. For the sake of humanity ... as they say good in the eyes of humanity (*Insaniyat ke naate. kehte hain na Insaniyat ke nazar mein accha hai*). It means not being rude, indifferent or inconsiderate (*berukhi*). It is important. Like if you help, then you get blessings (*duayein*) like live for 100 years, may good come to you ... The feeling (*bhavna*) is important. Like not how much you give someone but how you give. You should not give with bad feelings (*Kharab bhavna se nahi dena chahiye*).

Sania stressed a lot about the ‘goodness of mind’ while making an assessment of the good and bad in life. She valued such qualities as thoughtfulness, truthfulness, calmness, free from hard feelings and benevolence. She also linked it to visible behaviour like thinking before replying, not telling lies, not using bad words, not showing off, not complaining, and being helpful by nature and so on. She saw herself and her friends as forming the ‘good children’s group’ as they were studious, simple and straightforward (in the sense of being truthful). She also justified that her intentions at being wilful were mostly for the right reasons and not motivated to create much trouble for anyone. Doing something bad was not only wrong from the point of humanity, but also close to irrevocable for the individual. Thus Sania’s moral self, as it were, was not so much

reflected in her shirking of household chores, but in her deeper endorsement of her parents' dreams, family's decorum and dignity.

On to MANTU

Mantu would shirk any work. As we noted in Ch.3, he was studying in the 3rd-4th standard when I engaged intensively with him. He loved getting lost in his video games, TV programmes or just loitering. After eating, he never picked his plates. He would call out his mother if he needed anything - water to drink, a towel to bath, his school dresses, or even to find what he had misplaced. He was very particular about his toys, storybooks, colours and his variety of collections which he stored in a box. Every time he showed them to me, he counted them before keeping it back. But ultimately it was his mother's responsibility to stack them in the right place. His mother regularly pointed out his lack of interest in any housework: "He will only demand, but not help ... All his stuff, only I have to store properly. Now I will arrange and soon he will take all out and spread it all over, never put things in place. Sometimes I just feel like bashing him up". Mantu remained unaffected to such threats. Mantu's house had no housemaid to help his mother with all the chores at home. He would never study on his own; his mother had to sit alongside continuously guiding him. If his mother left his side to attend any work, then Mantu would leave his task halfway and start doodling or playing with some toys; and if no one is watching him, then he would just loiter around or switch on the TV. This was the main cause of him getting beaten. Many times, when I sat down to help him in studies or in getting him to do other stuff, I had to strike various deals. For instance, I had to promise him a game hour, take him out or give him some storybooks to read etc. For any unfinished task, whether in studies, chores or extracurricular activities, he would simply say, "Mama did not help". In response, his mother would chide him, mostly adding "Mama has to work, she doesn't have time".

On the matter of housework and parental concerns

During my fieldwork, a few times I insisted that Mantu should clean up his room or help his mother in serving food on the table. But that went unheard. He did the chores only if I took a lead in doing them. Though his parents were vividly amused to see Mantu at

work, they were very anxious that he may end up breaking or spilling things. One day I found that Mantu's mother was having a bad cold and fever. Mantu's father was out of town; and so I spent the day with them making the required arrangements. At night before leaving, I asked Mantu if he could give his mother a light feet massage before sleeping. Mantu flatly declined, imploring "... but I am just a kid, how I am to know?" Mantu found some or the other excuse to always avoid work.

But mostly his parents never felt confident in assigning any task to him. On a hot summer day, when his mother was really tied up with chores, I asked Mantu if we should help her with the washing. To this Mantu was emphatic, "No thanks. She can do it". I went ahead and joined his mother in drying the clothes upstairs on the roof and asked Mantu to pick a few clothes. But his mother resisted saying, "Oh no, he will drop them and then I will have to wash again". All the same, Mantu accompanied us and kept moving about the roof pointing out to different things. He playfully assisted in putting clips on the clothes. His mother and I then joined him to retrieve a handball that was stuck in the tree. Mantu picked a long stick and handed it to us to push the ball out of the branches, while he ran downstairs to retrieve it. I observed a similar attitude in Mantu regarding his personal care. He liked skipping his bath even in summer. One day, when his mother and I insisted that he cannot have his lunch without a bath, Mantu went inside the bathroom and did not come out for an hour. His mother kept fretting and asking him to be quick. She vented, "For everything, if I have to worry and supervise then how will I finish other works". That evening Mantu caught a cold.

To begin with, it seemed to me that Mantu's father was not keen on encouraging his son to participate in chores or be of assistance because he was more insistent on Mantu doing well in studies and keeping good manners like respecting elders. However, gradually I observed that Mantu's father was quick to lose his patience at his son's reluctance to work and assist others at home. This meant that if his father saw Mantu faltering at a task, then he resorted to scolding and shouting which led to Mantu's crying and sulking. So mostly he would let Mantu be. In addition, I noticed that Mantu was very prone to accidents and illness, because of which his parents restrained from pestering him. His father once commented:

He will just increase the work double-fold in the name of helping, and if you say anything he will start making big faces and become upset ... But many times he hurts himself. So we are a little scared to tell him anything. ... He is very weak and frequently falls ill. He does not have stamina. If you tell him anything for his good, he will not follow. Let's see, let him grow up. How much can you scold or beat? He will understand when he will face the brunt himself.

On the other hand, his father was very particular about the development of the right kind of sensitivities and attitudes in his son. Once, while talking about the dimensions of current schooling, he condemned the practice where students are made to sit according to their marks during extra-practice hours. He saw this as a kind of 'mark-shaming' of children, which he regarded as highly inappropriate. Going back to his own school days, he recalled:

I was in a convent for some days. Their teachers work on your mind and attitude. I was asked to do homework, and I did not. The teacher observed this habit. And one day she came in front of me and held her ears and started doing sit-ups. I was so confused. She kept saying that it was her fault that she was giving me homework and that she should be punished for repeatedly doing this mistake. I felt so ashamed. I came and told my father. He then apologized to the teacher and promised that it will never happen again. They worked on our attitude ... But now teachers keep quarrelling with one another. One of Mantu's teachers kept giving him less marks ... Then another teacher who likes him a lot told us that Mantu is getting less marks because he is not going to that teacher's tuitions. Now, what will this do to the child's mind?

Doubtless, Mantu was too young to be asked for doing chores. Both his parents and Mantu himself endorsed this view. Though Mantu's parents wished that their son should become more active in doing his school work and taking responsibilities at home, both of them were not sure how to get Mantu to develop this attitude and whether this was good for his health and mind. Mantu's parents chose not to pressurise their child. Mantu's mother was constantly caught up in household chores and attending to her son's demands, with little time to spare for other activities with him. Mantu's father, though aware of the needs of child development, had little patience to deal with Mantu on this front. Moreover, the father was more concerned about his son's manners, etiquette, and feelings than his active participation and self-reliance. Mantu was thus allowed to have his way, with excuses like him being a little child who would fall ill if compelled to work around the house.

The question of responsibility and the matter of 'mischief'

Mantu was not excluded from any of the family conversations. His parents openly expressed their views and opinions. His father, for instance, had no hesitation in pointing out Mantu's weakness in front of all. Not a single day passed during my visits, when his father did not tell me about the mistakes Mantu might have committed on that day, no matter how embarrassing it was. He would speak about how Mantu had stolen food from the kitchen, done poorly in the exam, and told a lie. The father's habit of caricaturing his son was also visible in front of other relatives where he unhesitatingly called Mantu 'Thakka' (thug) and 'Gadha' (donkey). All the same, his father was genuinely proud of Mantu's reading habit and computer skills about which he spoke with equal emphasis and pride to the people around.

Mantu felt visibly upset about his father's open and public admonitions. However, he soon forgot about it in his daily engagements of studies, watching TV and playing. Also, most of the time, the visitors and guests were quick to wave off his father's rebuke and cajole Mantu by declaring the latter to be a well-behaved, affectionate and sensitive child. This seemed to reinstate Mantu's faith in oneself, as it were. Mantu's mother too, who was quick to complain about his lazy habits and over-dependence on her, never criticised his ability to study and perform well. Rather, she insisted that Mantu was a fast learner and a deep thinker but with little interest in school studies which was the real problem.

Conversations revolving around family tensions and property disputes were also openly discussed in front of Mantu, especially by his mother. His parents fought openly to which Mantu seemed used. He seemed well aware of his parents' attitudes and opinions, and so also that of his other relatives. He mostly took it all in silence, sometimes asking a few questions about it to his mother when they both were left alone. Amidst all the admonitions, teasing and regular family tensions, Mantu's own discourse on his role and work in the home was pretty sorted. He necessarily identified the family as a space of 'happiness' ('*kushi*'); and 'happiness' essentially meant, "... all good work and happy work, like at night after everyone is free, they sit together and chat and watch TV". 'Work', for him, constituted something that people do outside. Thus he would say, "Yes, people have work-time. But at home, they have to switch off ... that (work) is something

you do outside. At home, all characters switch off and do happiness”. Accordingly, work meant something that people did outside in office, school or when they went out to shop. In addition, for Mantu, ‘work’ stood in opposition to ‘happiness’; and, besides, work and taking responsibilities were necessarily an adult prerogative (and himself, being a small child, was not eligible for it). He gives me an interesting analogy of video games to explain his position in life:

Life is like a game that we are playing (*Life ta gote game jauta ame nije chaleichu*). Have you not seen video games, how many levels are there? Easy, medium, hard ... Life also has levels, like school, college, job, to settle with kids and become a father and take care of the family (*pilla mananka sange settle heijiba, baba hei family sambhaliba*). The more the level, the harder (*kastha*) ... I am on 1st level now. Small children like 10 years below. As we grow up our level will increase ... Small children cannot work hard (*Chota pilal mane besi kama kariparibeni*). If we work more we will fall sick (*Besi kama kale aama deha kharap heijiba*) ... Small children will read Tintin ... and help Mama, like bring, hold, keep (*anilu, dharilu, rakhilu*).

The discourse of being a ‘small child’ appears strongly in Mantu’s scheme of things. It appears both as a fact as well as an excuse. Small children cannot work and they fall ill if they do so: he used this reasoning not only to avoid helping his mother at work or doing an extra hour of study, but also to avoid basic discipline such as personal hygiene. ‘Work’ as such is a prerogative of adults and grown-ups, who have moved up in the stage of life. So it was the expected and accepted duty of parents to work and keep the house going. In addition, serious work was that which was done outside the house, in school and office, while the home was the space to do happy activities as having food, watching TV, sharing happiness and relaxing. Consequently, for Mantu, non-participation in household work, even when his mother called for help, seemed acceptable and normal, as it was not something as serious as going to the office. Indeed, as already specified, with respect to his performance, Mantu’s parents were mostly worried about his academic achievements than about his un-readiness for work.

Mantu had high hopes for his future, all the same. Inspired by one of his cousins and the science fiction movies, he wanted to become a scientist and discover ways to protect the earth. His parents also narrated to him about his late paternal grandfather who was a respected IAS officer. Mantu too took great pride in talking about his grandfather’s great

qualities and habits. He would sometimes make great promises to his mother about his future achievements. On one occasion, her mother was sharing with me about the daily grind of housework. She mentioned that it was difficult for her to go out without a vehicle and therefore wanted a Scooty (low powered two-wheeler), but her husband was not conceding as he was scared that she might have a fall or meet with an accident. Mantu, who was listening to this conversation, promptly suggested that she could buy a car. To this, his mother queried, “From where we will get the money?” Mantu then quickly assured her that “Ok, when I do a job, I will arrange for it”. Mantu’s mother looked smilingly at him and declared, “How will you do that? You don’t study timely; you don’t obey what I say (*katha manunu*).” Mantu quickly blurted out, “But I am studying and I obey mostly”.

Amusingly, whenever Mantu was scolded or reprimanded for not studying or doing some mischief, he would often reply back saying that he was doing as much as he could and to the best of his ability. If his mother pestered him to study, he would snap back, “I studied in the morning. How much do you want me to study, should I not watch TV at all?” Or, if she stopped him from binging on junk food, he would retort, “But I had very little, should I not even eat?” Mantu hardly perceived or identified his actions as mistakes or shortcomings, and most of the time he was caught off-guard when his parents scolded or spanked him. As already noted, he got regular scolding from his father for not studying and wasting his time on TV and video games. Having observed this, I decided to ask him about it. I specifically asked him about why his parents scolded him and why he kept disobeying them:

Because of bad luck [his father had unexpectedly arrived home when he was watching TV] ... now I am a small child. That is why ... Being naughty (*badmasi kale*), being mischievous (*shararti hele*), is not like stealing or anything big. But I like eating ice-cream ... Punishment is certainly important. It keeps you from being mischievous for some days. Small children do more mischief. They are allowed to do little mischief. Hiding and eating cake, sweets. If you do little mischief, then you get beatings Big mistakes, I don’t know what they are. Maybe, going out of the house alone ... Because if you get lost or kidnapped and do not come back, then your parents will cry.

Mantu did not hesitate in repeating the mistakes for which he was repeatedly scolded and grounded. According to him, ‘small children’ are more prone to being naughty and

should be allowed to do ‘little mischief’, though parents can punish to check and balance matters, but not end it completely as those ‘little mischiefs’ are not harmful when done within a permissible range. When such ‘mischiefs’ are done keeping the safety of others in mind, then those can be ‘fun’ as well. In fact, ‘bigger mischief’ was such mischief that had irrevocable consequences. Thus, in Mantu’s own view of things, the mistakes and mischiefs he committed were harmless, within permissible range and did not call for guilt or remorse. Parental worries over these were not inconsolable as in case of ‘big mischiefs’ or real loss, and thus worth avoiding.

The fragments of good and bad

For Mantu, clearly, most mischief and punishments were part and parcel of small children’s life. He seemed to be making the distinctions based on ‘big’ and ‘small’ mistakes (or even harmful’ and ‘harmless’ ones) in drawing out categories of good and bad children. While describing his school life, he maintained the same view, where ‘good boys’ were those who did ‘harmless’ pranks while ‘bad boys’ were those who did ‘harmful’ pranks. When I wanted to know if he ever got punished in school, he was emphatic:

No, I never get punished. There are boys who get punished ... ‘Bad boys’. They do a lot of competition kind of things. Like if they like someone’s pencil box, then they will put a challenge to their friend that he should hide it somewhere. And if he cannot do it or if he gets caught, then he has to bring chocolate for everyone or hand over his pocket money ... They will ask their parents for money, like Rs.10 for this ... I am not a bad boy ... I don’t know what kind of mischief they all do. They are secretive and keep to their groups. They keep doing many ‘mischiefs’ (*badmaasi*). They keep telling lies about others, they make fool of others too, and when they get caught they cry hard saying they did nothing so that nobody gives them punishment. So you should be careful, first see a good or bad boy, and then befriend.

I am friends with two good boys. I keep a distance from others. Good means if you say some new games, then they will agree to play and not argue ... Sometimes two of us team up and play pranks on the other. Like slowly we will push him from the bench or scare him. If he gets angry, then we have to join our hands and sit in front of him or sing songs to please him. That is fun ... There is a difference in how good boys tease or bad boys tease. Good boys tease simply. But bad boys they will push hard, pinch, hit, they will not see if it is harmful to anyone.

It is important to be good like Gandhiji, who was a good man. He saved India. Like scientists who save the world from pollution. And bad work is like

terrorism, stealing ... These are sins. Like if you are a banker and you steal Rs.20 lakhs, then the police will arrive and take you because it is a bad deed. It is bad because then there will be a loss of people's money and property. It will cause harm to people (*Lokankara khyati huye*).

Children can do little good works like making science projects or helping parents. But I am too young for that now. In 7th class, children can do these.

For Mantu, clearly, what constituted as 'bad' were acts that caused real 'harm' and 'losses' to other people. This is the reason that he decided to avoid the 'bad boys' group who were inconsiderate to other people's loss and pains. 'Good works' were inevitably those that saved and protected people, the country and world. So he dreamt of becoming a scientist who would make new discoveries and protect the world environment. Mantu continuously used this reasoning in negotiating and justifying his space at home and keeping a clear conscience. He identified himself as 'good boy' who kept a distance from 'bad boys' and one who did his share of studies as expected from a small child.

Yet another setting in which Mantu referred to 'good' and 'bad' was in the context of God. Explaining to me why he prays daily following his mother, he stated:

It is important to believe in God. God fulfils all desires. If we pray with all our heart, then God comes. We feel God is not present, but God is present. ... If there is a poor labourer who is suffering, then God will help him and fulfil his wishes. Rich people also call God when their house peace is disturbed (*ashanti*). God helps ... I pray for my well-being, my health, exams ... You never know when you will have some desire, so you should pray ... God is not just up in the sky but everywhere, even on the earth (*Dhartima*). Also, God can come as you and me, like a common person (taking from a mythical serial on TV) ... For that, you have to pray with full focus all your life ... Or else like a child with a pure heart. ... You cannot say when God will show up before us.

On another occasion, Mantu showed me his school prayer, oath and daily 'Good Thoughts' printed in his school diary. He identified these as 'thoughts'. When I asked for an explanation, he said that these were '*shikhya*', teachings for good; and insisted that he followed these 'thoughts'. It was not easy for Mantu to explain good and bad at an abstract level. But he picked the ideas now and then from what his parents would discuss, as indeed his school teachings and TV serials. One day he brought me a newspaper, pointing at the headline talking about 'Inflation' and asked me "What is inflation and why the Prime Minister was worried about it?" After that, he seemed concerned and

wanted to know “What will happen to poor people if nobody thought about them”. Manifestly, moral issues touched and captured children’s minds in various forms and medium than just immediate encounters with family and friends in school. However, the larger contexts were somewhere seen as something removed and not directly related to them.

Moving to VINAYAK

Vinayak was studying in standard 2nd – 3rd when I engaged intensively with him and his family. As detailed in Ch.3, he lived on the top floor of an independent house with his working mother, while his paternal grandparents stayed downstairs. His father was posted in a distant district and visited them only on weekends. When I first met Vinayak’s mother, she had just returned from a refresher training program from Delhi. She spoke about her exhausting work schedules and the stress that she was going through and her guilt of not being able to give time to her child because of her job. “That child is getting neglected,” she exclaimed with some anguish.

Vinayak left for school in the morning and his mother readied him up. He returned around noon-time, and his grandmother or grandfather would receive him. He mostly stayed with them for the afternoon. He sometimes took a nap, or watched TV, read a book or came upstairs to play video games. In the evening he had tuitions which lasted more than an hour. A private tutor was appointed for this and arrangements were made in the front-room of his grandparent’s house for this. Vinayak’s mother often instructed the maid to cook some snacks that her son might want to eat in the evening, which the maid prepared and left on the table of Vinayak’s home. Mostly, Vinayak would snack upstairs while playing video games. He followed his mother’s instructions almost word-to-word on serving his food and clearing the table afterwards. Vinayak often contracted a throat infection, and his mother preferred to stick to the doctor’s instruction on his diet. He also followed in line and avoided food that his mother did not want him to eat, like ice-creams, cold water from the refrigerator, etc. He also remembered to take his medicine, if any, on his own. His grandparents, though careful not to offer too much advice to Vinayak, were continuously watchful of his routine.

Of housework and parental concerns

Thus Vinayak had developed a line of caution on when to play outside, about when and what to eat, when to watch TV and to generally not disturb things that he was not allowed to. Once his mother returned home, she immediately checked on Vinayak to see if he wanted a change of dress or a wash-up. If he wanted to go out to the park, then they went out. Sometimes Vinayak wanted to buy things from the shop and then they both went out for that purpose. She also did a quick round of the house arranging things and having some snacks herself. Before dinner, she preferred to read the papers or a magazine and check on Vinayak's homework. But Vinayak mostly wanted to show her things he had made or share stories about the school or just play around with his mother.

Vinayak's mother mentioned to me that she and Vinayak liked to have their talk sessions in which she explains her son about the pros and cons of his routine, habits, and medications. She expressed her satisfaction that overall Vinayak understood the importance of following the instructions as she was hardly present in-person to look after him; while also maintaining that if he did not behave well in her absence, then it would be difficult for her to manage everything with constant worries about his health and habits at the back of her mind. From what I observed, Vinayak took care to do things that his mother had asked him to and not indulge in things that his mother had prohibited him except on video games and TV viewing. He sometimes opened the refrigerator to show me, pointing out various food items in it, "Mama will give me those when its time. Otherwise, I will get a throat infection, and I will fall sick, then I cannot go to school". But then, whenever I remarked to him that he was not allowed to play video games in the afternoon, he would unequivocally reply, "But there is nothing else to do. Mama will not get too angry if I play this ... She knows I am a good boy".

Vinayak's mother did not force him beyond a point, and mostly preferred talking things out unless Vinayak irritated her too much. Mostly, she was hard-pressed for time and she had to manage her communication well to be able to get Vinayak to do the required without getting into difficult negotiations. Vinayak's father who visited on the weekends spent meticulous time in checking Vinayak's studies. He too had a set pattern of interacting with Vinayak, where time was divided into study-time and then followed by

leisure in which they either went out or did something together as a family (many times including the grandparents). Vinayak's grandmother was also a woman of few words and mostly adhered to Vinayak's parents' style of interaction and conduct with Vinayak for the sake of consistency in the latter's life. His grandfather, though, was the only one who resorted to nagging or, if needed, scolding him. Vinayak took joy in freely answering back to his grandfather and even have mock fights with him.

On one occasion, Vinayak's grandfather, while talking about the struggle of his student days, compared his time with that of his young grandson:

I was a child when my father died. I was the eldest of all the children. I did not like working in the field; so hard, muddy, sunny and rough. I used to fall ill. So I used to run to school. I liked studying. But my mother did not like it and she had me fetched out of school and sent me to the field. We needed money to survive. She had no choice ... After primary school, I went to a nearby high school. But the school environment was not encouraging. The teacher was not good. My mother wanted me in the field. So I dropped out. I forgot studying and worked in the fields ... But those days you had 'student poaching'. Good high schools would take names of studious students from primary class, and go to their houses inviting students to join their schools. Seeing my primary marks, one of the best high school's had been searching for me. So one day they came to my house ... This changed my life. I am so grateful to them. I was not at home at that time. Somehow my mother got convinced. I started going to school and working at home at the same time ...

Today you look at these children. They have tuitions, computers, learning aids, stacks of books, smart class and still they need this help and that ... Today's children think differently. What will you study about him (referring to Vinayak)? He has a mind of his own. He will not listen to anything. He instantly answers back. He is increasingly becoming disobedient. That day I told him that he had watched TV for too long and he should spend some time going through his books. He said that he had already finished his work. I asked him how he will remember by studying just once; was he Ganesha? He replied that if it is possible to have one Ganesha, then he will become another and ran away upstairs. I did not know what to say. How to handle these children? In our days we would listen to elders, even for saying something good, we would think before talking in front of them. Today everything has changed.

Suggestively, and with some candour, Vinayak's mother also gave her analysis of his behaviour and her concerns:

He has started behaving self-centred. Being a single child he gets everyone's attention. Everyone is at his beck-and-call. At home, everything is at his disposal. He is not learning to share; not only things but also attention and space.

That day a little child visited and he was quite smart. Vinayak could not accept that. Vinayak started showing off what he knew and kept trumpeting other children's little flaws ... These days he gets so engrossed in what he is doing and forgets people around. When he does his homework, then he is in full focus, he will not talk. Then he has tuition, and after that he will not sit quietly. Either he is engrossed in TV or cartoons or keeps surfing on the net. He is cutting himself off. Whatever time I am at home, I want to spend with him. But he has no time ... This individualistic trend is going to derail him. We have given him too much freedom. We never pressurize him for marks. We let him be. But he is not taking it well. He is getting too used to his own way of life; what he wants and how he wants. He has started being insolent ... I wish he was more independent and responsible, at least take care of himself. But no, he is getting too pampered as all his demands get fulfilled. Now he is taking all these for granted.

Conceptions of responsibility and 'mischief'

Vinayak had a way of doing things out of his own mind and volition. Sometimes, he would call me repeatedly over the phone asking me to arrive at his house urgently, without his parents' knowledge. On some occasions, he went ahead and invited me for a family picnic or other outing when his parents were yet to decide on any plans. He often surfed various items on the internet and made a list of the things that he wanted. He even insisted on surfing for mobile phones online for his mother when she wanted to buy one. On a couple of occasions, he threw temper tantrums on the street creating an embarrassing situation for his grandmother. I remember one such occasion which really upset his mother. Vinayak had been waiting for his mother to take him to a specific shop to buy props for a magic show in school. He kept checking on the net again and again for the item names and its best prices. His mother took time out on the day for the shopping. Both mother and son got ready and Vinayak excitedly recited the list of things he wanted. Suddenly his mother remembered that she had forgotten to inform the tuition master to cancel that day's class. They were already out on the street. His grandmother suggested that they finish the class and then go to the shop. But that raised the risk of not making it to the shop in time. Vinayak's mother suggested going alone while Vinayak attended the tuition session. Vinayak resisted and started crying loudly attracting outsiders' attention. He held his mother tight and she could not move out of the place. His grandmother kept placating him, saying that he was a good boy and that he always understood the situation very well. But this did not change Vinayak's mind. At last, he went with his mother to the shop and not for the tuition.

Needless to say, Vinayak's mother seemed very unhappy about this. The very next day she spoke gloomily about sending him to a boarding school where he would learn to behave properly. Vinayak, listening to this, looked shocked and jumped onto his mother's lap and cajoling said, "Since when have you started thinking this ... You have never told me. But you always tell me that I am a good boy and that I always obey you. When did I trouble you?" Later on, I asked Vinayak about what made him to act obstinate, to which he nonchalantly replied:

I act wilful (*ziddi*) when I do not like what they say. Because anger arises inside ... But anger is not good. Have you not seen on TV how demons get angry and attack? It is bad ... When I am happy I never get angry. But when I am upset then I get angry. For small children, it is like that. But bigger children can control anger I think. They (elders) say we should not get angry and instead we should start thinking about good things when anger comes and control the anger ... But I cannot control anger. I can beat you also if I get angry, that's how my anger is. [I point out that it may hurt me.] Then we can give some first aid.

I will not like it if anyone beats me. I should not beat anyone or get angry. But it happens to me. Anger comes, what can I do? My younger cousin if she disobeys me, I will explain her and still if she does not listen, then I will tell her Mama. If still she does not listen, then I will beat her. [I point out that similarly his mother beats him because he does not listen to her] ... OK, I will not beat her. I should not beat her ... I will explain to her.

Clearly, Vinayak took no responsibility for his anger and tantrums. For him, it was part and parcel of being a child. According to him, unlike adults or grown-ups, children have not yet learned to fine-tune their behaviour. He also saw his bad manners as a reaction provoked primarily by elders who make him upset. He clearly focused more on his obedient and supportive actions like listening to his mother's instructions and waiting upon her. He completely believed in his grandmother and mother who often addressed him as 'a good boy' and 'an understanding child'. He was thus taken aback when his mother openly pronounced him as 'being naughty' and that he should be sent off to a hostel. He kept demanding his mother to explain why she wants to send him away when he is indeed a 'good boy'.

I directly asked Vinayak if he helped at home or shared work. He narrated to me about his little cousin and how he helps her in moving about, keeps a watch and helps her get

her toys. He also insisted that he always helps his mother, like (as he said) he had waited for one hour in front of the clothes shop as his mother shopped. When I asked whether there is anything more he could do, he was emphatic: “Little children cannot help much. They mostly need help. They have not learned everything. So they keep asking you and keep causing trouble. But actually, they do not know that they are causing trouble. They do it unknowingly ...”. Doubtless, as a class 2 child, Vinayak expressed his inability to be of much help at home and believed that he contributed much as he could.

The good and the bad

In Vinayak’s case, specifically and somewhat oddly, I encountered the dilemma of good and bad in a different context than what I usually chanced upon with the other children during fieldwork. In the absence of his parents, Vinayak had developed the habit of playing a rather aggressive video game involving a series of violent acts. It was the GTA (Ground Thief Automatic) videogame. One would do well to narrate the incident when he introduced the game to me.

More than once Vinayak pulled me to the computer to play the game and check the cheat codes that he had searched from the internet and downloaded. The cheat codes when installed allowed additional features to the game. He explained to me (to my utter astonishment) that I had to operate a thief which is the hero. In the game, a thief is out in the city and has to take a car and drive fast. So the thief has to punch people and steal the car. If the police come in the way, then he has to shoot the police; and if gang people come, then he has to run over them and leave them wounded. Even if he sees a firefighter or an ambulance, the thief has to hit them and make way. The thief has to do it in express speed, for otherwise he may get caught; in both cases I lose points as a player of the game. The thief cannot wait and think; he has to keep completing the task to get the highest score. Once I figured out the game, I protested to Vinayak saying that these were all crimes. He promptly replied that “it was a good thief”. I further asked him about how a person who hits ambulances and the firefighter van could be ‘good’? Vinayak laughed at my innocent query, urging that “these are not real, this is just a game. There it is written ‘Market’ but it is just an empty word (*Khali lekha ta*)”.

As the weeks moved, people on the internet kept posting new chit codes which could allow the game to have more activity options. Vinayak and his friends competed on discovering the chit codes. It was thought a very smart act to be able to find a chit code and use it. One day, Vinayak opened the game and showed me the new additions:

Look now this car (in which the thief is) is getting slow. I want that fire brigade to escape from the police behind me. [Suddenly there is shooting in the game]. The owner of the fire brigade has come and he is shooting at me. I have to shoot him. I need the fire brigade. The police are close. [I insist that it was highly wrong to shoot at the owner and that the thief must surrender.] No, I cannot surrender ... Never at all. I will lose the game. You want me to lose? ... [I ask if there can be a chit code that allows the thief to surrender.] ... No, for then the game will get over. But I think we can have a chit code where the police and people just handover things to the thief so that there are no fights ...

... This is not real. These are just animations. But in real life, if somebody shoots at you, then you have to shoot back to save your life. But I think I will get very scared if I see a real gun and I will not do anything. In real we may get truly killed ... If anyone dies, then they will never come back again. Everything will end. Is that good? In real, all gun and gang war is not good.

.. It is not my fault that I am playing this game. My cousin installed it. What can I do, it is just there and I have nothing else to do ... I play other games but this is interesting too.

Given that Vinayak was in standard 2nd – 3rd, his excitement with video games and the possibility of various actions within it felt fascinating. The thrill of driving different vehicles, fighting different people, overcoming the obstacles, each not only looked heroic but also gave a competitive high when he would discuss his performance with friends. Any kind of moral consideration would take a back seat during the game. This presented to me an interesting scenario to understand Vinayak's ideas of 'good and bad' and, in this light, his own self-evaluation as a 'good boy'. I understood that somewhere for Vinayak it was just a game without any of its harmful effects.

Vinayak's parents were unaware of the game and its features as he had started playing it a short while ago. Over the weeks, I explained to Vinayak that it was an inhuman game and sometimes even used by bad people to train children on how to become violent. Vinayak then suggested that we search for a better and more interesting game and play that instead, although (as he maintained) until the new game is found he wanted to play

GTA. I wondered how best to understand the situation. Just because the game was ‘not real’, Vinayak felt that it was not objectionable to do actions that could be classified as a crime or immoral. And, precisely because it was not real, so the harms caused were not ‘real’ at all and there was no question of Vinayak taking any moral responsibility about the matter. All that appeared ‘real’ to him in that game was to continue playing it without losing. He seemed to make a distinction that in the game the deaths were artificial and one could start the game again, whereas in real life, death represents irrevocable loss and hence not good. Vinayak even pointed out that in a ‘real’ situation he may not be able to take such steps as his own life would be in jeopardy. In the end, Vinayak argued that he played the game because he had nothing else interesting to do and that the game had been handed over to him by one of his elder cousins, implying that it would not have been given had it been anything harmful.

One summer afternoon when Vinayak and I were alone, I got a chance to see how he might opt to deal with real life disruption. We heard a loud cry from his house backyard. Vinayak, however, remained unmoved, and straightforwardly explained:

It is the *didi* (sister) who stays in the Outhouse. Her husband beats her ... That *didi* is not a good lady, she steals and uses bad words, she does not keep food at home and spends all money outside ... Once I had gone there and I saw him beating her ... We cannot go there now; he may beat us also. It is not in our hands to do anything ... maybe we could tell government because it controls everything ... But I am too young to go to the government. Actually, there is no need to do anything. After some time, they become absolutely normal and everything becomes OK.

Apparently, the act of domestic violence in the backyard was not unusual, and I could sense that his family already had a talk with Vinayak on how to perceive and react on such occasions. Vinayak believed that everything would become normal after some time (and probably that is how it might have been on previous occasions). He showed no anxiety or any intention of intervening or playing any role in calling for help, and remained rather unaffected by it all. In addition, like in the case of Mantu, even Vinayak was convinced that this was an adult’s prerogative and that a child of his age is not expected to take any responsibility for this. On the other hand, he showed much promptness in matters of his health routine and medication as he believed that it would

lead to sickness and losing school hours, which for him are real term loss and also that these were matters that a small child of his age can take some responsibility for.

Indeed, this understanding of ‘real loss’ again figures out in Vinayak’s discourse (as in Mantu’s) for deciding acts that are either harmful or harmless, and in that sense not permissible or acceptable to commit. In the game, it was not bad to shoot and steal as it was all artificial, and one could start a new game again; admittedly, there was no shame or guilt attached to it. But in real life, it is ‘bad’ as the loss (and even the shame) is in real terms, irrevocable and permanent. Furthermore, for Vinayak, in real life actually, a child was free from a sense of responsibility if it fell outside their age limit and ability to take up the role. This partially explains his apparent unaffected stance on the ‘violence’ in the game and at his backyard in a context where he actually identifies himself as a good and responsible person.

And lastly to LUV and KUSH

From what I had observed on a daily basis, the twins Luv and Kush did many chores around the home. They had no housemaid or help in their house, and everyone in the family had to share work; the very least, to be self-dependent in taking care of their own belongings. They kept their books and school stuff clean; they had to look after the book racks of the house, cleaned their father’s bike, helped in mending and repairing things that their mother asked them to; and, along with their sister, they tended the garden, accompanied their father for ration purchase and provisions, and sometimes did it themselves with repeated instructions from home. When their younger cousins stayed with them, they took charge of supervising their homework. Certainly, for me, the most attention-grabbing was the children feast that the brothers organised with their sister in the lead.

Participation in housework and parental concerns

Undoubtedly, their parents duly acknowledged that their children knew their duties. Once when I offered to help them in arranging their books and the racks, their father was explicit, “They have been doing it for years, they know exactly how to do, and you don’t worry”. Their mother, on one occasion, equally shared, “My children know when and

what to do, I don't have to remind them ... In that I have put them in a habit". As already recounted earlier in Ch.3, during my fieldwork, I came across an interesting phenomenon, the children's feast that Luv and Kush organised along with their elder sister. They were often joined by a few friends from the neighbourhood. It was not only a feast organised for the children, but also by the children, albeit helped and guided by elders when needed. The children prepared the list of invitees, the overall and per head budget, the menu, the shopping for the ingredients and types of equipment, each in some detail. The children also set up the tent, did all the lighting and arranged for the music and games. An invitation was sent over to their school friends and to children in the neighbourhood that the family was close to (including other interested members like me or other mothers who wanted to come along with the children). Let me describe one of the occasions that I attended with Luv and Kush in focus.

There were new lights on the small front yard. The car had been removed and the muddy floor swept clean. Plastic mats had been placed around. About 20-30 children had gathered. The younger ones were busy playing games like carrom board and chess; and, to the left boundary wall, the cooking was going on. One of the girl's mothers and another college girl were cooking on two makeshift *chullahs* (cooking hearth) built there. The smoke from the burnt wood was giving them a hard time in cooking, even as another of the girls from the neighbourhood who was in middle school was peeling some vegetable as one of her juniors stood watching. Kush's mother noticed that they may need more firewood; and, soon enough, Kush called forth a few more boys and headed in search of firewood. They were talking about going to the temple ground. Luv stayed back to attend to the other children, while his sister with another college girl was calculating the money that was left and the number of ice-cream or cold drinks that could be ordered. A music player had been placed on a chair, plugged into an extension cord. As the evening progressed, Kush kept changing the music as per people's requests. The elder girls and boys continuously moved in and out of the house at the beck and call of the cooks and providing for them. There were soon four women and two elder girls, who each took a turn in cooking and helped to lift the dishes. A few times, the younger girls joined in to stir the dish on the flame or sprinkle condiments. I stayed with the younger boys engaged with their games; the elder ones among the children were delegated

responsibilities to attend the younger kids and other guests, giving them water, keeping the wandering toddlers away from the street, going out to shops when needed and so on. The rest of the children were allowed to play games or chat animatedly.

Manifestly, Luv and Kush's parents encouraged and supported them in carrying out these activities. Their mother insisted that life should have some celebrations and the coming-together of people and that the real fun in life lies in handling such events. Their father also encouraged it, saying that these are great learning opportunities for the children. However, though their parents expressed confidence in the fact that their children had mastered many chores and did their share of work, they never showed any overt delight. They almost treated it as a normal everyday matter. Probably, therefore, Luv and Kush took their participation in the family work as habitual and nothing significant or agential. Rather, it was the larger family expectation that they saw as the major responsibility of their life. Being responsible as a 'son' (*Ghara ra pua*), for them, was more about being able to uphold family values, teachings and meeting the family and wider society's expectations. This in real terms translated into performing well in studies, respecting family proprieties and being morally upright.

Of responsibility and the idea of 'mischief'

When I broached Luv and Kush about their role and contribution at home, they both identified themselves as 'sons' of the family. They did not see any specific responsibility attached to their role as such. Luv would laugh and comment, "As children, we have no importance, never any important duty". He elaborated on his role in the following words across occasions:

Doing something good in which obtains the family's happiness ... It is not always possible to keep them happy. But in major decisions like studies, job and other areas of life, I will take my father's advice first ... If I don't like what they (parents) say, then I will wait and have a dialogue with them A child of my age can carry out a dialogue. After all, it is the child's own situation that the child is going through and experiencing. So the child can keep his own views. But still, if they don't agree with me, then I will obey them ... It is important to be a good child for the family. If you are bad, then it is dangerous for the family. Family people trust you. If you go ahead on your own wish and perform something wrong then their faith will break. This will 'hurt' (*badhiba*) them for some days. After some days they may 'forget the hurt' (*Kastha bhulijibe*). But

will they ‘trust’ (*Biswas*) you again as before? Then how will you live happily with them in such conditions?

We cannot take serious responsibilities now. For that, we have to grow up, become independent and get a job. Like *Baba* (father). Only then we can shoulder the duties of life. Only studying and getting a degree is not taking responsibility. Studying is not the same as knowledge. One of *Baba*’s friends is not highly educated, but he is brilliant like Aryabhatta (the famous early Indian astronomer). He has taught many children and his students are in the topmost colleges and jobs. One child can do graduation and do a normal job. Another child can do intermediate, and yet do something excellent because he has knowledge.

Kush also shared a similar understanding; albeit in his cryptic words, “Children have a sense of responsibility, but no specific responsibilities. Responsible jobs are for elders. Children are here to learn”. He went on to explain his situation thus:

As a son ... follow routine. No work ... doing all those little errands, lending a helping hand like assisting *Baba* in operating mobile, cannot be called responsibilities. These are not assigned or important (*jaruri*) works that we must do daily. These are very small things. Our responsibility is ‘*shikhya*’ (teachings). Whatever our parents have taught us, we must follow ... Like they teach us to respect elders and to do good works. They call it *sanskara* ... Like we were told to start the day with a prayer and follow a proper routine. For some days we did. But then we became lazy. Then slowly our works got delayed and it was not possible to maintain a routine. Everything got messed up. So we got back to ourselves. We realized why it is important ...

Everything has an effect (*prabhava*). Suppose you say a harsh word, then it might hurt others. If you are a correct (good) person (*Thik Manisa*) then you will realise this has happened. If you did not have correct guidance, then you may not realise (the mistake). There is an innocence of mind (*Mana*). That is, we have a ‘sense of responsibility’ (*Daitwa bodha*) for each other. That is called mutual responsibility. So for us, we will obey our parents ...

If a child is properly guided, then he can see the consequences of their actions.

It is important to note here that both Luv and Kush, who shared many household chores regularly and were self-motivated in doing so, did not perceive it as real work or any kind of help at all. Rather, both the boys stressed on their responsibility to be obedient and not indulge in any such activity that might not be taken well by their family.

Clearly, for Luv, his responsibilities lay in doing such things that would keep his family happy and harmonious. Accordingly, he saw his role as a trustworthy son of the house. He rejected the view that helping in daily chores and finishing his daily tasks like studying are responsibilities; they were too insignificant to count as such. Rather, for him, 'responsibilities' referred to such duties which their father and mother would take charge of independently on their own, and which could not be substituted by others. Further, for Luv, responsibility did not only lie in studying or working, but in attempting to achieve a higher excellence or goal. To be sure, Kush also reiterated that the work they did at home could not be termed as responsibilities; for (as he maintained) those were not duties entrusted to an individual as a kind of independent primary occupation free from all supervision by parents or elders. Indeed, for Kush, as children, all the tasks they did were supplementary or secondary; and moreover, as a son, his role was to internalise the family values which he identified as '*shikhya*' (teachings) or '*sanskara*' (the family heritage/value systems). Kush, evidently, took the understanding of his role and responsibility to a deeper level, where he sees the duty of a child is to be respectful of other's sentiments and presence and also to be sensitive towards the consequences of one's own action.

With reference to their conceptions of 'mischief', both the boys tended to stress on the difficulty that a child faces in deciding between the good and bad, as indeed the importance of parent's guidance and caution in making a child to realise their mistakes and remain in the correct path. Kush, accordingly, shared how in his view children tended to get into 'wrong deeds':

Somewhere it depends on the child's mind. Sometimes elders tell us good things. But the child's mind reacts in a certain way ... Even if parents tell, will the child follow? Once you realize something is wrong, then even if your mind gets attracted you will not do it. How can you do something that you have labelled as wrong yourself? ... But sometimes children do serious bad things ... Like they will not tell parents and go to unknown places, they will tell lies, they will pass comments and parents do not come to know. The child starts enjoying it. They get some kind of satisfaction. Some kind of influence of the friend circle is also involved.

Also, it depends on the family. In time no one tells the child that what he is doing is wrong or if parents blindly support their child or if they beat him and don't explain properly. Then children keep doing wrong things ... It is difficult to then

bring the child back on the right track ... There is 'a trust element' (*biswas*) that works. You may not understand at that time what your parents are saying is for your benefit. At that moment trust works.

Undoubtedly, Luv also here stressed the role of guidance that a child is given:

What is wrong if parents shout at you? What is the big deal! If parents will not scold, then who should? The child should not get affected (negatively). This depends on the child's sense of mind or attitude (*mana ra katha*). Even sometimes we get scolded when we have done no fault. It happens. You can understand that, can't you (*Katha ta kan bujhi parucha na*)?

Both the brothers clearly laid a great onus on the parents in helping the child to understand the difference between good and bad and in realising one's mistake. Though they stressed on a child's own realisation and reactions, they also emphasized the influence that parents can have on a child's thought processes and orientations.

On the good and the bad

As should be evident, a lot of emphasis is being put on being good and taking to the right path by both the brothers. One was always intrigued about the specific attributes that both the boys seemed to be attaching to the good and the bad. Kush reflects, quintessentially the child-philosopher:

Everything has merit and demerit. Whatever you do will affect you. Stealing, murder ... Some will think that this is malevolent (*amangala*) for others. Then you will not do it. But others may not think about it ... They may not realise. Realisation is important. You must think about what is good and what is bad.

What looks right to you may not look right to the child. Everything cannot be understood from one person's view. Like in my class, our teacher will explain to us a task and then encourage us to give it a try. Then we understand that we had not thought like that, we can do it. Everybody is thinking differently at a point. So the child may not see it ... But parents should tell children what is wrong. Because the child does not understand now, and in the future, the child will be in danger. Like if he does not study now and spoils (*nasta*) his career, then it will be too late. Parents have to be very alert.

We can see that Kush is emphasising the child's own reflection and realisation in developing a kind of moral self. However, he also puts the onus on good parenting for the development of the appropriate reflective faculty in the child in the first place. If the parents fail in this, as he is evidently holding, then the child is prone to developing bad

habits. Luv, the elder twin, seems to be supporting this reasoning when he observes: “Good and bad depend on the situation. Immediately, it is difficult to decide especially for a child. Timely guidance and caution by parents are necessary and play a primary role in keeping a child on the right path”.

Quite like the other children mentioned in the foregoing pages, the ‘consequences of one’s action’ found expression in Luv and Kush’s discourse as well. Both were emphasizing that, if the consequences of our actions are harmful, then such acts should always be avoided and even is non-permissible. They too, like the other children, admitted the difficulty that a child faces in deciding what is good or bad, which thereby constantly necessitated parental guidance. Significantly, however, even more than any other of the children engaged with, these two boys acknowledged the role of a child’s own reflective capacities, like self-realisation, sensitivity, compassion and trust, for deciding between good deeds and bad ones. Certainly, the fact that the twins were older than the other children covered – both being in the 10th standard – had something to do with this ‘mature’ form of reasoning. Expectedly, the moral sentiment of ‘a small child not capable of doing heavy chores’ was missing in both the boys’ conversations. Indeed, in the case of deviance and defects, the twins were quick to highlight the possibility of neglect on the part of elders, especially parents, in guiding the children in developing the right perspective, instead of holding the children entirely accountable for the mistakes or blemishes of character.

Across the Folds of Narration: A Further Discussion

Evidently, in my field setting, it is very clear that irrespective of whether the children took part in doing housework or not, they neither counted it as an important contribution nor did they view it as a part of their role expectations at home. For the children, their role as a son or daughter lay more in shouldering higher responsibilities and a deeper sense of empathy with their parental hopes and fears. Adhering to family values, upholding family integrity and sentiments, fulfilling parents’ wishes, and achieving higher excellence, each of these figured as some of the important role responsibilities that the children identified with. Indeed, my contention here is that this order of finding

challenges the ‘corporeality participation’ discourse alluded at the beginning of this chapter which claims that direct in-person participation in housework is necessary for the development of a child’s moral self. In fact, in the context of my fieldwork, the lack of ‘participation’ in household work may not be seen as an absence of development of a moral self in children; rather, it’s dimensions ran deeper at the level of values, sentiments and the larger understanding of the family situation.

Moreover, I feel that this orientation of children’s sense of responsibility, somewhere encouraged by parents as well, is reflective of a change. Undoubtedly, there has been a shift in the definition of ‘sense of responsibility’ for the children whom I studied, as compared to the expectations that their parents and grandparents faced. For example, Vinayak’s grandfather was expected to leave school and work in the field to earn for the home. Vinayak’s grandmother had also shared with me that education and employment were seen as an excuse to shirk the laborious demanding chores of a joint family household by elders in those days. Sania’s mother and Mantu’s mother, besides, had deep regrets that they had to give up their education to take up household responsibilities. Currently, however, the parents were much more concerned about children’s exam scores, performances in school activities and their steady advancement towards their career goals. This is most prominently reflected in Sania and Mantu’s parental attitudes, who although unhappy about their children’s lack of interest in household work, paid more attention to the children’s performances in studies and not in housework. This sometimes created a situation of ‘role stress’ for the child who had to constantly face opposing expectations from their grandparents who wanted them to be more active and involved in housework and from their parents who wanted them to focus on their studies.

A seemingly minor point may be added here. Even though housework has been seen in dichotomous terms especially in opposition to school work, in reality, it might not be so. In fact, I found that the ‘participation’ of children in household work had no predictable relation with their academic interests and performances. Thus, among the children who were high-scorers and ‘toppers’, there were those who were quite active in their household works and other activities around the home and also those who did not take

any interest in same. There were also children who did not take part in household chores and had a poor academic record in school.

In looking at children's moral self, accordingly, I encountered the phenomenon of recurring 'mischiefs' by children and various measures taken by parents in reaction to it. Needless to say, in the beginning, I had assumed that mistakes, mischief and disobedience must make for a reflective avenue for children to learn and rectify themselves (even that 'mischief' necessarily contended with morality). Hence I had presumed that the events around 'mischief' would be highly emotionally charged moments for children and parents and accordingly important for me to cover. However, one had to soon come to terms with the fact that the children had a rather settling thought process of drawing lines around permissible and non-permissible 'mischief', which kept them in a way guilt-free in moving within the range of permissible mischief. This demarcation of 'permissible' and 'non-permissible' was being drawn by the children on the basis of their notions of 'real loss' (*khyati*) and 'feelings' (*bhavana*). For instance, in the case of Mantu, stealing food, long hours of video games, stating small lies etc. were permissible as they did not really harm anyone (even as stealing money from the bank was highly reprehensible as it brought loss and trouble for people who had put money in the bank). For Vinayak too, committing violence in the video game was not harmful as it did not bring any real loss of life or pain to anyone in particular.

In addition, the children further professed what Padma Sarangapani has elsewhere rendered as "being 'children-who-are-growing-up'" (Sarangapani 2003a: 120). Amidst this avowal, the children actively identified, adapted and used the fact of being 'small child' (*chotta pilla*) who are neither expected nor capable of knowing the best from worse or good from the bad. Such an attribution of 'innocence' to a small child's 'mischief' is somewhat remarkable. Vinayak, for one, used this argument in explaining that being a 'small child' he cannot be expected to control his anger, while elder people are more adept at handling their temper. The children claimed that they mostly committed mistakes because they were not aware of doing so, and that the period of 'childhood' was a period to learn and adapt. Sania thus insisted that 'mischiefs' were committed more by 'small children' as they are not aware of it, but as children grow up and understand the

issues they do not commit the same. In enumerating her instance, she gave the example of her falling down the stairs as a toddler for which she had to get stitches because she did not know how to climb downstairs.

This identification of ‘small child’ was also abundantly used by the children for explaining their lack of interest about taking part in household chores. Sania who was rather active in her school work cited her stage of life as too early to master housework and acquire self-reliance. Even more emphatically, this subsumption of a ‘small child’ who is not expected to know the difference between good from bad, and one who is exempted from taking on heavy responsibilities, also allowed the children to play around the lines drawn between a good child and a bad child with a clearer conscience.

Evidently, in the case of Luv and Kush who were in their high school, the discourse of ‘small child’ was not as readily available as in the case of the other younger children that I encountered. All the same, Luv and Kush delimited their role and responsibilities with the identity of ‘son of the house’ (*Ghara ra pua*) and ‘children of the house’ (*Ghara ra pilla*) who were not expected to take up independent significant duties for the family. Interestingly, Luv and Kush, while strongly acknowledging the child’s self-reflective abilities and realisations in making good and bad choices, squarely placed the credit of development of such reflective abilities and sensitivities in parent’s guidance and control, thereby absolving the onus of deviance on the child. This somewhere allowed children to see themselves as inevitably ‘good’ and even perfectible creatures. Their own mistakes, failings and other whinges did not necessarily affect this self-image. They found it hard to comprehend their actions as reprehensible, given that they did not attribute their intention of doing anything bad behind such conduct. They necessarily saw themselves as a kind of believer of the good, who wanted to see and do what is good and avoid the bad. Thus Mantu and Sania undoubtedly counted themselves and their friend groups as ‘good children’ (*Bhalla pilla*) group which stood in contrast to ‘bad children’ (*Kharap pilla*). Again, it is not that the children were uncritical about their viewpoints. But palpably the discourse of ‘small child’ and ‘real loss’ seemed to give them a kind of justification to clear their conscience of any guilt or responsibility for their misconduct.

Significantly, yet, this did not stop the children from having a categorisation of good and bad. They definitely had a schema of qualifications for identifying a phenomenon as good and bad. Indeed, this formed the basis of their understanding of ‘real loss’ and ‘goodness of feeling or intention’ (*bhav*). Accordingly, such acts that resulted in real and irrevocable hurt or harm were necessarily bad. Thus those children who indulged in such activities which involved bringing pain or trouble to family and friends were necessarily bad. This included such acts as hiding the truth from parents, bringing harm, hurting one’s own body and not helping friends in times of need. Furthermore, the notions of ‘real loss’ and ‘well-being’ as found in the children’s conversations were not merely limited to the immediate self and family context; it also reached out to include the larger society. This is reflected in how Sania was anxious about the conditions of the destitute and impoverished, as also Mantu’s invocation of Mahatma Gandhi and his work. ‘Loss’ in this sense referred to something both material and immaterial – whether in terms of a loss of money, family harmony, family values, individual development, society and earth as a whole. The understanding of ‘goodness of feeling or intention’ could be elaborated as the goodness of mind, benevolence, honesty, and right intentions. For Sania, clearly, the girls in her class who lied, found fault in others and were jealous of others were bad. She also believed in other’s blessings (*duaieyn*), and insisted on the need of having pure/good intentions behind every action. Similarly, in Mantu’s depiction of God and prayers, there was a stress on the purity of heart and feeling. Luv too confirmed his belief in the strength of faith and feelings of true heart while talking about God and *bhakti* (devotion); whereas Kush, who pointed out such actions as lying and misinterpreting as bad, did not however associate them with deliberate bad intentions, but rather with a ‘state of mind’ that needed attention and rectification.

As should be discernible in the descriptions foregrounded in this chapter, there is an inherent ‘moralism’ in the understandings being articulated by the children about responsibility and participation within the home. Lest this moralism seem somewhat contrived and forced, we may do well to heed the following striking observation (albeit delivered in a different context): “The mind of the moralist is located in the heart, which is, paradoxically, a cognitive organ, and it is through the heart that we come to know

moral truth(s). That is our augury” (Shweder and Haidt 1993: 364). I take it that my children informants were augmenting ‘moral truth(s)’ through their heart. We move now to the last layer of our narration traversing the moral sentimental field of children as they enact their lives within the home.

Chapter 7



Of Pride and Glory: Further Evaluations of Self and Family Worth

Dharmapada struck awe in whosoever heard his story. As children, including within my household and kin network, one heard it quite often in the Odia context. The story went a thousand years back:

Konarka temple had been commissioned; it was to be built in the sea where the river Chandrabhaga (now dry) met the sea. It was to be built in the shape of a chariot moving on the water towards the land. Idols were to be placed following the movement of the sun depicting the *prahar* (time of the day). If all of these were not indomitable tasks, then the temple builders planned to have two idols hanging in the air! In the *Garbhagraha* (sanctum sanctorum) the main idol of the Sun god was to be placed in *padmashana* (a particular style of cross-legged sitting posture). And over his lap, two alloy made idols, of one feet height each, were to be placed hanging in the air. This feat was to be achieved by placing huge magnets at accurate angles in the garden whose combined force would support the floating idols. One of the magnets was to be placed on the top of the *garbhagraha* as *dadhinauti* (topmost part of the temple shrine). Twelve thousand chosen Maharanas (the craftsmen and artisanal group) laboured for twelve years to finish the temple. The climax gravitates as the temple nears completion. The magnet on the top failed their calculations despite countless attempts. People in the kingdom were disappointed. The kingdom took great pride in its craftsmanship and arts. The entire kingdom had come together to bear the expenses of the grand monument. The King who had great trust in the calibre of his Maharanas saw it as a sign of complacency. To whip up the craftsmen, the king declared that, if the magnet was not placed soon, he would have them beheaded. Panic struck the Maharanas and their families.

The head of the Maharanas was Bishu Maharana. Back home, his infant son had grown up to become a young boy of 12 years. He had by now mastered the art of craftsmanship; learning it from the older generations left behind in the village. His name was Dharmapada. Dharmapada nagged his mother to allow him to go and help his father. Unable to contain him, his mother granted permission. Dharmapada gathered his tools and the black berries from their backyard for his father and set off to Konarka. He reached the site, met his father, gave his introduction and showed the black berries. Bishu Maharana recognised his son and was overjoyed to receive him. There at night, Dharmapada learned about the grave predicament the Maharanas were facing. He requested to intervene and sat down to develop the geometrical calculations required to successfully place the

magnet. The Maharanas executed accordingly, and this time the magnet fitted. The entire kingdom was jubilant. However, as the day passed, a new fear haunted the Maharanas. If a child could do the calculations, how come they could not? They were afraid that the king would think of them as tricksters who were delaying the work for the greed of monthly royal allowances. They voiced their distress in front of Bishu Maharana apprehending that the king would have their heads chopped off. Dharmapada saw new trouble that his presence had brought to the craftsmen and his father. Without hesitation, he climbed to the top of the temple and plunged into the waves of the sea. Dharmapada gave up his life intending to save the lives of twelve thousand Maharanas; without realizing that his death rendered the temple redundant because a place polluted with death is not fit for *Diyan Pooja* (idol worship). The temple had to be abandoned. The news struck like lightning throughout the Kingdom. The king was struck with sorrow, for he never meant to harm his craftsmen in the first place. Rather he would have felicitated the boy as a jewel of the kingdom.

[As narrated by the guide at Konarka temple and reiterated by the priest of Surya shrine at Jagannath Puri temple where the original Konarka Lord Surya idol has been placed now.]

This legend tells us about a plot in which the story of a grand state affair, a kingdom's pride and aspiration, and a child's action are closely woven together. Such a dramatic scenario of a heroic child and an exceptional state situation is most unlikely to appear today. Does this story have any resonance with the children I was meeting in the context of my work? Sitting in the drawing-room of a 21st century urban neighbourhood, watching children clamber down from the school buses, uncomfortably heaving their oversized school bags, vividly perspiring and still stopping to wave a zealous goodbye to the other bus mates, I wondered what aspirations do these children have of their future? I had not come across a single child, who did not have some or the other ideas about what he or she wanted to become when he/she 'grows up' (*bada hele*). I watched the children disappear into their houses to escape from the heavy summer heat. Inside the walls, I know, it was time for a lazy and sumptuous lunch, some video games, a deep siesta and an evening devoted mostly to tuition classes or some extra-curricular training. One of the common questions that the children in this place were asked by elders was, "What do you want to become when you grow up?" (*Bada hele kana habu?*). Even as a toddler, the child would be introduced to this question, however lightly it might be taken though. What did this question signify and what did it mean for children? It is interesting to trace

the link that children's answers to such questions on their future aspirations have with the child's understanding and evaluation of self and family worth.

In this chapter, I would like to get at the meanings that such expressions like 'well-settled', 'well-established' and 'successful' held for the children. These were common expressions that children came across in my field context. However, it is important to note that this question is not exclusively futuristic in its dimensions; rather, it is dependent on the child's current assessment of self-respect and family standing. I point out to three interrelated factors that affect the child's understanding of self and family worth. That is to say, the children's vision of 'what they want to become' in the future was based on their evaluation of their past family backgrounds, current family situation in general and their own performances in particular. Intimations of past family background could be found in such parleys and tales that ran in the family across generations and which the elder generations fondly narrated to their children (and whosoever was interested to listen). These stories involved a recollection of either an outstanding member with remarkable achievements in particular or of general family honour and standing of bygone days. Such stories were recounted with a resilient pride and nostalgia emphasising on the personal connect and identification with the past glory of the family. The current family situation included the success and 'adventure' (*sic*) stories of the current and emerging generation of the family. Here the parameters of success were mostly seen along the lines of contemporary standards of educational and occupational accomplishments. Lastly, the child's own performance covered the arena of their academic performance and particular sense of self-respect. It is important to note that the criteria of according merit and worth in all these three aspects, as we will see, involved multiple considerations like individual calibre, worldly achievements (*Byabahariaka*) and higher virtues.

Exploring this aspect of children's family life helps me to cover the last and third vertex in the tripartite framework of 'moral sentiments' that I had laid out in Ch.4. As we saw, the first vertex in the division talked of family feelings (*paribara mana*) best described as a dynamic and organic whole with a collective feeling of its own, which was experienced by the children as natural and ultimate and which was also accommodative

of diverse individual moods and feelings. This had formed the basis of Ch.5, wherein we had looked elaborately at a few situations of assertion and negotiations to develop an understanding of the dynamics of this shared nature of family feelings. In the second vertex, which formed the basis of Ch.6, we addressed the dimensions of a deep sense of moral responsibility that the children felt towards their families. For the children, their responsibility lay in upholding of the family values (the consciousness of good and bad) in their day-to-day conduct and not so much in their contribution to chores and tasks as insisted by their parents and grandparents.

As we had detailed it through Ch.6, one also looked at the idea of ‘mischief’ and disobedience that the children thought as permissible and such conduct that they considered non-permissible, so as to understand the boundaries of the moral consciousness that children had developed vis-à-vis their family expectations. In the third and final vertex, which forms the basis of our present chapter, I propose to look at the accompanying sentiments of glory, pride, humiliation and embarrassment with which the children went about their world at home. The very experience and understanding of these sentiments are necessarily associated with the assessments of self-worth and family standing that the children professed in their daily life. These assessments are reflected when children speak of their future aspirations or express awe and appreciation for their family achievements and in their parleys about their performance ordeals in school and examinations.

Again, for the order of our description, I have selected four families covering six children. The first family is, of course, of the twins Luv and Kush. Their family is very marked by a dominance of past legacies and an appreciation for higher virtues as part of their assessment of worth. The family also had many examples of higher achievements in their current generation. As already mentioned, both the boys were studying in the 9th standard when I initially started engaging with them. The second family is that of Samiksha and Aksh. This family manifestly had no trace of a past legacy, while emphatically its day-to-day life was marked by celebrations of the children’s performances and rewards in the present. Their sense of family standing was fed by the future potential of their children to settle well and truly in life. Samiksha was in standard

8th and Aksh in standard 4th when I got on to interacting with them. The third family is that of Sania, which seemed to proffer a thin glimpse of past legacy as kept alive by her grandmother, but not so much identified with by the other family members. Moreover, bitter sibling rivalry on her father's side had ruptured the feeling of common sharing and fellow-feeling between current generations of the family. Thus all instances of achievements in the current generation remained distant and unconnected, and even at times brewed feelings of resentment. In such a scenario, Sania's consistent performance as a 'topper' in her class and a focused goal in life held the family together in the current time, each deriving assurance from the hope of a better future. Sania, as already mentioned, was studying in 7th standard when I reached out to her and the family. As we know, she has a toddler sister called Sara, who had started playschool at that time.

The fourth family is that of Vinayak, who (as we inferred) had a mixed background when it came to family legacies. On his paternal side, his family was highly well established, while on his maternal side the family had a modest beginning, though increasingly doing well over time. His family members exercised a restraint in talking about one another's achievements. Thus though Vinayak was surrounded by people with high achievements, he did not assign much value to success; rather, he took it for granted most of the time. Vinayak had no doubts about his own future as a scientist. Vinayak, as already introduced, was an affable, hyperactive child who loved to watch TV shows, play video games, carry out experiments and was much less focused on his school studies. Both of his parents had full-time jobs and prioritised making Vinayak self-reliant, active and well-provided. The son hardly felt the pressure of exams and marks, which was limited to his paternal grandfather's instructions and concerns. Vinayak was in the 2nd standard when we started engaging with him. His parents were watchful of his development, but chose to be more patient waiting for Vinayak to find his own career and develop his own studying habits.

For the order of our narration – and following in the style of the preceding two chapters – we bring together extended pieces of data, clustering them together for making a case about each family separately. By way of a fuller reiteration, underlying the clustering for each family and holding together the orders of narration is the following four anchors:

(a) the child's attitude to performance, image-making as a student and future aspirations; (b) family past legacies and/or contemporary family achievements; (c) the nature of common ownership of a sense of merit; and (d) the child's valuation of self-respect and family standing. These four anchors have not been detailed as such in the sequence of each narration primarily for stylistic reasons; and note also that in one of the families where the orientation towards performance was strikingly different for both the children, each child has been separately described while covering the family case.

After covering the ground of the four family cases, I devote a portion for the analysis attempting in particular to construct a fuller picture of how children tend to evaluate their self-worth and family standing in making an appraisal of a 'good future'.

The Grounds of LUV and KUSH

What did Luv and Kush aspire for? What did success mean to them? Their elder sister was studying civil engineering in a private deemed university, but this did not seem to configure their sense of the future. Overall, yet, Luv and Kush knew that they had to score well, get into a good college, and find a good job. But exactly what could be the jobs, which would be their preferred college and what they precisely wanted to study were questions that they had left to time and dependent on their school passing-out marks and their parents' advice. Kush was, however, sure that he wanted to do something in the sciences as he was more comfortable with mathematics; Luv was more inclined to do the arts and humanities as he was not confident about maths and was more into reading books and novels. Their family never made a comparison between the preferences and performances of the two boys. Both of them scored in the range of 70-90 % of marks in their exams. They had a close group of friends from their school and neighbourhood, and most of these friends were high scorers or toppers. They all maintained a friendly competition between themselves.

On a daily basis, the twins followed a basic routine for their day's work. Given that they had day school, their study hours at home started quite early in the morning. The front room's wide sofa set and centre table served as their regular study place in their house.

A couple of strong racks and the shelves in the wall served as their nook for storing books. The twins did combined studies, discussing their lessons, sharing notes and solving sums for one another. Guests, if any, were entertained in the adjacent living room which also had the TV set. In the evening, the boys went for tuitions nearby, riding on their bicycles, many a time accompanied by their friends each headed for separate tuitions in the same direction. When back home, they had a leisurely dinner with their family, chatting and watching TV at the same time. Following this, they spent some more time finishing their homework before going to bed. Both their parents emphasised on their following the routine and being up-to-date with their studies. Their parents had a satisfaction that both their children scored according to their standard and labour. Their father was candid enough to once comment, “They are not geniuses, but they have intelligence (*buddhi*)”, thereby showing his acceptance of his children’s above average performance standards at school. The same was reflected in the attitude of the children. Luv once lucidly noted: “Can everyone become a topper? Few people have it in them. When you talk to them, you can make out. They are totally focused. They write to the point, as if they know the exact answer. We are little less than that”.

In an everyday context, predictably, Luv and Kush were more occupied by the immediate concerns of completing their homework, finishing their syllabus, and performing well in various school tests than any future dreams of making it big in life. Indeed, for the twins, being studious and disciplined was important not only for performing well in the school examinations, but also as an ideal form of conduct in itself. I pressed Luv and Kush to help me understand about why it was so important to excel in studies and perform well in exams? I insisted with them about why it was not enough to be just good without having to compete? Kush was all explanation and more:

No, it is very important. Only when you work hard for something, then will you come to know if you are good at it or not. If you are not doing anything how will you come to know? At least that is how the world sees it. Like if a child gets into IIT [Indian Institute of Technology, India’s most prestigious institution for engineering education], then you come to know if the child is in the right path or not. It means the child must have some good habits, orientations, and the ability to work hard. Your performances are indicators of your habits. That is how people think here, in our society. Have you not heard of ‘image’? If you are doing well in exams, admissions, promotions, then you develop an image. Once you have a good image, then all will encourage you more. They will talk about

you outside, praising you. But once your ‘image’ gets spoilt, then that spreads. Then people start talking in a different light about you. Then the child will get affected (by the talks). The child will break down ... ‘Broken-child’. [I interrupt: *What about the pressure the child experiences? It’s not easy to excel always, isn’t it?*] Yes, sometimes children collapse under the pressure to perform well. They are also ‘broken-children’. Have you not heard of the (child) suicide in the other lane? But this is how it is in India. You have to perform. You know in America, they will sit down and think about what happened. Why the child behaved like this? Why did the child act wrong? But here it is different. I guess it is about ‘mentality’. [Whose *mentality*? I interject.] Mentality means, in our school, on one side, it is all about marks, competition; it is a kind of greed (*gote prakar lobha*). Whether you understand or not, you just mug up and write in the exam. On the other side, some will say that it is about ‘conceptual understanding’, to be thorough in the topics. It is more about how to think, apply and relate it to the real world and how to see the entire life situation. So these are two kinds of mentalities.

I could well understand the ‘difference’ of context that Kush was pointing out to. Luv and Kush’s father was very particular that the children ‘well understood’ their school subjects. For example, when the boys were studying the World Wars, their father encouraged them to narrate whatever they had read as a story giving them additional information along the way. He insisted that his boys should study to ‘acquire knowledge’ and not just to score marks. Luv and Kush were thus sent to individual tuitions, and not to any coaching centre. Their father reasoned that the coaching centres stressed on cracking entrance exams, and not so much on conceptual understanding of the subject; also that coaching centres promoted unhealthy competition. Luv and Kush wholly endorsed this outlook, which is reflected in their evaluation of their Sanskrit tuition:

In our 8th standard, Baba (father) said that we should go for individual tuitions, and so we went. But for Sanskrit, Baba asked us if we wanted to go for individual tuitions or group mode? We knew this one Sir in our colony. He was once a professor at the university, but left his job to promote the Sanskrit language. Because of his effort, Sanskrit was introduced in Odia medium schools. He had written books and spoke in fluent Sanskrit. His students were in the book writing committees. So we went to him, and we learnt a lot from him. He gave us his books to read. We both started speaking in fluent Sanskrit. But he could not finish our syllabus.

Luv and Kush studied in one of the well-known private Odia medium schools. This school stressed discipline, modesty, respect for elders and self-initiative. It had several students’ committees that looked after various arrangements all over the campus

including the playground, sports room, principal's office and staff room, assembly and recess duties and so on. Children were encouraged to be dutiful and god-fearing; and the school took great pride in bringing up children with good conduct. As one of Luv and Kush's neighbours' once commented, "They are students from that school. You will not find a single bad habit in them".

'Image', which here broadly refers to the impression that people had about them, mattered immensely to the children. Interestingly, Luv, the other twin, had used the word 'image' in a different but relatable context. One day, when their mother was talking to me about their sons' temperaments, she described Luv as more impulsive and Kush as a more patient and introverted child. Listening to this, Luv charmingly teased that "Kush rarely got angry but when he did, then everyone had to run for their lives". As a counter riposte, Kush asked Luv to narrate the story where the latter had slapped a girl in front of the entire class. Hesitantly, Luv narrated:

First, we were in the same section. But then, based on exam marks, they put students in different sections. So he (Kush) went to another section. There I had many of my friends. They all knew me. But some other children tried to show-off, like proclaiming themselves as 'high rankers'. Ma (mother) always packed our food in one tiffin box. At home also we eat from the same plate; and so she said that in school to we will get one tiffin box. He (Kush) keeps it in his bag. In recess time, I go to his section and we eat together. But they had this class monitor who was very bossy. So she started questioning about why other section boys are coming inside the class during tiffin-break. Our teachers knew and they had permitted me, and so I did not speak to the girl. She tried to stop me from entering the class, but I kept quiet. One day, it was crowded and after eating I was about to go back to my classroom. Suddenly, at the door, she came and started tapping at my shoulder in front of everyone. I was totally confused. Was that proper manners? She started questioning me, not letting me go as if I was a convict. Everyone in the classroom and corridor fell silent looking at us. My reputation was at stake. It appeared as if I had done something wrong. I just slapped her.

Kush chipped in to give his version of the incident as an audience:

I was packing the tiffin box and did not realise what was going on. When I turned, I saw his face full of anger. He slapped the girl and left without looking at me. I did not go after him. The teachers intervened and brought both of them to an understanding. The girl was crying so hard. But everyone knows that he (Luv) is not a person who makes trouble. Then they both were made to apologise to one another. Now they both are normal.

‘Image’, for both Luv and Kush, had multiple connotations. It was not just about getting a good grade and a good job, but building themselves as substantial, cultured and good persons. There was also certain greatness attached to the pursuance of a higher cause through one’s acquired knowledge beyond immediate career success. In fact, both the children’s aspiration and the family’s inspiration resonated this and affected their assessment of their self and family standing.

But having said this, I would like to point out that in an assessment of their worth, the children did not confine themselves to their individual merits and pursuance of virtues. Rather, the umbilical cord of ‘pride and glory’ (*Garba o jasha*) remained attached to their past family legacies and their contemporary family members’ achievements. These reinforced the individual self-assessment and, as we will see in the case of this family, complemented it as well. Luv and Kush had strong family legacies; both their parents belonged to well-established families. They had huge land-holdings, family houses and other properties like temples, ponds etc. in their natal village. On both sides, their parents had many siblings and all their families were closely bonded with each other. The warmth and enthusiasm with which Luv, Kush and their parents spoke of their relatives and their past legacies revealed a common ownership and rejoicing of family member’s success and credibility. Engagingly, it was while charting their kinship chart that Luv and Kush urged their mother to tell me about her paternal family. This is how I learnt about her elder brother and other members of her family:

He (elder brother) was very different from the others, even as a child. He had a huge collection of books; a gold medallist all his life. The day he passed his engineering, he had a job of a lecturer in his hand. But he did not join it. Instead, my brother went to Delhi to prepare for the Indian Administrative Services (IAS). My father was very upset with him for that. Later on, we learnt that he had given up his lecturer job for a poor candidate who was next in line. In Delhi, my brother wrote for MBA (Master of Business Administration) and got admission in IIM-A (Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad) and moved to Gujarat. Then he joined some business empire there. My brother used to say that the owner of the empire was a mere 5th class pass, but an ace businessman. My brother learnt a lot from him. My brother was one of his favourites and took part in many important business deals. After a few years, my brother decided to start his own business. Now he has two companies and one factory. His wife looks after one company. Yet she is so simple. Their eldest son is taking coaching in Kota for IIT (Indian Institute of Technology). Their younger son is in class 5. This little boy had gone to an Audi showroom with his father, and he started talking of

extra-customised parts that even his father could not understand. Everyone in the shop was amazed.

When my father expired, we thought our family will get scattered now. All three brothers of my grandfather and all their families had stayed together in our family house. That house, all the land, and other property needed to be looked after. But who could spend so much money and time now? We have a *Durga mandir* (Goddess Durga temple) in our house, which is open to the entire village. Every Dusshera, our family sponsors the celebration. So we thought we will have to close it all. But my brother stepped in. He repaired the old house, which is like a school-building. My younger brothers assisted. And for Durga puja (part of the Dussehra festival), my brother and his wife take 6 days off and sit in the puja (worship) as *jajaman* (patron), following the family tradition. We all go there at that time. It is such a huge gathering; like good old days. We meet each other and spend our time together. One year I could not make it to Puja in time. My elder sister-in-law did not start the ceremonies till I confirmed I was reaching. My children don't quite know who my cousins are and who are my own sisters ... We are all so closely bonded.

These familial reckonings had a strong impression on Luv and Kush, and they prized the underlying values in their family. For the twins and their parents, aspirations in life did not exclude individual academic and occupational achievements, but surpassed it. It encompassed other attributes like being a more affable, humble, responsible human being, who is capable of supporting and keeping-up the family legacy, reputation and honour. The intimate bonding and sharing of family feeling enabled a common identification and partaking of the 'glory' of individual achievements by the family. In other words, their relatives' achievements enhanced Luv and Kush family's prestige and value in society. The family repute and family members' achievements supplemented the individual child's own earned merit and self-respect (*atma sanman*).

Sometimes this sharing compensated for the lack of individual achievements and success as well. To be sure, not everyone in Luv and Kush's family were doing well in their life. The family network as a whole presented a case where the intra-familial achievements and successes were diverse, presenting a variation in economic, material and social standing. However, the children of the house continued to experience a sense of belongingness and oneness based out of the emotional bonding of affection, intimacy and the common inheritance of family legacy. Weighing the diverse situation of family members, their mother once tellingly observed:

My third brother is a farmer. He did not study much, and his wife is also a simple soul. We were worried about what he will do. Now he looks after all the village land with the support of my elder brother. He makes all the arrangements when we go for our annual visits. But when we meet, you cannot make out who is what. There is no big (high) and small (low) (*bada chotta*) feeling ... All are one (*Sabu Eka*). Our servants' and field labourers' children are better placed than us now. We are all still in touch with them. They were always in need of money and help, as they stepped out of the houses in search of education and work. Our family supported them. But in our house we (the girls) needed no jobs, and so we did not step out. We were very good in our studies. We were high-scorers and had we opted for a career we would have climbed high. Our parents made sure that they picked well-known families to wed all their daughters. My father-in-law's family name is very well known (*naamzada*). The moment you climb out of the bus at the bus stand and mention their names, then people will know exactly where to take you. They will bow their heads. That much respect (*sanman*) they have.

For his part, Luv and Kush's father worked in the state secretariat as a senior 'Section Officer'. Though he was a good student and had a desire for higher education, being the eldest among his siblings, he had to join a job immediately after his post-graduation to support his family financially. Besides, despite the huge landholding at the natal village, most of Luv and Kush's paternal uncles and their wives had preferred to join middle-rung private or government jobs. All of their cousins on their paternal side were studying in schools. On their maternal side, their uncles and aunts were diversely placed as a successful industrialist, engineers, government officers, agriculturalist and so on. Some of their elder cousins were already settled abroad with well-placed jobs or pursuing higher studies in reputed colleges. Amidst all of these varied profiles, it was an appreciation for higher virtues, the sharing of success and failure as a family together and acquiring self-respect through self-effort, that affected the children's assessment of self and family worth.

Significantly, all the same, while Luv and Kush were influenced by the achievements of their relatives, they did not pin their hopes high about what they wanted to become in the future. They were clearly aware of their parent's role in deciding their future. Both the boys, calculating from their exam scores, solely dreamt of getting admission in the first two best government colleges in the city for their plus-2 science (by way of pre-university qualification). Beyond that, the final decision was to be made by their parents, as had

happened with their sister. Their father was a very cautious decision-maker. While affordability was certainly an issue for their father, he was even more concerned about the reputation of the college and his children's safety. Thus, in the case of their daughter, ignoring her chances of getting into a better government college outside the city, he had chosen to put her into a costlier private and reputed college for doing her engineering, considering that it was close to the house and she could stay at home instead of a hostel. He expressed his intent to take similar steps for his boys, and hence urged them to study hard so as to get a seat in the desirable government colleges in the city (which would also be sort of financial relief for the household as well). As Luv and Kush's mother once noted, "Even if we have to be on a strict budget, it does not matter to him (her husband). He wants the children in the best colleges close to home. If the boys do not get through into government colleges, it will become difficult for us to financially sustain ourselves in the next two years".

Without doubt, all these situations had alerted Luv and Kush to think of priorities in life beyond singularly fixed high ambition and to look at life from a broader picture engaging with different parameters of valuation. Their assertions of self-respect and family standing depended on this complex schema. They learnt to value self-effort, sacrifice, family-bonding, mutual respect and pursuance of higher excellence at the same time. Accordingly, the idea of being a successful and established person in life, for both Luv and Kush, came in many packages which the boys had learnt gradually to unpack in the ways hinted in the foregoing narration.

Moving to SAMIKSHA AND AKSH

Samiksha and Aksh, with their parents, were the kind of people who liked to take one day at a time. More than exams, Samiksha was concerned about finishing her daily tasks in full measure and always familiarised herself with the textbook portions to be encountered the following day at school. She maintained her study time meticulously even on weekends. Sometimes, on school days, she sat studying 6 hours in the evening, sleeping as late as 1 a.m. Samiksha's mother constantly worried about her daughter's overstressed sedentary lifestyle. She always encouraged her daughter to move about,

have some physical exercise or just relax her mind. Samiksha's father, who was an affable and light-hearted man, always stressed the value of education and a respectable career in making a good life. Being 'up to date' was very important for him. He kept a regular check on his children's progress with school work. Though he did not personally sit down to help them with homework, he frequently picked up their books and quizzed them from the portions covered in school. This gave him an idea if his children were up-to-date or lagging in their school work.

Aksh was much different from Samiksha in his approach to studies. He needed much pushing to start his homework and hardly paid attention to the study materials in front of him. The family was quite open about his difficult attitude. Aksh had a temper problem, spoke less and spent much time surfing on the internet, watching TV and tinkering with gadgets. He disliked attention, instructions and liked to be left alone. The only way to regulate his performance was to take a strict action for his exam scores and not by forcing him to hone a disciplined exam habit. Once Samiksha drolly talked about her parents' strategy vis-à-vis Aksh:

This weekly test system has ruined his sleep. Now we get to know every week where he stands. Baba (father) has told him clearly that if he does not want to follow a discipline, then it is up to him. He can study as it suits him. But beyond a minimum limit, his marks should not fall ... Otherwise he would have to search for his own dinner. This has given him a scare. But if he leaves everything to the last moment, then how will he cope with exams.

All the same, Samiksha's parents encouraged her to take out time for engagements like participating in the family get-together, spending time with friends and cousins, and going out to places. On the other hand, they tried their best to rein in Aksh's mood swings and find a way to help him cope with his increasing school demands. Most of Samiksha and Aksh's cousins, who were elder to them, had decent jobs or were enrolled in professional courses and expecting a good placement. Amongst all of them, Samiksha was one of the most hardworking, best-performing students. More than her parents, it was her close relatives, who seemed very well pleased with her discipline and performances.

On Samiksha's sense of worth

Without doubt, Samiksha enjoyed the appreciation and positive reinforcements that she got from her relatives as well as teachers. This encouraged her to take her class performance seriously. When I asked her why it was important to perform well in class, she laughed and somewhat self-deprecatingly opined:

Once you get good marks, you don't want it to decrease. If it decreases, you feel bad and sad (*Kam heigale kharap lage; Mana dukha huye*). When I get the result, then I come home and phone everyone, and tell them my marks. They feel pleased and proud. Inside me, I also feel that I have done well this time. In the classroom the teacher gives my example to other students. All these feel good to me.

Importantly, there was yet another factor which held her interest in this matter: the urge to be good at her work and to know well and soundly. Samiksha took a deep interest in her studies, and was also quick at relating her studies to real life. For instance, while studying 'The Merchant of Venice' by Shakespeare and attempting a question on interpreting various characters' moods, she was perplexed by questions on 'interpretation' per se. She pondered how teachers managed to judge and mark the 'interpretation' of students as it cannot be standardised. Likewise, while studying Scalar and Vector in Physics, she observed around for birds flapping their wings, gadgets vibrating or engines put on a start and yet not accelerating, trying to figure out the nature of these movements. Samiksha's relatives and parents found it challenging to clear all her doubts. Even though her father had found her a few tuition teachers, Samiksha did not find them satisfactory. Thus she preferred self-study by making her own notes, re-evaluating them and discussing them with whomsoever she thought appropriate. During my fieldwork, Samiksha and I had numerous discussions on her homework and classroom ordeals. One such homework was a written composition on the theme 'An event that changed your life'. Samiksha discussed with me what she wanted to write. This discussion throws a light on what made 'performing' as it were meaningful for her:

I was in standard 4th. One day, our Miss (teacher) came with a gold medal to our classroom. She made 5 of us stand in the front. She said that we were the top 5 and that if we worked harder, then we could top the class and secure the gold medal. So I felt a little greedy. I thought that, if I worked a little harder, then I could get the gold medal. So I used to sit and think about what I should do to improve. I wanted to know how students who topped prepared for exams. At that time, I did not have many friends. I did not like gossiping about TV serials, movies and home. But there was one student who used to top the class. So I started approaching her. Then we became close friends. Through her, I joined

the science club. I liked that; all students there were studious and creative. Then slowly I improved. I learnt from them how to write in the exam. In standard 5th, I stood second in the class. And in standard 6th I scored 96% and I topped. It felt very good. At home, parents treated it as usual, as if it was part of normal studying. My uncle, aunts, and cousins were very proud and praised me, but they do that anyway.

Now I got into a habit (*abhyas*) that I should not get less than 96%. In standard 7th I got 93%. I got scared that if in 7th I got this less then how I will manage in standard 9th when the syllabus is heavier. So in standard 8th I tried again and I was back to A+. Now I feel more confident that I can do it. I think my life changed after that standard 4th incident [when her teacher had shown the gold medal in the classroom] ...

Since U.K.G (upper kindergarten) I have studied on my own. I ask doubts to my teachers, parents or whomever I find appropriate. Just before exams, you cannot start studying everything. So I write my notes separately. I have all the definitions written in one place and all the two mark questions in another. Sometimes they ask the same question in 40-45 different ways. When I read a book, I try to underline the required sections ...

Beyond the desire for praise, Samiksha enjoyed the pleasure of learning. A deeper understanding of the taught topics was not necessary for her to score well in exams, but it kept her mind occupied. She also had a strong urge to do better. She was keen on learning the tactics to prepare and crack her exams. Despite this, whenever I spoke to Samiksha about her future aim in life, she did not seem to have any clear ideas. She mostly wanted to do something related to 'Science'. Once she thought aloud, "I don't know how an author lives or other different kinds of jobs. All I hear is that people do engineering, medical and research. Maybe I will do medical because people say it is tough and for hardworking students".

While the challenge of excelling motivated Samiksha, a clear identification with the image of being hard-working, studious and a rank-holding student gave her the confidence to aspire for higher challenges. For Samiksha, obviously, her 'image' of a punctual, sincere and good student was of great importance. The idea of 'respect' (*sanman*) inspired her. One afternoon she returned from school looking a little upset. Though she did not express much, she remained irritable throughout the evening. After a couple of days, she shared that on the said day she had reached school with incomplete

homework. Though she had hoped to finish it in between class periods, her class monitor duties kept her busy. Hence in the biology period, she had to stand back in the class with other late performers and finish her homework. In her studious words, “Miss knows that I am regular. But still, I felt very bad (*kharap*) standing back with late performers separately doing homework. I missed 15 minutes of the teaching. My friends cheered me up, but I did feel heavy inside all day”. Discernibly, Samiksha is here reflecting on her feelings of shame on being associated with non-performers. She clearly drew a line of distinction between students who were studious, sincere, invested self-effort and those who wanted an easy way out by copying from other’s notes, mugging them up for an exam. On a few occasions just before exams, her friends visited her along with their parents to borrow her subject notes. Though her father encouraged her to share, Samiksha expressed her frustration over it. “I laboured so hard to make these notes for the entire year and just before the exam dates they come and xerox it. It is not fair. I don’t like such students who don’t want to put any effort”.

For Samiksha, obviously, the virtues of a sincere student, one who is punctual, industrious and who takes self-initiative, were of equal importance as the end-result of success and awards. These virtues made the image of a topper worth aspiring for. Admittedly, in class 7th when her scores fell, she did not count it as one of her embarrassing moments; rather, she faced it as a challenge to get back her previous scoring standards. In contrast, the occasion of not being able to complete her biology homework and being made to stand out as a late performer in the classroom was highly disconcerting for her. This was a clear matter of concern for her ‘image’ of good students, something that Kush had voiced in the preceding narration. To be sure, the fact of having to share the experiences of a ‘non-performer’ negatively affected Samiksha’s self-image as a ‘good student’. During our interactions, Samiksha related to me that on occasions where she was not able to solve a sum or was called-out for talking to another student in the class, each such situation gave her much distress making her “feel like crying” out of shame. Sometimes she wistfully spoke of gaining entry into AFMC (Armed Forces Medical College), but felt unsure of qualifying the medical fitness test herself. She felt that being an army doctor was a “very big thing” (*Bahut Bada Katha*), and marvelled at the “discipline, command and commitment” that they have in their work

and the “respect” they received from the people. But she felt discouraged seeing the physical fitness and state of readiness that the job demanded. She feared that she had gotten used to a slower and comfortable lifestyle and could not imagine facing physical hardship. Accordingly, for Samiksha, being successful and performing well involved not merely a good exam score, but such qualities as having a command on the subject, being hardworking, sincere, disciplined and becoming self-established; it was important for her to maintain this image. Being part of something great, chivalrous and having respect clearly also inspired her.

A quick glance at the space of Aksh

Aksh, four years younger to Samiksha, is a very different person. Studies and classwork were never on his mind most of the time. He felt attracted to gadgets, sportspersons, athletes primarily, and scientists who attract mass and social media attention. He had managed to open an account on Facebook with the help of an elder cousin, and posted his stylised profile pictures in formal suit and casuals and family party photos on it. Aksh was definitely a disciplined player for his age. In any game that he played, whether indoor or outdoor, he pursued till the end of it with focus and followed the rules closely. His cousins who were aware of his interests often forwarded him related links, gifted him CDs and related accessories. At the same time, his parents encouraged him to spend some time studying books. During my fieldwork, I got to spend some time with Aksh when he was preparing for his weekly tests. I found that he faced a little problem in focusing on reading and comprehension. He had a habit of moving fast through his texts, and as a result he ended up doing silly mistakes in spellings and missing out on lines. Because of this, he sometimes endured confusion and frustration in solving problems in mathematics and grasping the meaning of the texts that he read, all of which affected his performance. Consequently, he did not enjoy the process and the satisfaction of studying. Frequent weekly tests made it difficult to spend more time with Aksh so as to reorient his basic habits in studying. Besides, the repeated pointing out of his mistakes made Aksh irritable and conscious. Thus he had developed a practice of not talking about studies or classroom issues in front of others. His family had realised his sensitivity and thought it best to deal with it indirectly by making him conscious about his final scores in exams, waiting for Aksh to rectify his studying habits on his own. Mostly, it came to

his father to monitor Aksh's studies and assess his state of preparations before examinations, while it was Samiksha and his mother who clarified his doubts on a daily basis. Aksh, though preferring to be on his own, was dependent on his family for doing his tasks. It was not uncommon for the family to pool in to assemble the various school projects assigned to Aksh as most of the time he left these to be done at the last moment.

Aksh's parents consciously attempted to transform their worry of their son's prospects into light hearted jokes. His father complained of Aksh being pampered and overprotected by all his relatives which stood in the way of his attempts to discipline the boy. His mother blamed it on Aksh's 'inborn temperament' (*Ajanna prakruti*). Aksh's relatives, however, saw it as a temporary issue, which they hoped would change as he grew up developing a sense of responsibility (*Dawitya bodha*). All the same, Samiksha saw it as a lack of effort, self-care and discipline on the part of Aksh. The latter, for his part, found it difficult to relate and identify with such impressions given about him. In fact, under his father's pressure and the demands of weekly tests, he did his best to cover his course; which incidentally was a matter of some satisfaction and pride for him. Being studious and consistently performing did not hold much meaning; rather, he opted to see his 'image' as a gadget-savvy handyman and dashing person. Aksh, it may be noted, was very conscious of his looks. He had started on a regular yoga practice to lose weight as he was quite chubby and sometimes got teased about it. He often spoke of various sportsmen and film heroes who had a fit physique and held forth enthusiastically about their lifestyles. Aksh was the lead person when it came to operating a laptop and using the internet in his house. He took great pride in mastering these skills. During a casual talk about his hobbies, he pointedly stated:

I do not have friends (in school). I play with children, if I like the game. If I do not like it, then I go away and do something of my liking ... If I miss a class, then I borrow copy from my partner (who sits next to him in school). But mostly, I get help at home. I learn from all my cousins. They taught me how to drive (through mock demos) ... It is easy. You need to feel the clutch, accelerator and learn to control it. You got to focus on the road and stir slightly. I can drive a car if it comes in my size ... [and then the conversation moved on the topic of pen drive scanning].

The parameters of being successful, for Aksh, were thus necessarily about establishing his practical and technical skills. Besides, being successful also meant being physically fit and strong for him. He took pride in his physical prowess, and spoke happily about events in which he successfully defended himself in the various scuffles and fights that schoolboys normally entered into. Aksh more or less remained unaffected by his academic performances and all thought about a good college education was far from his mind. He remained under the influence of his cousins and wanted to pursue an education like them, where he could know more about machines and gadgets.

Back to Samiksha and Aksh

Samiksha and Aksh, being the youngest of children among all the cousins, enjoyed special favours. They both were highly pampered, with Samiksha receiving much adulation and appreciation from her relatives for her perseverance, performance and calm manners, whereas Aksh, given his tender age, was mostly protected. They were showered with gifts by their relatives, especially by their cousins who had started earning and were posted out of the state or even abroad. Aksh was particularly fond of the games, sunglasses, wristwatch and the like that he had received as gifts. Though Samiksha also received such gifts, she was hesitant in accepting them and mostly expressed a preference for books. Sometimes the gifts given were expensive, branded and imported. All of these made a significant impression on the mind of the children about the things they could have, the ways of enjoying them and what they could be aspiring for.

Even as the family participated in frequent get-togethers, family outings and feasts, the prime topic of children and their education was a constant source of conversation and even gossip. All the relatives took much interest in their nieces and nephews' entrance exams, college admissions and job placements. All kinds of suggestions and counselling were freely voiced and shared. However, it was mostly left to the children and their parents to decide on the matter. The relatives were overall supportive of the decisions made, and these combined to provide an atmosphere for the children to feel encouraged to perform. Getting into a good college and a good job was necessary for the family as it did not have much of a family past legacy to fall back upon. Samiksha and Aksh's parents' generation were adequately educated, if not highly, holding decent jobs as bank

officer, electricity board official, Grade II government officer, and professor. Their grandparents were moderately accomplished; their paternal grandfather had served as a Grade III government officer and their maternal grandfather owned a rice godown in a neighbouring town (which is a common and thriving business in that region). Though their paternal grandfather had managed to build a house in the capital city, the fact of having had to finance the marriages of his five daughters meant that he had to face a financial crisis, thereby affecting Samiksha and Aksh's father's education. After doing his MBA (Master of Business Administration) from a local institute, their father had started his own business with a partner which was doing averagely. It was in Samiksha and Aksh's generation that the family members overall were advancing their educational and job profiles. Most of their cousins had done their engineering and were employed in respectable companies. Samiksha's father, in fact, once contextualised his daughter's situation by making the following observation:

She is too shy, always pulling her mother to go with her if she wants something. She should go out and develop contacts, be smart. She studies well; we do not have to push her. For her career, we can guide her to some extent only. Let's see how she performs in her 10th boards ... Things will depend on that. If she gets a good score and can compete, then we will see to it that she gets into the best coaching. But there is no point in doing empty calculations now. She says she will do medical. For that, she should be prepared to crack the entrance test. We do not have boundless (*asaranti*) money. It should be worthy of spending. If she has other dreams, then she will have to find out on her own. We cannot advise her on that. We don't have much exposure as your generation has today. Maybe her cousins or people like you can guide her.

Samiksha and Aksh were enrolled in one of the preferred schools teaching the ICSE (Indian Certificate of Secondary Education) syllabus. The school received children of high and middle-income groups. Samiksha's mother confided that, seeing the expenses on the schooling of their daughter, they had first considered putting Aksh in a comparatively low-cost mission school. But given the standard of teachers, students, and the teaching environment of the present school, they had changed their mind and enrolled Aksh in the same school as Samiksha. Though this was financially stressful, fortunately their father's business had looked up, thereby enabling the family to bear the expenses. This school was well-known for its cordial handling of students, the quality of classroom instructions and other group activities with its pupils. Samiksha and Aksh's parents

expected that their choice of school would influence their children's habit-building and performances, and accordingly impinge on the future stature of the family. For their part, the children based their understanding and assessment of self and family worth on the collective foundation of their cousins' standing in life and their own self-image as potential performers. The grounds of its enactment included not only academic success, but also the child's reputation in school, identification with other values like discipline, developing higher abilities, being in the good company, and being able to respect the family overall.

The Space of SANIA

Sania lived on the top-floor of government quarter flats. Despite the congested design of the two-room flat, Sania's house was comfortably arranged with contemporary furniture and beautiful drapes. Sania lived with her parents, her toddler sister Sara, and her paternal grandmother who visited them for a few months in the year. The front room of the house was reserved for Sania, which she shared with her grandmother when she was visiting them. This room had a double-bed, a couple of almirahs and a big computer table squeezed in. This computer table served as Sania's study table and it was here that she took her home tuitions. Sania's mother was very particular about her housekeeping, and Sania was responsible for keeping her table spick and span. Both Sania and Sara were always well-dressed and presentable, even at home.

Another thing that Sania's mother was strict about was her daughter's studies. Sania was a topper. She took daily home tuitions, did her homework and classwork meticulously, and spent her leisure time surfing the net or doing something creative. Movies and television serials captured her imagination, which she eagerly watched with her little sister. Sania also kept a diary in which she pasted the Page 3 pictures of various actresses and models in their glamorous dresses. Sometimes, she filled it in with her own decorations and written observations. More than anything, Sania liked to be left to her own, and did not like to talk much about her school and studies. This made her mother edgy about the orientations Sania was developing. Her mother often sought my

assurance in knowing if the daughter had the required standards to compete at various platforms in life.

Sania's mother was visibly stressed over her daughter's future and education. Her sense of worry emanated from her own past experiences. She had been a good student with a keen interest in higher studies, but her college education was curtailed for reasons of her marriage. She instead found herself as the eldest daughter-in-law in a big family; her day involved nine to twelve hours of cooking and cleaning. In her words:

What did I know of life? ... Nothing. I love cooking. My father-in-law, and his elder brother, loved my hand-cooked food. Everyone was so happy with me. But it just took my life. I did not know a single Hindi film heroine. Sania told me who is Madhuri and who is Sridevi. My sisters-in-law made fun of my simplicity. There was so much restriction. I never let the *duppata* (scarf) slip from my head, no make-up, no fancy clothes or jewellery. They were continuously watching me ... Every movement scrutinised ... *Badi Bahu* (eldest daughter-in-law). But I never reacted. I kept everything inside. Now it has affected my health. But their *choti bahu* (younger daughter-in-law) gives them back; she cannot bear so much.

Sania's mother feared that if her daughter did not study well and failed to secure a strong career, then she might be made to marry early in age and end up in a situation just like her own. The mother wanted to see Sania as someone who had a standing in life, which would give her daughter the authority and credibility to speak for herself. Sania's mother thus lived in a shadow of apprehension about her daughter's future performance and achievements. She often complained that, despite private home tuitions, Sania still required her supervision in preparing for exams: "If I don't check, then she will skip a portion or two for revisions before exam day. She is somewhat overconfident and irresponsible". Sania's mother saw her daughter's self-confidence in managing situations and her growing demands (on dresses, food, outings, etc.) as a lack of responsibility and dearth of a realisation about the real family situation. In fact, Sania's quiet and introverted nature made it more difficult for her mother to gauge what was going on in her daughter's mind. Sania's father, on the other hand, had great hopes and an assured confidence about the daughter doing well in life. He made his best attempt to provide every possible material and emotional comfort to his daughters (Sara included). They were both free to demand whatever they wished for. Sania's parents had consciously opted for giving their daughter home tuition, which was certainly expensive

for the family. They did their best to fulfil all the conditions for increasing Sania's educational prospects.

Sania was privy to her mother's jumpiness and aware of her father's pampering, but hardly showed any reactions to it. Once I asked Sania directly about it, and she opened up: "I cannot take so much stress. I want to relax. So I study as much as I have to. Then I do something else ...". More than once Sania had expressed her dislike for family tensions. She wanted a life more free from family restrictions and future anxiety. She studied meticulously as instructed by her tuition teacher and her school, and having done these tasks she liked to while away her time. She was never perturbed about her marks and, given that she was a high ranker, she had no doubts about not getting into the best of the colleges in the city.

Sania studied in one of the low-cost missionary schools patterned on the ICSE syllabus. The school did averagely compare to the other schools in its 10th standard results. Mostly children of middle and low-rung government officers and small businessmen were enrolled in the school. Compared to her school friends, Sania's overall standard of performance was better, and she seemed to be aware of this. Not only quite in terms of exam scores, but also in her behaviour and conduct, Sania liked to maintain dignity and a sense of importance. In school, she was part of the 'high rankers', whom she described as studious and humour-loving children not distracted by unwanted activities. It was clear from Sania's descriptions that somewhere children's day-to-day school interactions were underlined by a form of separation based on performance:

We have groups ... Like that of 90-100% scorers. They move together. They compete and fight, but are always watchful and careful to help each other. Similarly, there are those with 80-85% who stick as a group. In the group we share and lend copies, hang out and have fun, discuss topics. [What about others, I inquire?]. Actually, the whole class is together most of the time. But somewhere we are more close to our groups. There is a little hesitance with others. They are hesitant in talking to us toppers. I don't know why. Maybe they think we are arrogant (*ghamandi*) or something. (Don't you approach them?) We are free ... We talk and play with them. But little bit separation is there. You see if we start talking about studies and marks ... and then they may feel awkward or conscious. So we have to be careful.

Sania helped me to understand the distance that existed between the ‘high scorers’ and ‘low scorers’ in her classroom. The higher evaluation of prestige and self-assessment of a topper was evident in her reflection of her classroom situation. She reflected that sometimes their teachers read aloud each student’s mark in front of the entire classroom, which was according to her one of the “most uncomfortable moments” of the classroom. Sania was categorical that, though students never talked about such moments, “It shows in their face. They feel deeply embarrassed and ashamed. We all feel so bad. Why unnecessarily teachers do that?”

Sania was very conscious of her ‘image’ as a high performer. She enjoyed the importance that she got from her teachers because of the performance. Her mother pointed out to this while talking about her conversations at the Parents-Teachers meeting. She disclosed that one year Sania’s exam mark fell from 99% to 97%, and so she went to discuss it with the teachers. Needless to say, as her mother divulged, Sania’s teachers were quite surprised over her (mother’s) worries and even declared that Sania was a “jewel” of a student and that her mother should drop all her worries. Sania’s mother more than once ventured that her daughter had become cheeky and high-headed because of the attention she got from her teachers. For her part, Sania saw herself as a person who could do things well in life. She did not show any interest in household work, and (as we saw in the previous chapter) was confident that she would learn fast the skills of housekeeping when the time came in the future. She was very proud of her friend’s group with whom she spent time “doing good things”. Maintaining her reputation was quite important to her; she often spoke of how her advice and suggestions were sought by her friends in various matters as they had great faith in her right sense of judgement. In Sania words, “They know that I always think through the matter and say the right thing to the best of my understanding”. In this context, she spoke of how it was important to maintain one’s dignity in school. Getting any form of punishment was experienced by her as a moment of disgrace: “It ruins our reputation (*Izzat ka falluda banjata hai*). I do my best not to look at students who are being punished. Especially if juniors witness when we are punished, then it feels as if everything is gone (*pura galla*)”.

As already mentioned, Sania had a clear aim in life, aspiring as she did to become an IAS officer. This was also her father's heartiest dream. When I pointedly asked her what inspired her for this, she was emphatic:

Once I saw Aparajita Sarangi [one of the most popular senior administrative officers in the state] in an event. I saw her communicate with children. How she conducted herself and spoke with everyone was impressive. Everyone knew her and was listening to her with full attention. She is very strict with rules, and yet she had done so many reforms. She is very clever ... She made uniform compulsory for (government) school teachers, so that if they are outside the school during school hours, then anyone can make out and report on a helpline. [I interject: *To bring reform you don't have to be an IAS?*] Yes, like social workers. But then nobody listens to them and they have to run here and there. I find that boring. And I don't know to whom they report. It is not clear what they do. But everyone knows IAS. It has power ... It is a high post. Like in my father's office, IAS is the 'ultimate' ... The Boss. Whatever they say will happen. Social workers do not have this authority. [*What about OAS (Odisha Administrative Service)?*] OAS is only inside Odisha. If I become IAS, then I get to see India and travel all over. [*What reforms do you want?*] There are so many poor people. They are having such a hard time. You will feel sad looking at them ... Sleeping on the road ... No proper food. At least the basic minimum they should get.

Palpably, Sania is very clear about her aspirations, although her mother seemed to nurse a sense of dread over her daughter's high hopes. As she (Sania's mother) wondered: "If she wants to be an engineer or doctor, we can find out from people ... But all this big talk about IAS? What should a child do to get into IAS? Who will guide us?" She expressed her despair over Sania's father goading their daughter to set her goals high without any idea or preparation on how to achieve all of them. She particularly lamented over her family situation wherein she had no "means or connection" to provide for her children's dreams. She earnestly requested me to help Sania in getting some exposure. As a way of helping out, I fixed an appointment with a lady OAS officer to meet and guide Sania. Sania seemed hesitant about such a meeting and quite disliked her mother's open show of despair. All the same, in the arranged meeting, the officer did have a short interaction with Sania about her interests and studies. The officer was evidently impressed with Sania and assured her that she could do well in the IAS examination provided she retained her focus. The officer effusively noted: "It's so good to see your clarity and confidence at this age. You are already well informed and your family supports you. I had none of it. You maintain your standard and just finish your

graduation thoroughly. Then you can apply". She reassured that Sania had a good chance, and then noted down a few names of newspapers and magazines that she should read regularly. The officer also encouraged Sania to borrow books and materials she might want from her. Though most of the time Sania was quiet, she was very happy about the meeting. Back home when Sania's mother asked about it, Sania was subdued and staid: "Everything is going all right (*Sab theek chal raha hai*). No need to worry. Just focus on studies till graduation for now". In fact, this somewhat cryptic reply from Sania took me by surprise; it almost sounded as if we had a visit to a doctor. The response seemed to reveal Sania's dislike and criticism for presenting life and its problems as some sort of disease.

As we noted earlier in Ch.3, Sania's father worked in the state secretariat as a 'Section Officer'. On her paternal side, Sania's kin were all educated. Her grandfather's elder brother had been a professor with a Ph.D. degree in English literature. Sania's uncles and aunts were averagely educated with a graduation or a post-graduation degree. Their occupations varied from small businesses to medium-rung government and private jobs. Her elder cousins had gone on to pursue higher education like Ph.D., MBA, engineering and so on. On her maternal side, both of her uncles were graduates with petty business enterprises, and all her cousins being younger to her were in school. Sania's paternal grandmother always stressed Sania's close connection with her husband's elder brother and traced her study habits to his influence. She retold the stories of how Sania enjoyed a space of privilege in her paternal grandfather's house and how her grandfather and his elder brother fulfilled all her wishes instantly. Sania's grandmother liked to talk elaborately about her husband's house in the adjacent city and cherished the lively time when all the three brothers of her husband stayed together in the same house with their families. However, a few years back, with the demise of her husband's elder brother and her own husband within a fortnight gap, their families had separated. Sania's family owned a two-storied house in their native city, which was partly occupied by her grandmother and partly on rent.

Significantly, even as the grandmother liked to talk about her past family days, Sania and her family hardly related to it. Sania, in fact, did not appreciate her grandma's stories

and even commented that she was ‘exaggerating the old memories’ (*Badha chadhake bolti hain*). Sania instead liked to talk about the contemporary world, current affairs and discoveries, none of which were appreciated by her grandmother; this often created an argument between them. Sania’s mother did acknowledge her father-in-law and his brothers’ steadfast affection for Sania. But she also saw it as an impediment in Sania’s progress: “Sania was their life. Because she did not want to go to nursery school, they called a teacher at home. Sania just grew so stubborn, not learning her letters or even manners. No one was allowed to tell her anything; not even me”. Her mother had constantly felt that Sania was growing to become disrespectful, wilful and her ‘standard’ was falling. Thus, for the sake of Sania’s education, her mother fought and took up a separate residence in the capital city where Sania’s father had his job. This had apparently created a rift between Sania’s parents and her other relatives on her father’s side. On her part, Sania’s mother experienced a sense of helplessness and rejection about the matter.

Alternatively, while her grandmother remained indifferent to Sania’s educational achievements, her other relatives never showed any appreciation of it. Sania’s grandmother was rather quick at pointing out to the lack of respect for traditional values like rituals, dressing patterns and daily life habits that Sania had developed because of staying away from her joint family. To add to it, Sania’s father’s sister kept accusing of the family of neglecting Sania’s grandmother and interfered in the matters of family’s spending and misuse of family property. All of these had caused much bitterness, mistrust, and animosity between the family and some of their relatives. There existed no fellow-feeling or a common sharing of happiness and prosperity between Sania and her paternal relatives. Neither Sania could feel a sense of belongingness and pride with the achievements of her cousins, nor did she receive any appreciation for her achievements. On one occasion, Sania showed me her father’s sister’s vacation pictures on Facebook. It was a scene of a beach somewhere abroad, and her aunt’s family were posing in modern western beach clothes in front of a popular hotel. Sania was emphatic that while her grandmother kept nagging her for wearing western clothes, she never said anything to her own daughter. Sania’s mother, in fact, was not allowed to move without a dupatta even inside the house. All of these bred a sense of relative deprivation and even injustice

in Sania. In effect, although Sania had a family legacy and currency marked by individual achievements and aspirations, it did not transfer into a common ownership and source of gratification for the children of the house.

Sania openly disliked the sense of resentment among relatives that she had witnessed and, strangely, searched for an alternative model in movies like *Hum Saath Saath Hain* (We Are Together). This was her favourite because it showcased how a family dealt with such confrontations over the property and individual assertions with wisdom and restraint. Sania distinctly avoided any discussion over family disputes and discouraged her grandmother from gossiping on those issues. Rather, she spent her time searching for news on various developments and discoveries, focusing on her school work or planning outings with school friends and being in their company. Such acts of distancing and preferences revealed Sania's assessment of various aspects of life as worth opening up to. Sania's mother, however, who was in the centre of the feuds with little scope of distancing, saw her life as one of hardship, humiliation, and sorrow. In an attempt to move beyond their familial circumstances and in order to have power over the contesting forces within the family, Sania and her parents searched for solutions and forms of gratification in the daughter's hope-filled future. The positive reinforcement that Sania received from her school, her consistent performance and her secured image as a principled respected person, all gave Sania the confidence of holding her own in the world.

The Worth of VINAYAK

Vinayak was the richest of the children whom I approached, and he was also the youngest. As we have already indicated in Ch.3, Vinayak was studying in the 2nd standard when I began to interact with him, and by the time I had culminated my fieldwork with the family he had moved into the 3rd standard. He lived in a two-storied building which had been built by his grandparent's decades ago. While he stayed with his mother on the top-floor, his paternal grandparents occupied the ground floor. Furthermore, as already detailed, the top-floor was divided into three sections, of which two were let out on rent, while Vinayak and his mother occupied one section which

consisted of two rooms, a hall and a separate kitchen. Given the lack of space, the house always bore an over-packed and messy look. Vinayak's mother was a working woman and had to spend long hours in the office, which left her little time to keep the house organised. Vinayak's father also stayed away from home as he was posted outside the city, and visited them only during weekends.

On normal working days, therefore, in his after school hours, Vinayak was looked after by his grandparents till his mother returned late-evening. Vinayak had morning school, and he returned around noon. He had lunch at his grandparents' house downstairs and spent some time watching TV with them or looking at his school tasks with the help of his grandparents. His grandfather had great respect for education and consistently persuaded Vinayak to take his studies seriously. Vinayak, however, liked to pursue extracurricular activities, being often upstairs playing video games, watching TV shows or just tinkering around. Vinayak spent a considerable amount of time on his own and thus had grown free-spirited. It was hard to find him in one place and he moved between the two floors freely several times at his own sweet will. His favourite activity, however, was to play video games and surf online. In the evening he attended tuitions for an hour or more downstairs and then moved up with his mother to have dinner, discuss his homework and then hit the bed.

Vinayak was surrounded by books, study materials, latest gadgets, and toys. Most of it, he had received as gifts from his relatives; and recently he had started making his own demands lists learning about new products available in the market from the internet. In contrast to this, the overall material culture of the house was remarkably humble and minimal. The house was still modelled in its old mosaic floor and steel cupboards style as opposed to the recent trends in marble flooring and plywood cupboards. Many of the appliances at home were also fairly old models, save for few exceptions like the presence of a CCTV for surveillance of the front gate (which had been insisted upon by his grandmother). Vinayak's parents had a dearth of time to pay much attention to the house; while his grandparents were mostly unwell and needed regular medication. It was his grandmother who decided and monitored the maintenance and renovation works on behalf of the others in the house. Between Vinayak's parents and grandparents, they had

two separate running kitchens, cooks and maidservants. However, it was common for them to cook for each other depending on the circumstances.

His mother did her best to organise things for Vinayak so that he did not feel unattended. This involved putting out extra books for him to read, asking the maid to make snacks of his liking, giving him creative games to engage himself with and having regular conversations on a list of do's and don'ts. While Vinayak mostly followed his mother's instructions, his obsession for video games left him aloof from other things and kept him glued to the desktop in the crammed drawing-room on the top floor of the house, where he was to be found for the longest duration of his free time. Vinayak's mother who closely noticed his behaviour was deeply worried about his increasing disregard for people and things around him and his growing demands. She often saw it as a by-product of the over-attention and pampering that Vinayak received as a single child in the house and the lack of quality time that he got to spend with both his parents. Over durations of time, she often spoke about her concerns:

When he was little he would listen to me. Even at that age, he could understand. I hardly raise my voice ... I can't. I don't like those manners. So we used to have our little talks. And if I was able to tell him the reasons he would understand. I had told him not to take anything from the fridge because he has severe throat infections. He understood that it would be his loss to fall ill. You will see he never touches things I have warned him against. Not because I scold or get angry ... I explain. But now as he is growing up, instead of becoming more mature, he is going the opposite direction. Now he is more wilful, unconcerned and demanding ... he is becoming a little 'wayward'. He is not developing good manners. He litters the house and never keeps back his things in place. If some guests visit, he needs to be reminded to wish them. He is conscious of his health, but not at all about his studies. I want him to be a little bit self-reliant. He has to be reminded twenty times to do his work. If you tell him anything he immediately answers. I wonder where he is learning all this clever forms of speech.

Today children are smarter than we are as grown-ups. I don't know how to be on par with him. As children, we were not only simple, but we were also slow learners. We could have never handled technology the way they do. So fast ... How to catch up with them. They are becoming so technology-oriented. But it is also taking away some good habits from them ... Like reading habits, being with family, getting to know friends. He is so engrossed all the time. Look, we are talking here, but he is not listening to anything [Vinayak was watching Hindi movie songs on TV in the same room]. Then he will open his cartoons and then some crafts program. Even if I lock, he knows some way to unlock it. Then he has his tuitions, and after that he wants to finish some craftwork or project. He

does not have time to sit and talk. I cannot understand how children can get so busy? If I ask him to do something, he will not even pay attention. But he wants everyone to just attend to him. This will derail him.

We have given him a lot of freedom. We never pressurise him to study and get high scores. We let him be. Let him do what he wishes to. I have many unfulfilled dreams. I wrote my IAS exam, but I was eliminated. I always wanted to be there. I see my friends and they are in such high posts and some even meet the Prime Minister. They tag me on Facebook. I have stuffed all these almirahs with so many reading materials. But I just don't get time to read them all. Someone could make good use of it, if they want. So I have a wish that he becomes someone famous. ...But I never mention it to him. I never impose my wishes on him.

Sometimes I feel that because we the parents are not being able to give time, so he is becoming like this. He is getting used to his own ways. But he is not becoming anymore independent ... I wish him to become more self-responsible. He should at least learn to take care of himself. Sometimes I feel that because he is a single child and he gets so much importance and attention, everyone listens to him, all his demands are getting fulfilled, and so he is becoming like this. He has started taking everything for granted. But I cannot give him much time, and have not found out time to research this issue much also. What parents should do? His carelessness and disregard are bothering me. What direction it will take him?

No doubt, Vinayak's mother found herself in an overwhelming situation. She chose carefully, however, before showing any reaction towards her son. To Vinayak, she mostly pointed out to his good conduct and boosted his pride in maintaining them. For example, she reminded him of his past reading habits and about how fast he was in it when she felt the need to ask him to read a book. If she had to stop Vinayak from some form of mischief like disturbing people, then she would insist that Vinayak being a 'good boy' should avoid such conduct. Vinayak's grandmother too adapted this strategy of telling how good her dear grandson was in his studies, if she had to make Vinayak sit down for his homework. However, his grandfather had a stricter and straightforward approach. He did not hesitate to call Vinayak disobedient, naughty and insincere with studies in his face. Vinayak mostly ignored his grandfather's direct taunts or gave him some curt form of reply out of fun. Only on certain extreme occasions, Vinayak's mother would call him a "disobedient" or "naughty boy". On such occasions, Vinayak candidly expressed his confusion and disbelief as his mother often told him that he was a 'good boy' and suddenly he was being reprimanded for 'being bad'. Vinayak thus grew up

with a sense of satisfaction of being a person who did what he was expected to do, even though he did not necessarily do as instructed.

From the very beginning of my interaction with Vinayak, he told me what all that he was allowed to do and access and all that he was not in the absence of his mother. During the summer vacations, he explained me that he had a routine which he followed and in which he had to “wake up early and exercise, do yoga, have breakfast, take his medicines, watch TV, study, have lunch, sleep, play on computer, attend tuitions, play more, have dinner and sleep”. However, this was hardly what I noticed in his day-to-day activities. His play and craft times were way too far and extended with little time for sleep or study. When I pointed out this to him, he simply replied, “When I play alone I lose track of time”. However, it was uncommon to see him paying any heed to his grandparents or his mother’s pleadings and objections. It was always possible to divert his mind and pull him to do something more interesting, as could be with other children of his age. Outrightly forcing him was, however, difficult as he started sulking and crying aloud till his wish was fulfilled.

Vinayak was too young to have any sustainable conversation on these matters. One day, when he was adamant on not switching off the TV despite having watched for a couple of hours, I merely mentioned to him that maybe his parents and grandparents were worried about his behaviour of not listening to them at all. Vinayak dismissed it outright by saying, “They love me a lot. They are proud of me. Whatever good they say I do”. Without letting me talk any more, he started explaining how much he liked the beats, tunes and dance steps of the music videos he was watching, and famously added, “If you see the way I see, you will like it”. Vinayak remained a very affectionate boy who liked to have people’s company and attention. But he was also moody and choosy about the people who could be with him. Mostly he wanted to be with people who could do things that he wanted to do. This was a reason why he did not like to go out to parks and play with other children whenever his mother suggested so. He often resisted stating that though few of the children were his school seniors he did not like playing with them as he had to do what they said.

He had a great interest in online games and net-surfing. He kept downloading games and improvising it by adding more and more cheat codes from the internet, as we have seen. On hearing my severe objections to a couple of games which included stealing and violence, he sat down with me to take notes on games that I might like to play. He started asking me questions about the kind of city I would like to have in the game and the kind of activities that I would like to make people do in the game if not fighting and racing. He assured me that when he grew up he would design a new game for people like me. When I asked him where he would learn to design a game, he opened YouTube and searched for videos related to it. Often in the afternoon, I reached his house to find him organising some experiments he had learnt that day in school. He took great interest in demonstrating those experiments. He taught me to hold a glass upside down that was half-filled with water and covered with a thin paper, without spilling the same. When I asked him to explain the experiment, he again showed me a YouTube video and asked me to memorise it.

Of all the books and materials he had at his access, like most little children he was interested in books with colourful pictures and descriptions across their surface. However, alongside that he was more interested in reading the various manuals of the gadgets that they had at home. He received many toys that came with complicated instructions in them, which held him in great interest; and though he struggled to decipher them, he did not find many interested people at home to help him out. His grandparents found it hard to familiarise themselves with such products, and his parents had little time. The day I started interacting earnestly with Vinayak, he handed me a middle school science kit to make tiny robots. For three consecutive days, we worked hard on it following more than hundreds of minute instructions to make an active robot. Vinayak's mother informed that some of their relatives had gifted the kit. She explained that it had become a fashion to bring fancy gifts for children and that people end up unconsciously picking whatever inappropriate products are available in the market. She pointed out that most of such fancy gifts were technology-based, which (as she further felt) had a mixed impact on children of the 'new' generation.

I directly asked Vinayak about what he actually liked in all those experiments he did. He was candid and lively as ever:

Science is my life. All the discoveries and inventions are very interesting. [What is interesting, I ventured to ask?] One day, when I grow up I will be a scientist and make something new and big. And I will sell it to government. Then everyone will get benefited. [What benefit?] Like you see a car, how useful it is? We can travel from one place to another. [What about pollution?] They have found out cars that run without petrol and pollution. When I grow big, then I can also discover a new pollution-free car that everyone can easily use. I will get to surprise everyone. There is a video on YouTube. A man builds a car using his old things like a suitcase and all. It works ... Everyone was so surprised to see. [What new things will you do?] I want to research 'Glowsticks'. I want to find out how they were invented, what they are made up of and how they are recharged by light. I read a book where they say everything about glow sticks.

Obviously, Vinayak's high exposure to technology and gadgets had created an interest in him about this area of expertise. The family's material standing and intellectual culture had also built an impetus in him to read and look up things he liked to find out about. The indulgence and perhaps leniency of his family about his post-school study hours had left him with the time to pursue his interests rigorously. The people in Vinayak's family, besides, were also hugely interested in other kinds of intellectual pursuit. His mother, because of her administrative job, had to keep herself updated with various political and developmental activities of the state and the country. She also extensively read through various managerial and motivational articles to handle her office challenges. However, Vinayak did not show much interest in any of these pursuits. His grandmother was a devotee of a spiritual cult and followed various religious and spiritual books. Quaintly enough, Vinayak took much interest in these books and sometimes sat flipping through them. He had thus developed some ideas about God, birth, and rebirth. However, he maintained a distance from these topics as he mostly associated them with old age retirement activities and not with present hobbies or any future profession.

Even though Vinayak had gotten used to having his own ways owing to the free time and liberties he enjoyed at home, he also had an eye towards impressing others. He often spoke of his engagements as something that would please his parents and even benefit them. While playing a game and scoring high or building something with his toys, he

would excitedly utter that, ‘I will do this and make them happy (*khusi karidebi*)’. Also, with guests and visitors, he wanted to share what he had done. For instance, when he had learned to make an egg omelette, he wanted to make one for anyone who came to visit the house. This went on until his mother pointed out to him that people would think that he was showing off. Vinayak’s family, besides, had a practice of projecting his positive qualities unless they were talking to someone who was already acquainted with Vinayak well; in the latter circumstance, they opened up about their worries. Overall though, the family was quite conscious of their privacy, presentation, and propriety in front of the others. To some extent, this had affected Vinayak, who was used to being talked of in good terms despite his real dispositions in a given situation. On a few flustered moments, when his mother took him to task for his misbehaviour and confronted him directly, Vinayak reacted with sheer disbelief and confusion. He counter-questioned his mother’s scolding, insistently by saying, “But you always say that I am a good boy. You always say I do good things for you ... Don’t I?”

For me, both as researcher and lay subject, it is interesting to see that Vinayak, even in his tender age, had developed a sense of image-building and self-respect although he had not yet learnt to associate his intentions well with his actions and many times failed to secure it in the other’s eyes. Vinayak was acutely conscious of his ‘image’ as a ‘good boy’, which he saw in his ability to follow instructions in the absence of his mother, in responding to his grandparents, in mastering video games and science experiments and overall being the receiver of affections and attention from his family at large. This was also supplemented by his image as a science-oriented and cordial child in school. Moreover, besides his individual qualities, he had also learnt that individual self-respect was to some extent attached to the respect and reputation of the family as a whole. One day, his mother had pointedly and somewhat exasperatedly asked: “Why Vinayak does not listen to me despite me having given him all freedom, fulfilled all his wishes? Why has he started arguing and fighting with me?” Earlier that day Vinayak and his mother had ‘fought’ and in his anger Vinayak had hit his mother which had left her quite distressed and perturbed. Having witnessed Vinayak’s growing hyperactivity, I empathized with his mother’s concern and suggested that she should tell about it to his teachers at school. Vinayak was present beside us when we were having this

conversation. My suggestion seemed to scare him and he protested strongly, imploring his mother not to do so. He strongly asserted:

No, she cannot do that. [Vinayak's mother asks why not?] What would they think of me? They would think of me as a bad boy. Would you like that? [I point out that he has behaved badly.] But they will think bad of her also. Because she is the mother ... It is like that (*semiti*). And this time she started the fight ... She made me lose my temper.

In short, Vinayak was pointing out that saving his face and image was akin to saving the face of his parents and the image of the family. Sure enough, on that day he had gone on to use this knowledge to influence his mother to not mention the matter in front of his teachers.

Vinayak's family had a mixed background. His paternal grand mother's family was a well-to-do one, with huge landholdings and a thriving business; his paternal grandfather, though, belonged to a family with a history of poverty. Both the families had yet a combined legacy of education. Vinayak's grandfather, who held education with reverence, was a topper of his time and had retired as the chief accounts officer from a well-known telecom brand, while the grandmother was the first woman in the state to join the Odisha state's revenue services. Vinayak's father worked as a senior engineer in the state government. All of Vinayak's father's siblings, to be sure, were highly placed in life. His eldest paternal aunt worked as an audiologist for Hindi movies; his second paternal aunt had started a 'plus2' (pre-university) science college a few years back following her divorce; and his youngest paternal uncle was the deputy general manager in a well-known hospital in Bengaluru. Alternatively, his maternal grandparents had a much more modest living, having been socially ostracised following their inter-caste marriage. Thus his mother's family had to fend for themselves without any help from relatives or any community members. It so happened that his mother's elder sisters' had to look after their younger sibling's education, jobs, and marriages. Vinayak's mother who was the third of the siblings was the first person to get a good job by qualifying for Odisha Administrative Services (OAS). However, over the years, Vinayak's maternal uncles and aunts had gone on to establish themselves in much higher positions as engineers, managers with jobs in MNCs in India and abroad. Evidently, the younger siblings had started looking after their elder ones who had sacrificed their youth to see

the entire family settled. Thus Vinayak mostly got to see the bright side of the picture, often rejoicing in the costly gifts that he received.

Vinayak's parents hardly spoke about their relatives and the nature of bonding with them in front of their son. It was only in his absence, and on very few occasions, that his mother divulged her difficulty in adjusting with her in-laws after her marriage. She calmly mentioned the comments and taunts that she sometimes received for her simple upbringing and unsophisticated living style. This had brought about an unexpressed coldness in the relation between Vinayak's mother and his paternal aunts who had higher education qualifications and were much better established in their professions. In an intimate conversation, Vinayak's grandmother also shared how difficult it was for her to marry into a much poorer household compared to her own family and adjusting to their minimalistic and conservative ways. She spoke with some fortitude about her struggles in bringing up all her husband's siblings and her own children out of the impoverished environment and making them earn better educational and occupational accomplishments. Alongside this, she further added about her dilemmas in accommodating a daughter-in-law (that is, Vinayak's mother) who had been brought up in an inter-caste ostracised self-surviving family without friends and relatives, and which (for her, that is, Vinayak's grandmother) was an unfamiliar context compared to her experience of a closely knit large family with standing and prestige. Thus the relationship between the members of the Vinayak family was a bit guarded, with restrained intimacy and respect for individual habits. The members rarely opened up about their feelings about one another. A mutual sharing of the stories of struggles and achievements was uncommon as it seemed to open up the old and new strained circumstances within the family. Thus stories about the extended family were consciously not discussed or talked about, although relatives on either side would float by the home.

Vinayak, considering his age and his selective exposure, mostly remained unaffected by the pertinent differences of opinions within the family. He held both his paternal and maternal relatives in equal esteem. He most visibly found a warm welcome at all his relatives' places, who bestowed him with gifts and affection. Vinayak was very attached

to his cousins and liked to show their pictures, especially those with him cuddling them. While showing his paternal uncle's infant daughter, he insisted that he had a special bond with her as she smiled every time he stood in front of her. Vinayak knew the exact details of all his uncle and aunts' jobs, postings and work profile; he had no problem in explaining an audiologist's role in film-making and nursed particular ideas about the products that his uncles' had developed as software engineers. More than a matter of pride, Vinayak spoke of these aspects as a matter of fact.

Vinayak studied in a reputed franchise school following the Central Board of Secondary Examination (CBSE) syllabus. The school was known for its competitive spirit, higher attention to mathematics and science, as well as other extra-curricular activities. Vinayak liked to take part in various projects, exhibitions, and camps conducted in the school. He was also encouraged to do so by his parents, as it kept him engaged constructively in their absence. The school received children from a variety of backgrounds, starting from IAS and corporate executives' children to middle-rung government and private job-holders' children. The school's orientation had certainly helped in boosting Vinayak's inspiration for becoming a scientist. However, though he was extra-enthusiastic about the science 'practical', in textbook studies he remained uninterested, invariably always performing averagely. However, this did not dampen his spirits because he thought the true pursuit of a scientist was in mastering the practical. Vinayak's preceding generations had increasingly created a strong legacy of high achievements, which gave them the confidence of extending the same to their succeeding generation. Besides, as already implied above, another aspect of their struggle and achievement was that they wanted a more relaxed and stress-free life for their children.

Surely enough, Vinayak's parents, instead of pressurising him for high scores, allowed him to pursue his own interests. Vinayak was quite aware of the high offices that his relatives were occupying, but he was mostly kept away from the adulation, praise, and fame that tended to come with it. The family mostly spoke of their posts and achievements as 'necessities' in life that one has to achieve and which comes with great demands on personal life in terms of long working hours, target pressures and intensive engagements. Vinayak's success in projects and science works were much encouraged,

but often passed as one of the many (or, rather, a small part) of the on-going achievements found in the stock of the family, and thus did not transform into a moment of celebration or rejoicing. For Vinayak, getting a secured and reputable profession in the future was a regular thought, which also meant pursuing his interest and doing something that would surprise his family as well as the world at large.

By Way of Closure: In the Overall Scheme of Things

Broadly, it can be affirmed that the location and assessment of self is part and parcel of social life and of living amidst others (both intimate and distant others). Children too continuously make such assessments in their day-to-day family life. They do such assessments while talking about their relations, the nature of these relations; speaking about their friends, teachers, and school performances generally; addressing their possible future dreams and ambitions; and while talking about their past legacies and the nature of ownership of these legacies by themselves. In this chapter, I have tried to look at the complex of influences that affects children's assessment of self and family worth. The place of strong sentiments in the complex is palpable; and in prefacing them as 'moral' sentiments, these influences were experienced and established through such feelings as pride and glory, shame, and a sense of humiliation (with our chapter, of course, working its way more through pride and glory than shame and/or humiliation). Overall, the children's attitude towards these sentiments tells us about the parameters they apply for evaluating the worth of their self and family life.

The key factors that affect the assessment are, certainly, multiple and complementary. A child's hopes and fears about his/her future depended on their current assessment of self-respect and family dignity. We have also noted that the location of self, family and the wider circle of relatives were intertwined. More pointedly, the child's individual merits were attached to the stability of the family in dual ways, with not only a child's prospects in the future bringing a sense of security regarding the family's reputation as a whole, but also the child as deriving a sense of security from the prosperity and standing of the family. Importantly, as our pages above have recounted, in taking stock of their past and current family achievements, children tended to give a high priority to the state and

quality of 'family relations' as it were (including their connections with the wider circle of relatives). A close bonding characterised by affection and belongingness enabled an advantageous transfer of pride and glory emanating from the achievements of one family member to his/her near and dear ones. Simultaneously, the relative absence of such an environment affected the appreciation of family members' and relatives' achievements negatively by the other members. A lack of connect and shared identification with family member's achievements lessened the sense of support and security that a family seemed to nurse overall, thereby diminishing their evaluation of family standing in the overall scheme of things. Rather, in a situation of rivalry and dispute, the success of one led to a relative deprivation on the part of other.

As implicated by and through the logic of this chapter, the assessment of self-respect and family standing made by the children can be broken down into three interrelated realms, namely, the family past legacies, the family's current situation, and the child's potential self-image. The qualification of 'what is worth' in these three realms was not limited to personal conditions or situations, but spread over to larger, seemingly more esoteric, considerations. Indeed, as we saw in the foregoing orders of description, in families with a certain legacy of past glory, there was general emphasis given to the family's name and fame in the locality. However, a sort of particular emphasis was placed on extraordinary achievements of particular individuals who had helped in establishing or carrying forward the legacies. Moreover, the supposedly extraordinary achievements were not only gauged in terms of academic and vocational excellence, but also were highlighted with attributes such as goodness of behaviour, ability to overcome hardship, supporting relatives and working for some higher cause in society. Certainly, while talking about the current generation's achievements in a family, there was a stress on educational and professional success, but it was appreciated only in a condition of an intimate and healthy bonding between the relatives. Thus it was important for the member to be open to sharing with a strong sense of belongingness and value for his family members and other relatives.

Evidently, children's assessment of their present self-image depended on their exam scores, their level of involvement in their subject of interest and a positive reputation

based on standards of ethical behaviour, the gravity of personality and other talents especially in the school environment. In fact, Susan Seymour (1988) has pointedly observed that the child's educational performance is never an individual affair, that indeed the entire family is impacted by it and that the child's educational choices had often to be 'integrated' with that of the family. Indeed, keeping with this tendency, she poignantly states: "The child is lauded or reprimanded by parents and other family members not only for his or her own performance but for how it reflects on the family and what options are facilitated or not accordingly" (Seymour 1988: 360). Likewise, as our narration further reveals, we can see that a reference to higher virtues along with material and worldly achievement always figured out in the children's narrative on individual achievers; and, what is more, a family's sense of dignity was associated as much with such factors like cordial relations, presence of role models, openness to higher virtues and stability, as with educational and occupational advancement.

In the preceding chapter (Ch.6), one of my points of exploration was that of children's identification with 'goodness'. That is to say, each child invariably counted himself/herself as the 'good child' whose friend circle was also necessarily made of alike 'good' children. In the course of that narration, I had tried to understand the meaning system that each child professed which enabled such an order of identification. In this our present chapter (Ch.7), one of my points of exploration is that of children's sense of self-respect. The children were each aware of the role and importance of having a 'good image' in surviving the day-to-day demands of social life. This phenomenon they understood as (shall we say) the 'mentalities' or 'mindsets' in any given social context. Thus, as our foregoing pages has tried to demonstrate, every child had developed a sense of self-respect that he/she builds around the possession of certain qualities that they deemed worthy of having. The placing of 'worth' however differed for each child. While some saw the 'worth' in the results of the academic advancements, others saw it in building a disciplined and committed lifestyle on a daily basis; and yet another combination saw 'worth' in being smart and techno-savvy moving apace with technology ahead of their peers. To be sure, the children saw the possibility of alternative sources of pride. To a great extent, yet, under cordial family relations, the child also derived a sense of self-respect by associating his/her image with that of shared family legacies and

other family members' achievements. Such an allocation of worth, it must be pointed out, was not overlapping and often inclusive. For some children, it was necessary to have a disciplined regimented lifestyle to assure one's academic advancements, while it was not so for others. Undeniably, academic and career advancements remained the dominant category of assessing a child's future prospects. However, as seen from the renderings above, children who might not perform in this area still managed to foster a sense of worth from alternative points of inspiration for themselves.

Let us return in a final sweep to the Dharmapada story which has anchored this present chapter. I would like to say that though science and technology continued to be the preferred subject among the parents and their children, the intermingling of science and arts (the latter primarily in the form of aesthetics or even semiotics) did not capture the mind of the present generation (or even the society at large) as it did during that era of the Dharmapada story. Technology for children has now meant something with a utilitarian value that is beneficial for the world environment and people's lives. In its recreational avatar, besides, technology has become popular as heavily designed virtual media, whether in the form of television shows, multimedia learning apps and video games, which are mostly meant for mass consumption allowing limited engagement from the children in terms of their creative inputs. However, somewhere children, as found in the character of Dharmapada, still seemed motivated to master their object and subject of their interest in whatever form presented to them, whether in school or at home or anywhere else. Besides, like in the Dharmapada story, there still was an appreciation for a greater cause, higher virtues and sense of sacrifice amongst the children. Even though the dynamics of child heroism has toned down to a great extent and transformed into various form of competitions and events open for all children where they get a space to showcase their unique talents, still the idea of 'great deeds' (*Mahat Karya*) does seem to occupy their consciousness. Being able to do something good for the poor, beneficial for the society as a whole, and something 'big' that would bring happiness was invariably present in the expressions of the children encountered as also in the encouragement of their elders.

In the final analysis, is there something cultural and social about the trajectories mapped here, and in the forgoing chapters? What are the further cultural and sociological implications to be drawn from the moral and psychological universes inhabited by the children encountered in our study? What further conceptual and theoretical work is demanded for revitalizing childhood studies in India? These and some such other questions will form the basis of our concluding chapter, and hopefully help assuage any sense of misgivings or unease that the order of our narrative reconstructions in the foregoing pages and chapters might have forced one to bear. We thus move to our final concluding chapter, which will include an overview of the specific grounds traversed by our study.

Chapter 8



Beyond the Shadows of Socialization: Overview and Conclusion

As should be evident from the various foregoing chapters, my sole preoccupation has been to do meaningful research with and on children and engage systematically with how they relate to the world around them. In search of an unconstrained and informal setting, where one could observe and participate in ‘free’ conversations and interactions, I ended up accessing children inside their homes in an urban neighbourhood in Odisha. In the context of my long and sustained interactions with children within their home settings and intimate family spheres, which became the ‘life context’ in which I opened up to children’s lives, I have tried to foreground the dynamic aspects of ‘moral sentiments’ as the window into exploring the world at home as nurtured and experienced by children. Needless to say, my fieldwork was immersive and full, bursting with matters all clamouring for attention, and my interactions over a sustained period of time was always intensive and compelling. As should be obvious, rather than give in fully and entirely to the sheer multiplicity and profundity of the circumstances and situations engaged with and encountered in the field, I have chosen to deliver the substantive order of my description through the narratives and posturing’s of eight children across six households in the neighbourhood studied.

In this my concluding chapter, I propose to rehearse the ground of my thesis and provide a brief overview of its chapters. This will set the tone for a more reflective order of appraisal, which will strive to critically articulate the overall implications of this work. In particular, I will try to engage with the dimensions of ‘socialization’, both as theory/concept and as condition/process, underwriting the study of children’s lives in their family setting. Some of the core underlying issues that our study has tried to conceptualize with reference to children’s ‘moral sentimental’ life will also be addressed in the course of this chapter. In doing so, I am perhaps attempting something more than just providing a conclusion for my study; I am also trying to ‘experiment’ – as I think we

have all through the sequence of this thesis - with ways of thinking and writing about children's lives that go beyond mere orchestrations of socio-cultural life and/or ideological and discursive processes of social scientific knowledge production.

Rehearsing the Ground: An Overview of the Chapters

Keeping in mind the hermeneutic spirit of the research which entailed a continuous and simultaneous interplay between the field's experiential insights and the prevalent theoretical expositions in the very process of the development of our analytical frame, we had structured the thesis in three parts. **Part One** worked its way through three chapters (**Chs.1-3**), with the first (**Ch.1**) broadly laying out the basis of my own obsession with the world of children and encountering the shifting grounds of childhood research across various disciplines both in India and elsewhere (more elsewhere than in the context of India, to be more precise). We looked at the different traditional paradigms that have overseen the study of children, while also noting the shifts towards a 'new sociology of childhood' and other integrating moves in the direction of 'childhood studies'. Along this course, we also sought to locate our own study in the debates between 'traditional' and 'new' approaches to childhood studies, and worked our way into more person-centred or 'first-personal' perspectives on children (what we had rendered as understandings of the 'subjective child' or 'child as the first person'). Importantly, we had also noted that our study entails an 'interspersing' of the contexts of 'home' and family, which in the Indian context significantly translates into an 'adult-child proximity' or the shared space of adult-child experiences in the family setting. We accordingly worked our way through select studies on Indian childhood, noting in particular the 'frames' operative thereon which tended to brush the study of childhood under the researches on family studies and the 'Indian relational self'. In an effort to further contextualize our study, we sought to critically re-engage with the possibilities of – and for – Indian childhood studies in the family setting. This meant critically working through particular studies of children's subjectivity in Indian childhood studies and formulating a basis for more robust descriptions of the 'self' of childhood and the child in India.

In the second chapter (**Ch.2**), we took a further measure of the childhood research that takes ‘children’ as active subjects in their own right, while also addressing both on personalized register and in a more impersonal cast the challenges of doing ethnography with children. Particularly, we were interested to inhabit the grounds of ethnography, where the latter becomes the most suitable choice of method in contemporary childhood research. The chapter also detailed the various situations and circumstances that went towards shaping our research into a kind of immersive ethnography, while also reflecting on the demands of a researcher’s positionality in the course of doing ethnography with children. The latter order of reflection also worked off specific situations and challenges that arose in the context of the actual fieldwork undertaken for this study. The thickets of the methodological challenge to accessing children’s life worlds also came to be addressed in this chapter, which culminated in a further rumination on the ‘fluidities and greys in the everyday’ and the ‘multiplicity of lived dimensions’, each of which meant coming to terms with the fragmentary, partial, affective/emotional and necessarily ‘selective’ (if not determined) nature of all ethnographic work.

In **Ch.3** of **Part One** overall, we enumerated in detail the physical setting and ethos of the neighbourhood in which we carried out our fieldwork – which we christened as Sripalli (S1, for short) – while also striving to give a glimpse of ‘everyday life’ in the setting as a whole. As the chapter waded through the ‘world at home’ in the neighbourhood, we also sought to provide a descriptive understanding of the families obtaining there – relegating the more statistical bits of information to our Appendix I and II – while also trying to capture the daily rhythms of households and their children. The effort was to offer a ‘peep’ into the homes of S1 with children – literally so, considering the dual nature of the neighbourhood life as marked by bustling streets and surroundings teeming with working people and strangers during the day and the visible presence of ‘locked gates’ shutting off the houses from the world outside. We dwelt upon the broad patterns in the daily routines of the children within the ‘security’ of their homes (as indeed the ranges of the activities that the children seemed to almost compulsively pursue, albeit to the convenience and discomfort of their parents). We also noted passingly that although ‘schooling’ forms the universal language of education for the children, the latter by and large did not take great joy in studying – and this was true with

even the consistent toppers at school – often with the long tuitions, school hours and a textbook-oriented syllabus exhausting the children. Equally, we noted the folds of children's talk about their kin (their cousins especially) and school friends, combining a mixture of stories both pleasant and sad or unfortunate; while also adducing to the specificities of the qualities that the children generally deemed 'good' or appropriate. In this context, besides, the folds attaching to parents' (especially, mothers') talk about their children were also highlighted and commented upon. The chapter also further highlighted the fact that, more or less, the children of S1 grew up with a certain awareness of the larger family network and relationships. In the midst of these narrations, we had distinctly commented that, even as the children of S1 struggled to accommodate the varying influences and aspirations in life, overall it seemed as if the collocation of 'good child' (*Bhala pilla*) with 'dutiful parents' (*Daitwaan abhibhabaka*) had made the phenomenon of bringing up a child highly stressful for the various homes in the neighbourhood.

Significantly, following this generalised order of presentation, we moved on in the same chapter to a description of the 6 families and their children – 8 children in all – who formed the basis of our ethnographically nuanced framework of exposition narrating and exploring the facets of children's family life explicitly through the lens of 'moral sentiments'. This latter conceptual and theoretical lens formed the basis of the sole chapter (Ch.4) constituting Part Two of our thesis, and I shall summarize this foray presently below. These 6 families – and the 8 children in all – were those with whom I had spent the longest duration of time and had sustained and intense interactions with (although, as our Ch.3 also conceded, there were some practical challenges in the fieldwork that made us to turn the focus intensively onto children family life inside the home setting and to devote long durations of time in each family). These practical considerations notwithstanding, there was also the imperative of our theoretical and conceptual frame which required that we deploy the substantive orders of our narration pragmatically in and through the 8 children and their families. Of course, each of the 8 children and their 6 families were not covered mechanically through the substantive narration, but selectively deployed to animate the themes of our theoretical and conceptual framework. We offered a description of the 8 children and their families,

observing aspects of their individual personalities and their daily rhythms, while going to more fully account for the various situations in which the children and the families were observed and interacted. The chapter concluded with a further note on the fieldwork – indeed, the personal integuments that one brought forth both as a researcher and empathetic subject – and the ways in which one sought to both feel and be at ‘home’ with the world at home of my children subjects and their families.

Part Two, represented solely by a single chapter (**Ch.4**), marked the theoretical and conceptual basis of our study, working off primarily the idea of ‘moral sentiments’. Considering that the moral sentiments accounted for in our study majorly unfolded in the everyday family setting, it also became imperative for the chapter to animate some questions about the framing of ‘everydayness’ and the ‘study of the familial domain’ as such. As we reiterated thereon, this operative schema was not fabricated prior to fieldwork, but evolved in the course of it as one became more conscious of one’s own observational field and other immersive engagements with the children of our neighbourhood context. In many ways, the children of my ethnography were assigning a central place to ‘sentiments’ (emotional feelings and affective states, essentially) in expressing and establishing the value of the ‘family’ in their lives. Indeed, it was in confronting the challenge of addressing the seemingly mundane, uncertain and mixed social occurrences so as to capture the facets of the ‘world at home’ from the point of the children that one turned to the concept and register of ‘moral sentiments’. Accordingly, the ‘affective’ and/or emotional cores of everyday life and their bearing on one’s own fieldwork found some expression here, even as the chapter went on to crystallize aspects of the everyday dynamics of internal family relations - the various modalities of engagement with oneself and between and across family members, their moral sentimental renditions of it and so on. In particular, the idea of ‘moral sentiments’, as formally enunciated through Ch.4, allowed us a frame to lay out and explore the affective and/or emotional cores of children in the context of their family life, encapsulating at once matters of belongingness, moral responsibility, mutuality, trust, the burden of demands and the spaces of their negotiation, as also an understanding of their own individual spaces in the home. In fact, as we argued thereon, the very meaningfulness of ‘quotidian acts’ within the home came to be sharpened in this light, while also offering

a dominant lens within which to conceptualize our field data and observations about the children of our ethnography.

Having thus established the heuristic basis of our study, we moved on to **Part Three** of our thesis, where in the course of three substantive chapters (**Chs.5-7**) and different sequences of narration through the 8 children comprising our 6 families, we tried to embody the various lives of our children subjects and the moral claims underscoring them – all as rendered through our lens of ‘moral sentiments’. In fact, a tripartite schema that analytically unfolded itself through these three chapters marks an operationalizing of our concept and framework of ‘moral sentiments’. Thus, under the ethnographically obtaining rubric of ‘family feeling’ (**Ch.5**, necessarily), we tried to capture the ways in which the family and ‘home’ were invariably talked about and expressed as a place of happiness, togetherness and belonging by the children (and which were held on to in the face of squabbles and disputations and, sometimes, even in a backdrop of deep family fissures and contestations). Such an understanding of family as a space of care and trust was also deliberately worked upon and induced, a performativity in which, as we argued and tried to show through Ch.5, the children partook profusely and quite involvedly. More specifically, in the context of the chapter, we noted that within the extended family, and especially between the parents and children through the 4 case studies presented, the place of emotion was not quite only as a form of substance facilitating all interaction; rather, emotions were also a factor in the decisions internal to family interaction. We discerned in this a patterning of ‘emotional life’ that adds a certain nuance to the literature in the sociology of emotions, with forms of ‘emotional etiquette’ being seen to be equally constitutive of the contexts of family life and ‘family feelings’.

Of course, as we reiterated in the concluding discussion appended to Ch.5, it is not as though in this emotional landscape the children are not being allowed to express and display their real ‘felt emotions’. Besides, as we further recognized, this space of the display of emotions was being strategically appropriated by the children to assert and ‘succeed’ with their own demands. All the same, as we sought to emphasize, it is the emotion as perceived - and not quite the emotion felt, displayed or strategized - that influenced the decisions in the family. Having disclosed thus, we moved on in the next

two substantive chapters to illustrate further the moral grid of sentiments and emotions that the children tended to be weaving around the facets of their world at home.

Accordingly, the second aspect of the tripartite schema giving effect to our concept of ‘moral sentiments’ was the ideas of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, of being ‘responsible’ and/or ‘irresponsible’, which formed the basis of our narration through **Ch.6** primarily. As we stated, this narration marked an extension of the previous chapter’s rendition of ‘family feeling’, but also nuanced the latter by way of further deepening the engagement with children’s beliefs and perceptions, about their very ideas of good and bad, responsible and irresponsible, and the place of the affirmed sense of ‘family feeling’ in this affective/emotional complex. The chapter also wended its way through the idea of ‘mischief’, which incidentally is a common trope for rendering the specificities of children’s lives, but which finds sharper ethnographic embellishment through the orders of our narration and the situations and circumstances surrounding the children of our ethnography.

Specifically, Ch.6 traversed aspects of the ‘moral self’ of children – again through selected case studies – and in the process tried to highlight the fact that adhering to family values, upholding family integrity and sentiments, fulfilling parents’ wishes, achieving higher excellence, etc., figured as some of the important role responsibilities that the children identified with. Of course, as we acknowledged, there has been a shift in the definition of ‘sense of responsibility’ for the children, as compared to the expectations that their parents and grandparents had faced. And yet, as the chapter tried to disclose, there are some specific dimensions about ‘participation’ and ‘responsibility’ that seemed to run deeper at the level of values, sentiments and the larger understanding of the family situation as a whole at the level of the children and their families. Indeed, in looking further at the children’s moral self, we encountered the phenomenon of recurring ‘mischiefs’ by the children and the various measures taken by the parents in response to it. Where we had hitherto assumed that the phenomenon of mistakes, ‘mischief’ and disobedience can make for a reflective avenue for children to learn and rectify themselves - as also, more poignantly perhaps, presumed that ‘mischief’ necessarily contended with morality – we found that the children had a rather settling thought process of drawing

lines around permissible and non-permissible ‘mischief’, which kept them in a way ‘guilt-free’ in moving within the range of permissible mischief. Thus, as our chapter had framed the ground, this demarcation of ‘permissible’ and ‘non-permissible’ was being drawn by the children on the basis of their notions of ‘real loss’ (*khyati*) and ‘feelings’ (*bhavana*). Moreover, as we observed, this order of demarcation did not stop the children from having a categorisation of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, which (as we posited further) formed the basis of their understanding of ‘real loss’ and the ‘goodness of feeling or intention’ (*bhav*). On this register, such acts that resulted in real and irrevocable hurt or harm were necessarily bad; furthermore, the notions of ‘real loss’ and ‘well-being’ as found in the children’s conversations about themselves and their families was not merely limited to the immediate self and family context, it also reached out to include the larger society. More definitively, the children seemed to be both answering to and possessive of an idea of ‘clear conscience’.

To be sure, as our ethnography has disclosed at multiple stages of its rendition, our children subjects had various ways of evaluating their own self-image and family life, and this largely constituted the last grid of our tripartite schema operationalizing the concept of ‘moral sentiments’ as rendered through children in their home settings. In particular, through **Ch.7**, we were concerned to articulate the intricate ways in which such evaluations of worth were often woven with morally charged feelings of pride, glory, shame and so forth. This often also meant pressing claims on the future, as much a preoccupation with the parents’ as with their children - although, as we noted, a desirable sense of ‘settlement’ for their child in the future sometimes drove both the children and their parents on a mission mode. Paradoxically, as we tried to show, the idea of a good life, with one’s goals and aspirations fully met, were also deeply anchored in the child’s present; in other words, in the child’s self-image based on their own achievements and the dignity of an always-obtaining ‘family life’.

More frontally, through Ch.7, we tried to look at the complex of influences that affect children’s assessment of self and family worth. The place of strong sentiments in the complex is palpable; and, as we had argued, in prefacing them as ‘moral’ sentiments, we were seeking to show that these influences were experienced and established through

such feelings as pride and glory, shame, and a sense of humiliation. Overall, as the chapter had maintained, the children's attitude towards these sentiments tells us about the parameters they apply for evaluating the worth of their self and family life. Pointedly, as implicated by and through the logic of our presentation again through 4 children and their situations at home, the assessment of self-respect and family standing made by the children could be broken down into three interrelated realms: namely, the family past legacies, the family's current situation, and the child's potential self-image. What is more, the qualification of 'what is worth' in these three realms is not limited to personal conditions or situations, but spread over to larger, seemingly more esoteric, considerations as well. Thus, for instance, as we saw in Ch.7, in families with a certain legacy of past glory, there was general emphasis given to the family's name and fame in the locality. More complicatedly yet, a sort of particular emphasis was placed on extraordinary achievements of particular individuals who had helped in establishing or carrying forward the legacies. To be sure, while talking about the current generation's achievements in a family, there is a stress on educational and professional success, but it finds moral approbation and approval only in a condition of intimate and healthy bonding with the relatives of the extended family circle. Evidently, the location of self, family and the wider circle of relatives is intertwined in the children's current assessment of self-respect and family dignity.

Indeed, as we further went on to demonstrate – accentuated, of course, throughout our tripartite traversal through the 'moral sentimental' landscape of children's family life - every child had developed a sense of self-respect which he/she builds around the possession of certain qualities that they deemed worthy of having. The placing of 'worth' however, as we stressed throughout our narrations, differed for each child. While some saw the 'worth' in the results of the academic advancements, others saw it in building a disciplined and committed lifestyle on a daily basis; and yet another combination saw 'worth' in being smart and techno-savvy moving apace with technology ahead of their peers. To be sure, the children did see the possibility of alternative sources of pride, but to a great extent, under cordial family relations, the child also derived a sense of self-respect by associating his/her image with that of shared family legacies and other family members' achievements. Undeniably, academic and career advancements remained the

dominant category of assessing a child's future prospects. However, as seen from our renderings, the children who might not perform in this area still managed to foster a sense of worth from alternative points of inspiration for themselves.

As already stated, the framework implicating our narration as a whole emerged in the context of the themes and their underlying dynamic which constituted our ethnography with the children of an urban neighbourhood in Odisha. Doubtless, the methodological basis of the fieldwork recounted in Ch.3 gets filled up with the logic of our substantive narration through Chs 5-7, albeit laced together through the framework of 'moral sentiments' as formally enunciated in Ch.4 (or Part Two) of our thesis rendering. All the same, it is important to assert here that the framework of 'moral sentiments' – as feelings broadly embodying an affective and/or emotional core - which informed the overall narration has played a dual function, at once, of both claiming and repositioning the family in children's lives. Indeed, in the final analysis, as we asked at the end of Ch.7, is there something cultural and social about the trajectories and emotional landscapes that we have mapped here in our study? Pointedly, what are the further cultural and sociological implications to be drawn from the moral and psychological universes inhabited by the children encountered in and through our investigation? What further conceptual and theoretical work is demanded for revitalizing childhood studies in India? Indeed, it is these and such other probing questions which will form the basis of the rest of our concluding chapter. Overall, in critical perspective here is the shadow of 'socialization' hovering around studies of children as indeed of family life in general: what does the framework of socialization entail overall, and what is to move beyond its shadows? We shall go to engage with some creative suggestions about the study of 'early socialization', both from within the framework of our study and in the wider theoretical literature; and along this course also outline the contours of one's own future work in the area.

Inside the Mosaic of Belongingness: A Phenomenological Gist

Having recapitulated the ground of my thesis, and summarized its chapters in an effort to foreground the ethnography embodied here, let me try to inhabit and conceptualize

further the kind of centrality that has been attached to the orders of moral sentiments and their roles in capturing aspects of ‘the world at home’ as rendered and experienced by the children themselves. In many ways, my effort here is to get ‘inside’ the mosaic of belongingness as represented in the substantive chapters of our study and forge a kind of phenomenological gist of the traversals recorded in the space of our children.

Intimations and inflections

In the middle of my fieldwork, my professors alerted me that I was not paying enough attention to the local indigenous vernacular and cultural articulations in the field. This was a strange and puzzling situation for me. For one, being an Odia myself and with Odia as my mother tongue, I had heard the language ever since I had lived and did not quite know how to look at the language with a new found realisation. I went back to my field and my burgeoning field notes, trying to pay extra attention to the words that my subjects were using and with a motivation to look at the extra ‘life’ that these expressive usages could be bringing to the events and situations that I was witnessing and exploring.

Months later, I got an opportunity to witness an opening session of a ‘yoga-cum-habit-building’ program conducted by a self-confessed ‘international humanitarian organisation’ based out of Bengaluru, called ‘The Art of Living’ founded by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (see <https://www.artofliving.org/in-en>). This particular program was being organised for government officers belonging to ranks from top-to-bottom of the civil service hierarchy. They came from different regions, and hardly knew one another. On the starting day, I noticed that the participants were rather stiff, formal, distanced and grave, as if the situation before them seemed to be an overwhelming one. The senior officers chose to sit separately, and the junior ones sat with their faces turned away. They were all clad in informal loose clothes and had to sit down in the early hours of the day. Needless to say, such an arrangement was proving rather awkward for them. Overall, the people gathered kept themselves busy with their phones or whatever documents they had, hardly ever looking up. Interestingly, even the teacher sat quietly, without a word and never even looking directly at those who were all slowly assembling together.

Once the last participant had entered the hall, the teacher sprang into action. To begin with, there were a few friendly remarks, a quick briefing about the exercise, and some bit of induced laughter; and then, with some alacrity, the teacher moved to write down two phrases on the whiteboard: 'I belong to you' and '*Sanghachaddhwam*'. Following this, he gave a series of clear instructions - "Every single person in the room has to reach out to every other person with folded hands and after telling one's name, he/she has to utter the mentioned phrases. Every time this exchange happens, the two persons should face one another with a smile". The teacher demonstrated the process with one of the participants. Immediately, there was a lull; the participants looked confused, amused, even angry, looking at each other and shaking their heads sceptically. An argument ensued that they did not know each other, even that they did not know the meaning of '*Sanghachaddhwam*' and that the instructions given were rather unexpected. The teacher smiled and declared, "Let's first experience, and then we will analyse". A messy clatter followed. Hesitantly, the people got up. Only a few took the lead enthusiastically and frankly, while others followed shyly and cordially. Men and women moved in separate groups. Many wished only a few standing close to them and kept waiting for others to come and approach them. The teacher kept repeating, "Reach out to everyone". It continued for the next 15 minutes. In the end, the people were visibly emotional, some grinning, others serene, and some teary-eyed. This was rather overwhelming even for me to witness. Once everyone had settled down, the teacher pointedly asked, "What happened?" A few replied that they felt strangely light, free, and happy or connected. One man even explicitly said, "It was foolish to sit away in a corner with all these people in the room". And yet another person replied in Hindi, "*Ajñabion ke beech bhi itna apnapan ho sakta hai*" (There can be so much belongingness even among the strangers).

At that very moment, it struck me loud and clear. I realised that '*Apnapan*' was not a static word, but a hugely dynamic phenomenon and strangely volitional. It was not necessarily restricted to an in-group, or a group to which one identified with, but also often could be extended over to people who were strangers in an attempt to build connections. It is in this perspective that I would like to explore the application of '*Apnapan*' in my field context, and hopefully extend the terms of my appraisal of children's lives in the context of the home. The Odia version of this Hindi word is

‘*Aapanapana*’ and it was frequently used by the subjects of my field; it was quite a commonplace utterance. ‘*Aapanapana*’, as rendered, means a feeling and condition of ‘We-ness’ or ‘belongingness’. This sense of ‘belongingness’ is an important aspect guiding one’s sense of social connections and spheres of conduct, and indeed dynamically so. I believe it is important to understand the nature and significance of this construct ‘*Aapanapana*’ (or ‘belongingness’, more specifically), primarily because this sense that permeated the family altered itself with the swings of time, situation and the other’s behaviour.

AAPANAPANA: valences of belongingness

‘*Aapana*’ means ‘one’s own’ and ‘*pana*’ connotes the suffix ‘-ness’, with ‘one’s own’ becoming a state or condition or even a quality in this light. ‘*Aapanapana*’ necessarily connotes a sense of love, ‘fellow-feeling’ and ‘closeness’ and togetherness. ‘*Aapana*’ (as in case of the associate word ‘*Aapatya*’) has Sanskrit roots, traceable back to the Vedic terms ‘*Aap/ Aappo/ Aapah*’ (not to be confused with ‘*Apah*’, which means to cut-off or take away) and bears reference to ‘water’ and its divine qualities depicting life-giving, nourishing, purifying properties as compared to the love of a mother for her infant (as embodied in the Rig Vedic hymn *Aapah Suktam*). The Hindi word ‘*Apna*’, to my knowledge, is also used in their local versions in other Indian languages like Marathi and Bengali in the same sense. This sense of ‘benevolence’ and ‘affection’ is thus acknowledged as something desirable and revered.

In my field, the sense of ‘*aapanapana*’ had a highly dynamic presence, both within the family and outside, amidst more public spaces. One’s own family was undoubtedly experienced as an intimate, organic presence, although there also obtained a form of continuous engagement by way of reinforcing and recreating a sense of settled bonding. As we saw in the course of our chapters, there existed an eagerness to organise occasions of various get-togethers (*Ekathi haba*) and enacting happiness (*khusi kariba*) in harmony with each other (*mili missi*). Not quite only on these celebrative occasions, but also in mundane life on an everyday basis the ‘belongingness’ and ‘closeness’ of the family was reinstated through the habits of having ‘quality’ family time, looking out for one another, keeping details of one another’s life and so on, each of which were considered important.

Interestingly, the children of my field site asserted the state or condition of 'belongingness' as a natural and normalized 'inner feeling' at any given point, while also speaking of the need to 'build and maintain' relationships at the same time. That is to say, even though family relations were seen as something natural and primary, there was also an understanding that conscious efforts needed to be made to keep them 'alive'. Here I am reminded of an utterance, which my father's aunt used to reprimand him about for his long absences from the ancestral village, "*Samparka ta gacha bhalia. Pani nadele kan banchiba*" (A relationship is a plant that needs watering; otherwise how will it survive?). Thus, even as 'aapanapana' was something already available, it also needed constant tending by way of deliberate effort at fostering and sustaining it. This agential dimension of 'aapanapana' in a way interferes with the belongingness based on prescribed kinship relations, and thus calls for constant affirmation and reworking for the very maintenance of the existing relations, while also extending the connections over to people falling strictly outside the realms of the physical household.

One important feature that I observed about this dynamic engagement with 'aapanapana' was in the context of conflicts and disagreements. Significantly, practices and expressions of 'aapanapana' provided a kind of safety valve for the continuity of a relationship in the context of regular and deep feuds. For example, even as there was deep contestation between Mantu's parents and his father's sister over the family property (which had even led to incidences of violence involving goons), Mantu's mother still allowed her house to be used for the wedding of her sister-in-law's daughter; Mantu, besides, was often well looked after when left to the care of his aunt. Such a simultaneous show of connect and togetherness in the midst of tensions and disagreements kept the relations going overall. In fact, when I asked Mantu's mother about this simultaneous fights and the shows of affection, she seemed unflappable and calm:

What to do (*Kan kariba*)? After all, they are our own people (*Jaha hele nija loka ta*). *Karibaku ta padiba* (We have to do). They also do (*Semane bi karuchanti*). But there is no soulfulness, no deep connect from within one's mind (*Kintu mana bhitaru se atmiyata, se aantarikata nahi*). Can a relation break so easily (*Samparka ta kan ete sahaja re bhangi jaye*)? My niece as a child used to be with me with such 'belongingness' (*Bhanijita, chua bele kete aapanare misuthila*).

Despite the incidences of conflict, Mantu's mother talks fervently of her decision to continue her association with her relatives. This affirmation, as it were, is not a merely mechanical or habitual practice, but rather is discretionary in that she is aware of the changing contexts outside and the shifting feelings within her regarding the quality of the relationships. She is persistent that the soulfulness, deep connect and closeness (*aatmiyata*, *aantarikata*) she had once experienced is absent now. But, amidst all this play of emotions, she still chose to stress on the importance of 'belongingness' (*aapana*) that she continues to experience with her niece and opens her abode for the latter's wedding with some wilfulness.

Along this register, I find that the expressions like '*nijara*', '*aantarikata*', and '*aatmiyata*' serve as modalities that render the phenomenon of '*aapanapana*' dynamic. Thus, in a situation where Mantu's mother felt an absence of the sincerity of the feeling of '*aapanapana*', she chose to explain the relationship in terms of '*nijaloka*' (one's own people) or plainly '*nijara*' (one's own) so as to lay claim to a 'belongingness' that continued in a subdued fashion, while still retaining a bond of unity and sense of duty. On the other hand, '*atmiyata*' (soulfulness) and '*antarikata*' (from deep within) were used to highlight the quality of '*aapanapana*'. '*Aatmiyata*', as should be evident, comes from the word '*aatma*' which means soul; and '*aantarikata*' comes from the word '*antara*' meaning inside or within. Thus, for my field subjects, '*aapanapana*' is valued not merely because it was a sentiment of 'we-ness' obtaining between people who were related or associated in some pre-given social circles. Rather, it was important because it carried the elements of 'deep touch', 'sincerity of feeling' and a personal privileging and valuing by the people themselves at the first-person level. Such a valence, I feel, gives '*aapanapana*' a remarkable volitional characteristic. Thus, during one of my early interactions with one of the senior residents of Sripalli (S1), who happened to be a famous author and orator, I heard him proclaim: "I do not go if they (the Sripalli Residents' Association) invite me (as 'Chief Guest' at its functions). Is there any '*aatmiyata*' (closeness)? It's only a show-off that famous people have come to their function". Evidently, '*aapanapana*' is not a kind of social moral structure which makes itself available for individual psychology to enter into and inhabit. Indeed, quite realistically, it is a social moral resource that changed colours in the hands of individuals in different

times and situations. It also acted as a sentiment that enabled subjects, including the children themselves, to gauge their own and other's sincerity towards the relationships inscribing the family at home.

In fact, '*aapanapana*' could even connote a practice that seeks to build a world of 'mutuality' and 'acknowledgement' across given identities, so that it can always entail extending the essence of familial relations even to outsiders and strangers. Interestingly, in the developmental psychology literature, there is some recognition of this phenomenon, as for instance in the admission that "the child is encouraged to use 'fictive kinship' terminology to address this vast network of people that he/she encounters from a very early age, even when they may not be related" (see Sharma and Chaudhary 2009: 82). Likewise, in the context of our own ethnography, we could discern that the function of '*aapanapana*' is not only palatable within the family and its closed circles, but also is palpably present in the informal public realm. Poignantly, the sense of '*aapanapana*' picks up the familial flavours and gets projected in its operations in the informal public realm. Thus, for example, in my field, it was a practice to address the neighbour, the shopkeepers, the guards and even the strangers on the road by using the kinship terms like '*Mausa*' (uncle), '*Appa*' (father), '*Nani*' (elder sister) or '*Aja*' (maternal grandfather) and the like, depending on their age, gender and possible placement in a sense of kinship. Sometimes, the children of the neighbour, especially where movements between were frequent, would get addressed as '*ama chua*' (our children) and a close neighbour would be referred to as '*jemiti gote ghara*' (like one house/home). Thus it was not surprising that Mantu, while answering his father's query about my relationship with them, endearingly proclaimed, "She was a neighbour, but she is becoming a cousin" (especially considering that my involvement with him had been growing closer). I guess it was an understanding and operationalizing of the Hindi word '*Apnapan*' that the 'Happiness' participant at the 'Art of Living' program was referring when he uttered, "*Ajnabiyon mein bhi itna apnapan ho sakta hai*" (It is possible to have so much belongingness and closeness even among strangers).

Thus, by way of further augmenting our understanding of the valences of belongingness attaching to '*aapanapana*', let me quickly recount a nonagenarian who expressed the

following while talking about his stay with his son abroad. The declaration, arguably, invokes a sense about ‘*aapanapana*’ which is not as palpable and visible as within the homes of S1 that I accessed.

I have a 4-year-old granddaughter there. One evening I took her out for a walk. One of their neighbours was driving by. He waved at us and said ‘Hi’. Everyone says ‘Hi’ to everyone else there. This little girl beside me shouted back, ‘Hi John!’ That man must have been 40 years old. A 4-year-old child calls a 40-year-old by name and he also calls back her by name [*Laughs*]. Here it won’t do. I found that a ‘habitual relation’ [*spoken in English*]. There was no warmth in such associations. But if you see ‘*Adivasi*’ (Tribal) people worldwide, they have a communal relation, a sharing of services. A warmth of belongingness obtains ... Even for the outsiders visiting them. Abroad at my son’s place, I learnt that all high school students have to show certain hours of social service. So many students go to old age homes. These children spend a day with old people and come back. There you will see a lot of provisions for old age people. But I found that old fellows remained as lonely as ever. When I was in the Rotary Club, we made an ‘Old Age Home’ (*Jara Niwas*) here. But it remained unused and we had to make it a centre for homeless people. We did not have this concept ‘Senior Citizen’ then. In our home, grandfather and grandchildren live together, they develop an ‘emotional hunger’ [*spoken in English*] ... Today we are seeing a cultural change. In our days even the beggar and the stranger had to be addressed using the same words as our own people (*Nija Loka*).

Although, evidently, the feeling of ‘*aapanapana*’ is not directly invoked here, the allusion clearly is to that very sentiment – with the lament being necessarily about the feeling of ‘belongingness’ or ‘sharing’ being artificial in the foreign context while being held to be more natural in one’s own cultural setting (albeit also recognizing cultural changes with the space of the latter). It may be opportune here to recall an event that I was privy to, albeit occurring outside my fieldwork context and in a village 30 km from my University campus. A group of foreigners from various countries was visiting this village to understand Indian rural life. The locals and the Sarpanch (village chief) hardly knew anything about the background of the foreigners, but still hosted them generously, even letting the strangers have a close look at their homes and into their everyday lives. Predictably, the foreigners were quite moved by this open acceptance, and more so by the unrestrained personal involvement of the villagers in each other’s life. One of the younger men in the group wondered pensively, “Why did they give us so much importance? How come everyone is so free with everyone else? Why do we not have

this affection in our place?” To this, an Argentinian man in his late 40s promptly replied, “We don’t trust belongingness. We have forgotten how to build it”.

Evidently, ‘*aapanapana*’, as the warmth of belongingness, is hardly a static phenomenon to be felt and experienced among people who are related or bonded in close circles of kinship and friendship. Indeed, despite its deemed essential nature, it was never experienced as something that could be ever be taken for granted. Rather, it was something that individuals in the interactive context had to acknowledge and constantly express and enact in the right spirit in order to build and maintain their day-to-day relationships. More sharply, ‘*aapanapana*’ provided one with a frame to address, organise and advance relationships within as well as outside the family, while also allowing for continuous and conscious modifications and readjustments of emotions and sentiments that constituted the world at home.

On the ‘morality’ of mixed emotions: further disquisitions

Within the contours of our ethnography as a whole, the ‘good’ was necessarily a happy thing, and the ‘bad’ was something that brought sorrow and regret. As we saw chiefly in Ch.6, the children, especially the younger ones, often evaluated something as ‘good’ that which pleased the parents and as ‘bad’ that which hurt the parents. Sometimes, the word ‘loss’ (*khyati*) was used, instead of sorrow (*dukha*), to represent a situation of misery. The elder children especially were reflectively insistent on harmony, trust, integrity, kindness, mutuality and moral responsibility as the valued criteria of goodness, thereby indicating the need for leading a benevolent life with others and for being conscious of others’ needs, feelings and opinions, all of which are seen as forming the basis of a ‘*sukha o shanti ra jibana*’ (a happy and peaceful life). Accordingly, being conscious of others’ sentiments (*bhavana*) was essentially a desirable quality that an individual ought to develop and must be encouraged to do so. The inherent goodness in the individual emotion and the goodness of society were peculiarly interlinked; the ‘good’, being a source of happiness and peace, was rendered beneficial for both the individual and the society.

But this gist is only one part of the story. Surely, it is not that there was always a complete emotional decorum within the family and no breach in the decency of the world at home. In reality, there was a mixed and rather confounding picture. As we saw particularly in Ch.5, on the one hand, while the child is often taken to task for showing anger, misbehaving with elders, not helping siblings or cousins etc., the children also abhorred those situations when the adults in the home resorted to fighting without resolving the matters peacefully. On the other hand, expressions of ‘raw’ emotions were never stifled, even if discouraged. There was an allowance for children to throw tantrums, sulk and ‘create a scene’ even in the presence of outsiders. Moreover, in the case of the adults themselves, it was common to have a feat of temper loss, breaking down in front of others, and so on. A severe scolding of children, and at times light spanking, in the presence of relatives and friends was not uncommon. These forms of behaviour, while certainly not encouraged, were yet not seen as anything uncompromisingly insulting for the individual involved or embarrassing for the people around. Rather, what I observed within the home was that there was some slackness in taking offence. Two important phrases that I came across pertaining to this were ‘*katha dhariba*’ and ‘*besi/bhari bhabiba*’. ‘*Katha*’ means ‘talk’, and ‘*dhariba*’ means ‘to hold on’. Woven together, this necessarily meant a condition of clinging on to what someone else might have done or said and even attributing undue intentions behind actions. Often, my subjects (and specifically the adults) advised, ‘*Katha dharantini*’ (one should not hold on to talks, words really, or events) or ‘*Ete chota katha kan dharuchu*’ (Why are you holding on to such silly/trivial talks or events?). The tendency of seeing or attributing undue intentions behind people’s actions or holding on to such thoughts for too long was considered as something undesirable, and as an ‘immature’ form of habit - strictly, in the colloquial, as ‘*abujha*’ (lacking understanding) or ‘*pilaliyami*’ (connoting ‘childish’ behaviour). In this sense, there was a deliberate and concerted attempt to ignore the assertion of intentions behind others’ words and speech (and even more so with reference to attributing anything malicious to people or circumstances).

Similarly, whenever the children complained about their teachers or friends, their parents usually used the expression, ‘*Tu besi bhabuchu*’ (You are thinking too much), primarily in order to divert the child’s attention from the unhappy feelings. This same expression

was also used between friends (among the children) when they wanted to resolve misunderstandings between them, “I did not mean at all. *Tu bekar tare esabu bhabuchu* (You are unnecessarily thinking all these)”. Such situations were hence not considered real occasions either for feeling bad or being sad. In other words, this deferring of the moral gesture of assigning intentionality, as indeed the assumption of innocence with reference to those immediately around at home, seemed to assure that the unruly or unpleasant forms of behaviour would often be perceived as being free from all malicious intentions and always amenable to correction with time. At any rate, within the home, there was always no necessity for causing individual unhappiness and/or social tension. I particularly here recall the use of two common adages, which shows the extent to which this framework – a kind of ‘benevolence’ or, more staidly, the grant of a ‘benefit of doubt’ - prevailed in my fieldwork context. One is the saying ‘*Kiye kaha mana katha jani pariba?*’ (Who can know what is on someone’s mind?) and the other ‘*Nara maya Narayananku agochara*’ (The illusions created by men are incomprehensible to God). Let us pursue this assorted emotional landscape further.

Doubtless, this phenomenon of deferring the ‘taking-on’ of insults and/or ignoring the supposedly ‘bad’ intentions behind people’s actions poses a challenge in locating intentionality in the forms of behaviour being addressed, as indeed ‘the world at home’. It also calls into question the central propositions of any micro-sociology intent on pursuing the meaning of the intentions behind human actions. While the latter problem can certainly be tidied over theoretically, the situation in sheer empirical terms complicates for us the ground of description of the ‘good and bad’ behaviour as found and understood in our ethnographic context. Very often, the individual child’s ‘bad’ behaviour like being demanding, unaccommodative or aggressive were viewed as a matter of habit, a personality trait or a mood swing owing to situational pressures or some misunderstanding. In fact, both the children and the adults avoided assigning any deliberate intentionality or conscious effort behind such behaviour. Indeed, as we saw, parents often excused the children’s misconduct as innocent and/or as a passing mood; so did the children in talking about the quarrels and fights of the elders at home. These were all often seen as temporal, situational or habitual, and the people were all hopeful

of their resolution over time with consequent realizations on everybody's part (whether children or elders in the family).

Interestingly, this seeming attribution of innocence or even 'benefit of the doubt' was not only granted to all the members of the family, but also freely applied to oneself, especially by the younger children as we saw in the Ch.6 clearly. The children assumed themselves and their friends as 'good children' who could be separated from the 'bad children'. The latter (that is, 'bad children') were those who repeatedly and 'knowingly' indulged in such mean acts that would bring discomfort to others; and, what is more, this moral perception was being held even as they saw themselves and their own friends as those who engaged in constructive work and indulged only in such pranks that did not bring any substantial 'loss' or damage to anyone. Importantly, this frame of thought, seemingly 'habitual' and yet moral emotional at the same time, was also being extended over to such moments within the family where the child had been 'caught' (*sic*) causing 'real' trouble to the parents and unhappiness to others. For example, Vinayak was visibly shocked when his mother said that he had become very naughty and troublesome. Upon listening to this admonishing remark, he even entered into an argument with his mother, demanding an explanation of the fact about how his mother, who had always been saying that he was a 'good boy', was now attributing a troublesome quality to him. For Vinayak, clearly, 'good' children's actions did not and could not cause trouble to anyone. In fact, among the elder children whom I had intensively studied (like Sania and Atman, in their respective families), they were categorical that they did not hesitate to assert their demands and/or show their tantrums, because (as they believed) it did not 'really' hurt their parents or cause them any sorrow; even more, that they (the elder children specifically) did not see themselves as guilty of anything wrong. Moreover, even when I confronted the children in those very situations where their parents seemed visibly angry with them, the former (that is, the children) in all sincerity replied that their parents were angry because of other reasons like a fight elsewhere or work pressure, and that this anger was being vented out on them (namely, the children at home).

This created an interesting situation of 'mixed' moral sentimental life, seemingly incoherent in children (but obtaining, as well, in the context of adult lives). Specifically,

with reference to the children, considering that they were seen to be in a stage of incomprehensibility (*abujha*), it looked natural for the parents and the relatives to forgive or allow some actions of assertiveness and/or ‘mischief’, while hoping that with age the child would come into her (or his) own sense of self-realisation or self-comprehension (*Appe Bujhiba, Nije Bujhiba*). In my ethnographic context, the children too seemed to subscribe to this view of a ‘gestation period’ for self-realisation. The younger children continuously asserted their moral freedom on the grounds that ‘little children’ did mischief out of sheer ignorance (and never intentionally) and that with time, in the future as children grew up, they would become more ‘responsible’ about their forms of behaviour. The elder children, though, also asserted the need for proper timely guidance in helping a child to develop a deeper understanding of his/her action.

This did not mean that there was no category of ‘bad’ or unbecoming conduct. Wherever any negative or malicious intentionality was discernible in an action, it was almost immediately classified as ‘bad’ and the person branded as a ‘bad person’. Thus ‘bad’ was something that was committed with the knowledge of the doer, and thereby deserving unhappy reactions from others and possibly also invoking some sense of guilt in the doer later. But the unintentional and innocent mistakes and forms of misconduct were to be overlooked by others and not pursued as unhappy situations, even if ultimately they are not ‘perfect’ circumstances in daily life. In reality, the prioritisation of self-realisation or self-comprehension (*Appe Bujhiba, Nije Bujhiba*) on the part of the doer (that is, the one guilty of the misconduct) over branding by others created an interesting intersubjective situation of smoothening the feelings of pain, hurt and sorrows between people and relations within the home. Any form of ‘good conduct’ (*bhala byabahara*) would certainly be that which had clear intentions of bringing comfort and joy for others and was deliberately encouraged as a form of lived habit or practice.

Widening the Lens: The Shadows of Socialization and Beyond

Without doubt, the everyday realm that I encountered in the course of my fieldwork – as indeed the privileging of the ethnographic contexts that I did - presented me with a reality that challenges what the sociologist Dennis Wrong (1961) has termed the ‘oversocialized

conception of man' (Wrong 1961). As my early chapters recorded, I was often struck by a feeling of 'hanging in the middle' during my fieldwork and outside of it. At a given moment of action, in the very point of its enactment (especially when specific motivations are getting somewhat realised or reoriented for the better), where any decision and its impact are still evolving and the scope of sustained reflection on the action in question is not materially available, how does a researcher arrive at his/her conclusion(s)? Circumstantially, of course, there is a lot that can be described and a meaningful narrative or 'story' - even one sociologically relevant - can be constructed. But, in the final analysis, one has to make an allowance for the spirit of spontaneity that pervades all moments of life, whether habitual or deliberately enacted. The researcher is obliged to open to the various and manifold moments of seemingly contradictory choices and multiple 'moral' worlds. Any conclusive rendering, at best, indicates a certain possibility about extant forms of life, about the courses of events, actions and meanings, and hardly ever their finalisation or concrete embodiment in a fixed and regular pattern.

All the same, in every context of narration, whether lived and/or represented, some form of 'typifying' becomes an ongoing affair, ever continuous and an infinite process. In what follows, I would like to address aspects of this complexity, not quite only in the context of multiple exposures owing to compound (or manifold) group affiliations and situations but also in the context of face-to-face conversations as enacted and represented in the surfaces of our work, in the hope that the conceptual and theoretical moves underscoring our investigation will get sharper and more comprehensive justification. Such an order of appraisal is imperative, because (as should be evident throughout the course of our study) we have constantly resisted 'oversocializing' our 'objects' of study and the attendant contexts of narration, albeit recognizing through and through that the 'world' being probed – the 'world at home' or the family as delivered by and through children – constitutes a 'primary' locale of socialization of subjects in the social order of things.

Moving beyond an 'oversocialized' conception

Dennis Wrong, in the paper referred at the start of this main section, candidly observes that man is “social but not entirely socialized” (see Wrong 1961: 191). Pointing explicitly to Freud, he says that people do not succeed in acquiring the ‘superego’; what is more, that, given a chance, if they can escape an external authority, they do guiltlessly commit such actions that might not seem appropriate from the standards of the superego (ibid.: 186). Wrong, obviously, was addressing the key issue of the sociologists’ view of man as a ‘social animal’, which he (Wrong) also frames as the ‘Hobbesian question’ of “How is social order possible?” or, as rendered in social-psychological terms, “How is it that man becomes tractable to social discipline?” (ibid.: 184). Wrong strongly argues that sociologists have subscribed to a rather exaggerated conception by way of understanding a ‘socialised’ man as someone completely attuned to social rules and norms through the process of ‘internalisation’ and ‘acceptance seeking’ (ibid.: 186-88). Such an understanding, he explains, was propagated under the sign of ‘modern sociology’ so as to counter the larger tendency of totalising partial understandings of man. As Wrong puts it with explicit reference to the latter dominant tendency, in order to facilitate theorisation, man was projected as a political, economic, religious, etc. category, as if the partial aspect is all that a man could have and (what is more) that such a particular motivation could help explain all aspects of social life (ibid.: 190).

Importantly, even as he admits to the ‘oversocialized conception of man’ as a counterpoint to the tendency of totalising partial understandings of man, Wrong also alerts us to the fact that the ‘oversocialized conception’ leaves the process of ‘internalisation’ and ‘acceptance seeking’ unproblematised and accordingly restricts the scope of ‘dialectics’ and human agency. In other words, for Wrong, modern sociologists tend to commit the same mistake of universalising one part of the story and leaving out the other part (ibid.: 191). Thus, as he strongly notes:

On the one hand, socialization means the ‘transmission of the culture’, the particular culture of the society an individual enters at birth; on the other hand, the term is used to mean the ‘process of becoming human’, of acquiring uniquely human attributes from interaction with others. All men are socialized in the latter sense, but this does not mean that they have been completely moulded by the particular norms and values of their culture (ibid.: 192).

Wrong thus urges sociologists to move beyond, seeking a more evolved framework of analysis which would give space (as I reinterpret his injunction) to the various ‘moral moorings’ of agents and addressing the multiple group affiliations that they find themselves in a social world (see also Jaaware 2019: esp. Ch.7; and Guru and Sarukkai 2019: esp. Ch.2).

Restricting myself to the space of one’s own work, for instance, in the course of my fieldwork I came across a few households which were obviously Odia, having retired from the Odisha state government jobs, but followed typical (one might say – and I realize I am being essentialist here) ‘Andhra Pradesh (AP) culture’, whether it was in food, traditional house decorations, rituals, and attire. When I did broach the same to the members of one such household, I was gently told that they belonged to the south of Ganjam district where the border touched the state of AP. Their native village is one of the border areas, which basically belonged to a princely community from AP, but it fell inside the state border of Odisha in 1936 when the state came into existence as a province in British India. This had led to protests against the village’s inclusion in Odisha and a demand made to be included in AP, but to no effect. Gradually, as I was told, the village people had all come to be identified as Odia, while still maintaining their ‘AP culture’. As the old man who narrated this bit of history told me, in a gesture of hybrid identification: “We are Odias and every bit Andhra families”. In yet another interesting conversation that I had with the nonagenarian, who incidentally was a retired professor of philosophy, he started narrating about his beef-eating experience abroad. Across the space of his home, I had noticed that his wife practiced strict a form of religiosity and even observed extra-purificatory measures the day non-vegetarian food was being consumed. His German friends, as I was told, had confronted him about his beef-eating habit, being a Hindu, but (as he disclosed) he had affirmatively replied: “But it is not a Hindu Cow!”

Everyday life is replete with examples where people continuously explore ‘new’ ways of being in both old and new situations. There is no accounting of the multiple group affiliations and cultural ascriptions that people are often exposed to – indeed live through - and the manifold ways and habits of thought and practice that people invariably

acquired. Especially in the familial setting of one's home, the sheer intimacy and informality of the domestic sphere allowed for a number of shifts and displacements, where the borders of our received categories and structures remained open and privy to negotiations and to the 'freedom' of individual wills, emotions and interests.

Here, in the context of this altered conception and baulking against any 'oversocialized' view, I would like to add one more example from my ethnographic context in order to place in perspective the subtle changes that situations gradually introduced into both individual and family's understanding of their location as indeed state of being within the world across the home. In Ch.5, to recall, I had spoken about Luv and Kush's 10th standard examination issue. We saw that the twins, who were both quite studious with a record of above-average scores, secured a result which was almost 10% less than their expectation in the final board examination owing largely to the state government's decision to change the examination and its marking pattern. Given their below par performance, the twins were both forced to give up their dreams of getting admission into the top colleges of the city. Juxtaposed against this, I would now like to allude to Atman's situation, where in the 10th board examination he had scored about 10% more than his average performance and expectation and which had enabled him to get admission into a 'good' college in the city. Of course, in alluding to this contrast, what I am pointing towards is not quite about how various people perceived of the children in their changed circumstances. To be sure, those who knew Luv and Kush (neighbours, teachers and relatives) partook in their disappointment and sorrow, and also retained a strong faith in the twins' sense of discipline and higher standards. Similarly, those who knew Atman were very happy for him, and yet cautioned him not to get carried away but rather think of it as God's grace for giving him a new opportunity to build his life.

More pointedly, it seems to me that the situation deeply affected the self-perception of the children themselves. There was a visible loss of confidence in both Luv and Kush. Luv went on the back foot about choosing the sciences stream for his higher studies as he perceived that he lacked the calibre to succeed in it; as for Kush, he started feeling that there was a difference between state board and central (or international) board teaching methods and also that the 'English medium' schools perhaps had better teaching

protocols as their students always performed better and scored higher. Palpably, these were self-perceptions about ‘self-worth’ that had never occurred to Luv or Kush earlier as they attended a successful private Odia medium school that was well-known for its performance and discipline. Atman, on the other hand, approached his college with a fresh enthusiasm, even proactively exploring a career in engineering.

Quite certainly, given the mixed and passing nature of such sentiments and situations, it might not be possible for me to explore the issue to its optimum scale here; the issue also borders on certain ‘class’ perceptions, lifestyles and ‘strategies of cultivation’ that, for instance, has been broached in different contexts (see Lareau 2011 and Sherman 2017 for the American context; May and Dawson 2018, as also Irwin and Elley 2011, for the British context; more generally, see Morgan 1996 and 2011). Rather, I would like to maintain that, considering people’s variegated value choices and attendant moral complexities - which, incidentally for me, is a given about all human subjects, whether adults or children - it was difficult to base one’s grounds of inquiry into everyday life on any kind of fixed or sociologically-mediated typifications about the patterns of social life or even sociality/sociability. Besides, as we will see in course, even if one were to resort to mediations of the sociological sort (say, in terms of caste and class, or even regional specificities stemming from the Odia cultural context), these cannot be forwarded independent of individual appraisals or assessments whatsoever. As my professor has kept reminding me, what possibly mark out the ‘human’ as the object of the humanities and social sciences is less the fact of ‘social’ and/or any other kind of ‘determination’, but the capacity to ‘steer’ – that one is never a mere ‘bystander’ in a scheme of things, but have to necessarily steer (see Hegde 2018: esp. pp.182-83). Indeed, it has been this agential dimension and the varied manifestations of this in the context of children’s lives primarily within the home that I have tried to capture in the foregoing pages. Needless to say, it was only by means of attending to the subtler and perhaps softer aspects of ‘moral sentiments’ and their affective cores that one was able to arrive at a more immersive and consensual understanding of the dynamics of family life and its continuity as perceived and experienced by children.

More on the surfaces of the ‘everyday’ and the agential

Having broached the theme of the ‘oversocialized conception’ and the problem of reduced categorisation, as it were, I will now like to take a step further and talk about one of the core elements in everyday life engagements which is challenging of all modes of ‘typification’ in empirical studies specifically; namely, that of face-to-face interaction, both in the context of the researcher and informants/respondents. In this context specifically, I would like to make a brief appraisal of what the social theorist Frederic Vandenberghe (2016) has postulated as ‘moral sociology’ in the context of both the basic framework of the discipline and the practitioners of its craft (namely, sociologists *per se*). According to this scholar: “From the point of view of the sociology of morality, moral positions can and have to be explained in terms of social positions within the social structures and its corresponding discourses” (Vandenberghe 2016: 6). He subscribes to the view that ‘morality’ in sociology is at the same time a “collectively shared cultural order” and something that is “learned and internalised” (*ibid.*: 5). Accordingly, in order to study morality, one has to address this dual aspect - at once of being something external as well as internal, of being the (structuring) condition and (structured) consequences.

Interestingly, as a solution to this ‘conundrum’ (as he terms it), Vandenberghe proposes the ground of a “descriptive ethics”, alerting that, while questions of ethics and judgments belong properly to the domain of philosophy, the sociological treatment of these open up the scope of everyday actors’ reflections and their reasoning. He openly posits that sociologists, as actors, are bound to enter into appraisals of daily life and impression-making. Consequently, he argues for a kind of balance between the claims of “professional morality” and “lay morality” for sociologists. As he puts it: “With sociological concepts circling in and out of the life-world into academia, and back, both are profoundly intertwined (*ibid.*: 7). In addition, Vandenberghe points out that, unlike philosophers who mostly deal with an ideal and perfect situation where judgments are fully articulate and clear, the sociologists deal with situations that are “real worlds” where situations are rather ‘messy’ (*ibid.*: 8). Sociologists, in their very investigations, have to observe actions, decisions, and evaluations in ordinary situations of life; and what is more, that: “This transition from normative to empirical is only possible if one does not

oppose philosophy to sociology, but rather, integrates them into something like a descriptive ethics” (ibid.: 8).

Now, it is precisely this challenge of the description of everyday ordinary moralities that a researcher can (or ought) to undertake – and upon which the very idea of a ‘descriptive ethics’ is based – that I would like to problematize especially in the context of ‘face-to-face’ interactions. For Vandenberghe, of course, ‘face-to-face interactions’ constitute the core means of engaging with the field, what he terms “participant evaluation” (Vandenberghe 2016: 10). To be sure, much earlier on in the discipline, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann had struggled to bring together the everyday ‘face-to-face’ interactions that evades social patterning – as the authors’ observed, “the pattern cannot sustain the massive evidence of the other’s subjectivity that is available to me in the face-to-face situation” (Berger and Luckmann 1971: 44) – and the ‘typificatory schemes’ which they claimed sustains everyday life and its routines. This latter space they rendered as follows: “The reality of everyday life contains typificatory schemes in terms of which others are apprehended and ‘dealt with’ in face-to-face encounters” (ibid.: 45). Indeed, by way of clarifying the point, Berger and Luckmann had sought to explain that ‘typification’ accords a certain degree of ‘anonymity’ to a person’s individuality, in that certain aspects of their conduct are seen as “resulting from this typification”, although they may yet “in the plenitude of expressivity of the face-to-face situation ... constantly ‘break through’ that anonymity and manifest themselves as a unique and therefore atypical individual” (ibid.: 46). Moreover, as Berger and Luckmann sharply remind, this dynamism of ‘atypicality’ and ‘typification’ occurs ‘reciprocally’ in the context of “consociates with whom [one] interact[s] in face-to-face situations and others who are mere contemporaries”; and consequently they refer to the

social reality of everyday life as [-] apprehended in a continuum of typifications ... [a]t one pole [of which] are those others with whom [one] frequently and intensively interact in face-to-face situations [and] at the other pole are highly anonymous abstractions, which by their very nature can never be available in face-to-face interaction (ibid.: 47-48).

They expressively reiterate that the categorisation of one another gets constituted on mutually responsive grounds, in the sense that the categories of one another gets affected

and acknowledged by the exchanges and specificities revealed in a given context of face-to-face interaction.

Indeed, here like Vandenberghe as traversed above, Berger and Luckmann assume that face-to-face interaction gives a determinate point of entry for gaining access to each other's subjectivity. My own experience in the field, however, had been of a different subjective landscape, at once encountering double meanings, echoes of silence, and perplexing turns of discourse often incorporating suppressed and/or random utterances. In such interactive and experiential contexts, it seemed farfetched to ascertain a purpose, meaning or intention. Let me illustrate with a simple example from my fieldwork. One day in one of the old ladies' meet that I used to attend during my fieldwork, one of the women took me aside and started inquiring about my background. She directly asked if I was a Brahmin by caste. At that very moment, another older woman who had overheard the line of questioning upbraided the former for her prying habits: "You are on a perpetual match-making mode. You need to change with time". The woman who had posed the direct question with me was obviously taken aback and patiently clarified that all she wanted to know was if I was a relative of a family which she knew (while going on to give all the details of the family in question). I casually maintained that I did not know any such family, and soon turned to other matters. While returning to my home, however, I was accompanied by yet another woman who happened to know my family well. She cautioned me to be careful about giving my personal details to all and sundry in the field and especially to the lady who was inquiring me. I was further informed that a couple of the ladies had already planned to approach my parents with a marriage proposal in mind for me. It was certainly not hard on my part to guess that some of the women transacted with a vague intention of arranging marriage matches, but equally none of them were ever explicit or carried on the effort with alacrity. Their possible motives and my speculated indifference all remained on the brink, unspoken and unconfirmed.

At such moments of incomprehensibility and vague hints of disclosure, the mutuality of the interaction seemed to be grounded on a certain unknown faith and respect for the occasion and a sentiment of empathy for the persons in context. In what might seem an

excessive gesture, I would here like to invoke the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' famous understanding of ethics as the 'first philosophy' (see Cohen 1987: 14-16), whereby he (Levinas) asserts that 'ethics' as designating a respect for others precedes knowledge or comprehension of others in our social encounters. Indeed, whatever else the notion may involve, 'ethics' necessarily involves acting with regard to another person or people; moreover, even as some may discern, within ethics, a regard for the self, this latter notion cannot be regarded as mutually exclusive from the former notion designating a capacity for acting with regard for others. Thus, as Levinas formulates the ground (in a short and crisp reflection):

To be an I [-] signifies not to be able to slip away from responsibility. This surplus of being, this exaggeration which we call to be an I, ... is realized as a turgescence of responsibility. The putting into question of the I by the other makes me solidary with the other in an incomparable and unique way ... The unicity of the I is the fact that no one can answer in my place. Responsibility which empties the I of its imperialism and egoism ... does not transform it into a moment of the universal order. ... To discover in the I such an orientation is to identify I and morality. The I before another is infinitely responsible. The other who provokes this ethical movement in consciousness ... involves a surplus for which intentionality is inadequate" (Levinas 1986 [1963]: 353, emphasis added).

In his path-breaking work, *Totality and Infinity* (1969 [1961]), Levinas explores the 'irreducibility of the other' and the nature of separateness in face-to-face interaction (see also Levinas 1986 [1963]). Considering that my own engagement with this figure and his work is hopelessly incomplete and unsustained, allow me to further quote summarily from a devoted translator of Levinas' work:

... the subject's ego cannot reach in or reach out to be or anticipate the Other's ego. This inability, however, is not merely an epistemological or ontological failure, a problem of knowledge or a limitation of being. Indeed it is not a failure. The oncoming character of the Other, the Other *qua* future, ... is not merely unforeseeable, which it would be from the point of view of the knowing or grasping ego, it is not merely a question of craft and ruse, the tactics of war, rather the Other is *better* than the ego, and thus exerts moral demands on the ego. The I is responsible not only to know the Other, or to share an understanding of the world which the Other also shares, but is responsible to respond to the very alterity of the Other, to an alterity which is always on the verge of presence but never comes to presence, is never reducible to the phenomenality of the face. The face is not, properly, a phenomenon ... but a plasticity or enigma which pierces phenomenality with command, from a future which is never present though infinitely close to the present. This oncoming character of the Other ... is also what Levinas calls 'expression', a meaning-giving which overdetermines any

meaning-given. At the same moment, furthermore, the Other forces upon the egoist subject a past that was never within the subject's powers of presencing or making present. That is to say, in the face of the Other, goodness emerges as the responsibility of the subject which has *always already* been responsible, prior to any explicit agreements, prior to even the subject's ability to welcome the Others (Cohen 1987: 18-19, emphasis in original).

In this and such other annunciations of ethics as the 'first philosophy', Levinas solves for me a puzzle that I carried in my head, namely, "To what did my ethnographic subjects respond when they actually did not understand my work convincingly?" I was always surprised by the trust and confidence shown by the subjects in my unaccomplished future. It also reminds me of something very basic that is practiced almost in every community I have come across or heard about, that is, parents always encourage an infant or a toddler to greet people around them, even when the act hardly holds any meaning for the former; what is more, gradually the child learns to wave at people even when she/he is seeing a 'complete' stranger. To be sure, we all have this trace where we have learnt to accept the other before questioning his or her presence. All the same, in moving on to the discussion on the inadequateness and incompleteness of the present moment of an interaction and the face of the other (in the light, particularly, of an unrevealed future), I would like to narrate the following course of an event in my field with an intention of elucidating the point in perspective.

One of the houses that I visited in the neighbourhood was inhabited by two brothers with their children, all of whom were in college or in employment. They also had a male relative staying in the same neighbourhood. The family in question often criticised this relative for his supposed habit of taking bribes from all and sundry. However, the man appeared to me very kind, approachable and jovial, and even helpful. He was also very hard-working, with a couple of awards from his government department and the administration. I took some interest in the man's work as it was similar to the responsibilities I had shouldered when I had been employed; and, I found his narrations genuine. Given the situation, none of his relatives ever spoke about their disgust for his habits in his face. The circumstance was even more awkward when the man's wife and children were around, as they had no knowledge of the man's supposedly corrupt habits. The relatives', by and large, remained divided over their assertion of whether the wife

was complicit or innocent; some believed that it was impossible for his wife to be ignorant of her husband's practices and some thought that she was a simple lady with hardly any exposure to the ways of the world. However, all these assertions fell silent whenever the wife or the children entered the room. On one occasion, in the context of a casual discussion with the children of the man, I started talking about various social issues, including public corruption. Both his children, one of whom was in college, expressed their anger and shock over the various scams that were in the news those days and discussed the details trying to fill in the gaps. I began to feel that it was probable that actually their father was innocent.

A few weeks later there was a whiff of some vigilance notice to the man. The latter maintained that he had many shares in the stock market and that his investment in a friend's business had fetched him additional incomes. He claimed that he had been made a victim of departmental politics as he had not consented to being part of a larger corruption that the administration seemed to indulge in. The episode, obviously, strained the man, and yet he remained his normal self, open to all, prompt to help and sincere about his duties. Once I tried to open up the issue with his wife, who went on to calmly note: "Everyone has their own intelligence and they will act accordingly. There are many things in life to attend to. One cannot sit over one thing". It was difficult for me to gauge the exact meaning of the statement that she made as it could have been spoken equally for the relatives and even her husband. I could not fathom about whom she was holding responsible for her discomfort or whom she was actually supporting. At times, surely, I even felt that the man's unusual and outstanding success might have bred suspicion among the relatives who were unaware of the many possible ways of making money in the financial market and also perhaps that the man was actually a victim of office politics. Even when the charges labelled against him were dismissed, the relatives and neighbours were convinced that heavy bribes had been paid by the man to exonerate himself. As far as the man and his family were concerned, their everyday life seemed to go on as always. Beyond a point, there was quite no way of making out what actually had happened.

About a couple of years later when I visited the man, he was posted in a remote area. There was a considerable decrease in the grandeur of the house and their lifestyle. The

man and his wife explained their situation in terms of the growing expenses of all their children who were in higher education at that time, as also recent health problems that the wife had developed. During this interaction, our discussion moved over to my experience of campus and student politics. To my surprise, the man seemed to be well-informed about university history in India and about campus politics. He was also up-to-date with all the details about various activities in the major universities. I sensed here an opportunity to enquire about his 'office politics'. The man opened up about the various cases of money-laundering and favouritism that were then under investigation, and, while hinting at the regularisation of bribery along the hierarchy about a decade ago, submitted that with digitalisation, standardisation of operations and increased vigilance the old habits had been given a serious blow. When I further probed him about whether vigilance could become a mechanism of harassment by way of targeting the innocent, the man chuckled and enigmatically exclaimed: "If they find an innocent! People know what they do. Sometimes, they are ignorant of the 'real faces' of people (*asali chehera*). You join an office with faith, not ready to fight, but willing to please".

Within the inner circles of his relatives, the man remained branded as before, as somebody corrupt and dishonest. In the neighbourhood as a whole, though, the people were mostly tight-lipped and maintained a studied indifference, running together stories of the man as being a victim, a fighter of sorts and as being complicit. Within the everyday modes of knowing, there was quite no way of knowing the truth. I had to leave with an unsettling feeling wherein, integrating the man and his family's story, I could neither let go of my speculations nor my 'benefit of doubt'. The integration, as it were, had to be open enough not only to address the multiplicity of presence, but also the unavailability of the 'truth' as indeed the accompanying uncertainties of alterity. Amidst this flux and flow of life and circumstance, the words of one of my Yoga teacher as expressed in English come to mind: "Yoga is alignment, but not in the sense that the unfathomable complexity ceases to be complex. It is all about touching the *ease of the complex*" (emphasis added). To be able to describe this 'ease of the complex' – especially with reference to life as experienced on an everyday basis and not quite as a project - remains a challenge for me as a field researcher and as a common person. To repeat after Levinas (and I quote all over again);

The *I* is responsible not only to know the Other, or to share an understanding of the world which the Other also shares, but is responsible to respond to the very alterity of the Other, to an alterity which is always on the verge of presence but never comes to presence, is never reducible to the phenomenality of the face (Cohen 1987: 18).

Surely this move can be extremely productive for sociology and anthropology, but – and this is important – it also attests to the imperative for freeing oneself from overly deterministic models of knowledge and practice (cf. also Das 2007: esp. Ch.1). I will return to this theme in a subsequent final section.

Of fidelity and attunement: more on belongingness and ‘being attached’

The anthropologist Jarrett Zigon (2014) has proposed that we move beyond existing philosophical frameworks being brought to the study of moralities and ethics, especially those that “[de]limit what we might recognize as moral experience beforehand”, and urges that we consider “a broad and open framework that allows us to discern the diverse and oftentimes wide-ranging moral claims, acts and dispositions we may find in the world” (Zigon 2014: 16). He astutely reminds us that “most moral lives and ethical projects – what we might call moral experience – are lived according to an entirely other set of concepts that are concerned with dwelling in the world, that is, with expanding, maintaining, repairing, or even disentangling from constitutive relationships” and suggests ‘attunement’ and ‘fidelity’ as “ontological conditions for this moral way of being-in-the-world” (albeit recognizing that others may “express this way of being in terms of love, hope, risk, care, neglect, acceptance, struggle, fair, normal, joy, getting by, bearable, or friendship”) [ibid.: 27-28]. While the larger theoretical apparatus guiding this work need not concern us here, there is yet something in Zigon’s suggestion that resonates with our own work as represented in this thesis. Of course, our ethnographic interlocutors have been children; and indeed, as we discovered in the context of the ‘world at home’, they (that is, the children) could not be divorced from their parents and the lived reality of the home.

In fact, our foregoing discussion of ‘*aapanapana*’ in the second main section above, chiefly as communicating valences of ‘belongingness’ as experienced within the home,

is I think sufficiently communicative of this mosaic of relations within the home. At any rate, it reinforces the claim that all humans as such – including, and I stress this, children – are (to quote Zigon) “essentially relational beings who by their very nature are always beings-in-relationships and are always in the world first and foremost as affective beings rather than thinking and contemplative ones” (ibid.: 21). To be sure, our privileging of the framework of ‘moral sentiments’, as detailed in Part Two, Ch.4 of our study, flowed necessarily from this emphasis. It seems to me, yet, that the two terms which Zigon privileges, namely, ‘attunement’ and ‘fidelity’, are further expressive of the moral and emotional dimensions of ‘*aapanapana*’ as disclosed earlier on in this our conclusion chapter. Thus, as Zigon observes: “Attunement makes possible a wide range of possible modalities for being-in-the-world. Ranging from anxiety to hope, from love to hatred, from admiration to indifference, the range of possible ways of being-in-the-world are attuned towards such things as other [subjects], physical objects ... [and] activities, ideas, imaginations, and discourses” (ibid.: 22). Evidently, for him, even as ‘attunement’ is what enables the subject to become so “through its multiple entangled relationships”, ‘fidelity’ describes “the ontological condition that allows this subject to remain true to its singular life-trajectory enabled by these particular relationships by compelling it to have concern for its way of being-in-the-world” and gets to be “enacted through the ethical maintenance of the relations [that the subject] has with the other subjects and objects that constitute its world” (ibid.: 24). While I do recognize that Zigon’s delineation incorporates a more integrative theoretical vocabulary than what I can ever hope to accomplish, his forwarding of the claims of ‘attunement’ and ‘fidelity’ as briefly recapitulated lends further depth to the textures of ‘*aapanapana*’ detailed earlier in our second main section above.

I have no intentions of labouring this point however – in fact, an ethnography delivering into the density of this description remains on the agenda of my future research – although in what follows I will further venture to think more abstractly from within our ethnography about the larger sentiment and condition of ‘being attached’ that ‘*aapanapana*’ discloses. The ‘world at home’ and the children’s lives that are constitutive of this space necessitate this further elaboration on the ‘attachments’ that signify relations as experienced within the home, among the children, between the

parents and the children and the wider network of cousins and relatives. In a more foundational sense, the reflection which follows also consolidates the grounds of new work that invites us to think differently about our understandings of the social world (see, for instance, Mason 2018, which urges us to be open to the ‘affinities’ that make us and what ‘kindred’ can yield in conceptualizing our lives within societies; also Smart 2005 and 2007).

‘*Aapanapana*’, as we have clarified, broadly designates ‘belongingness’; and, given its dynamic presence in our field context, we had also maintained that within its extended valence, one’s own family was undoubtedly experienced as an intimate, organic presence, although (as we admitted) there also obtained a form of continuous engagement by way of reinforcing and recreating a sense of settled bonding. It is important to get at the ‘emotionality’ of this, at once, active and settled form of bonding as communicated by the term ‘*aapanapana*’. Clearly, as we have been implying, something more than ‘fidelity’ and/or ‘attunement’ is being suggested, in that a sense of ‘being attached’ is also being communicated as part of its (namely, *aapanapana*’s) expressive and moral valence. Now, of course, the term ‘attachment’ does describe our emotional connectedness to ‘objects’ (human or otherwise) in the world, as (for instance) we become ‘attached’ to our careers, to our homes, to certain ideas, and perhaps most importantly, to other people. Obviously, however, it is in the context of the home – as, indeed, parents and other kin – that we are here interested to reflect so as to connect with or measure up to the further challenges of our ethnography.

Indeed, in the context of ‘*aapanapana*’ as delivering both into and from our ethnography, it further designates a type of attachment as a fluid ‘mode of mattering’ that can help to inform certain aspects of agency and emotion among children (as indeed within the home). Philosophers as also anthropologists have often sought to come to terms with this type of ‘mattering’ in terms of care or caring (see, for instance, Frankfurt 1999 and Feltham and Cottingham 2011; for anthropology, see Das and Han 2015, as also Han 2015 and Chattoo 2015). However, it seems to me that the form of the ‘mattering’ that attaches to ‘*aapanapana*’ in the contexts inscribed by, and in, our study cannot be subsumed under the philosophically and anthropologically familiar notion of caring. I

realize I am being too conclusive here of the fertile grounds of the latter notion – see also Dalmiya 2016, as also the review symposium on this work in the journal *Philosophy East and West* (2019) – but let me still try and forge a formulation (again, this is a ground which will form an important basis of my future research).

Evidently, from within our ethnography, ‘*aapanapana*’ is also communicative of a form of attachment as a distinct ‘mode of mattering’ which becomes particularly palpable when the world *of* home – as also world *at* home - is approached, as we have, through its children inhabitants. The many vignettes’ presented through the course of our Chs.5-7, as rendered through the situations of our 8 children belonging to 6 families, clearly suggest ‘*aapanapana*’ as not quite only an active and settled form of belongingness, but also a distinct form of attachment that matters. The key question is: what is it about ‘*aapanapana*’ that warrants the label of attachment (and a distinctive mode of belongingness at that)? In other words, what does it *mean* to be attached in the context of the home? Let me venture a brief answer in the context of our ethnography with children, and in the process suggest further depth to the textures of emotion and agency within the family and its space of ‘*aapanapana*’.

For one, as our tripartite traversal through the framework of ‘moral sentiments’ has revealed - and particularly so for the children of our ethnography - experiencing the family as a ‘felt need’ is a crucial feature of the form of attachment at issue in ‘*aapanapana*’ as revealed and/or represented. Now, of course, we all generally experience our attachment ‘objects’ as ‘felt needs’, in the sense that one is left unsatisfied when the sense of need integral to attachment is not met. But the fact that we generally experience our attachment ‘objects’ as ‘felt needs’ need not imply that, in every instance or case, one is better off with than without our attachment objects. Be that as it may - and certainly as the contexts integral to our ethnography with children has disclosed – a key element of what it means to be attached to an object (in our instance, the home, as indeed the parents and kin) is to have strong feelings concerning it/them and to feel as though one would suffer without it/them. This, however, is not the whole of the form of attachment at issue in ‘*aapanapana*’, for it is also important, I think, to get at relevant sort of attachment at issue here, in particular the kind of feeling (or desire) that issues

from one's felt need for an 'object' and the kind of denial when that feeling/desire is left unsatisfied. Note, the particularity of this emotional and agential landscape is crucial, as much for children as it is for older subjects (including parents and other elders).

In this light, getting at the relevant sort of attachment at issue in '*aapanapana*' in the context of my field also implies getting a measure of the family or the home as a (we can say) 'non-substitutable particular', an unconditional conditionality as it were. This expression 'non-substitutable particular', I realize, has been used by developmental psychologists to gesture at the infant-primary caregiver bond (see Ainsworth 1969, as also Weiss 1991; for an overview from the Indian context, see Mistry, Contreras and Dutta 2013), but in extrapolating it to my ethnographic context I am also gesturing at a kind of 'family habitus' that pervades Indian households. Getting a measure of this habitus is crucial, although in keeping with the literature that we surveyed in Chs.1-2 this conclusion may seem a somewhat trite one. At any rate, I am inclined to hypothesize that there is something more than care or caring which this habitus as rendered through the notion of '*aapanapana*' can be taken to imply. It is not only possible to be attached to some object without caring about it (as, for instance, in a state of obsession, one may be desirous of the other less for ensuring the latter's well-being as for one's own self) just as one might also care about an object without being attached (as, for instance, two siblings who may have busy lives and have little time to engage with one another, albeit concerned about each other). In other words, I am urging that the idea of '*aapanapana*' as the fount of a family habitus which renders the 'family/home' as a non-substitutable particular implies a form of attachment that is not synonymous with (or adequately captured by) the notion of care or caring. Indeed, unravelling the structure of these emotions/feelings that undergird the family bond as represented by my subjects would take us too far afield, and perhaps even necessitate a complication of the terms of our reading and rendering of the framework of 'moral sentiments' as recoverable through the home and its children. All the same, it is the everyday that we were interested to capture in the context of the home and its children.

To be sure, there may be something specific and unique about this family habitus as so rendered, translating into the very terms of culture and practice in the Odia context and

the largely Hindu ethos of its households (at any rate, certainly, the urban neighbourhood we have traversed, with the exception, of course, of Sania and her family, although in the context of its everyday this latter family too hardly stood apart from the others of our setting). The cultural anthropologist Usha Menon, whose work we briefly encountered in Ch.2 largely, does give a robust cultural reading of the ranges of domesticity attaching to upper caste Hindu households in Odisha, although she is also interested to interrogate ethnographically some of the universalizing assumptions of global feminism in this wake (see Menon 2013a and 2013b). In particularly traversing women's access to well-being across the life course among Odia Hindus, Menon does place in perspective some distinctive aspects of the domesticity and 'self-refinement' that can be seen to inform the family habitus in many Indian/Hindu cultural contexts (for another matrix of discussion, see Saraswathi 2005). To be sure, any postulation of a family habitus would require such a fuller modality of engagement. And yet it should be fairly self-evident that we have here refrained from giving in to such overtly cultural readings of the patterns of behaviour observed across sociocultural contexts (for further glimpses of such readings, see Shweder 2009).

My problem, broadly, with the cultural analysis of social life has been that it over assumes the 'staticity' of relations and interactions and often takes for granted the variations in any given form of social or cultural practice, often to the detriment of the fluxes and flows that constitute the dynamics of everyday life. Without doubt, 'culture' is not something whose life can be assumed, even as it presents itself as collectively upheld. In fact, the representation of culture as an embedded whole is invariably the case in the face of personal and societal breakdown or challenges, although it often comes to be creatively transformed in this process. Significantly enough, there are also moments when 'culture' lightens its hold. However, it is not easy for any social researcher to capture these shifting nuances and track them to exact moments of change. The everyday life approach may yet provide an avenue to grasp these fluctuating tracks often found in the micro-interactions of socio-cultural life.

Without doubt, any study of everyday life cannot be rid of its fluxes and flows, as indeed its tendencies towards routinization and breakdown. In fact, woven into the fabric of

normalcy that often engulfs everyday life is the very idea of lingering uncertainty, ambiguity and limited understandings that never allows a whole to be constituted (as opposed to, say, expert scientific or even traditional modes of knowledge which lay claim to totality). Any story of culture, as indeed its analysis, becomes inevitably one about the acceptance, allowance, and accommodation of these uncertainties and fluxes (see further Shweder 1991 and 2000). To quickly recall, we had sought to foreground the ‘role’ of uncertainty in any substantial engagement with the everyday and its unfolding logic in Ch.4. Every individual, as indeed each episode of life, may try to deal with these persistent uncertainties creatively; and, what is more, amidst the backdrop of apparently shared understandings and customary ways, there could be vast allowances for differences of treatment and negotiation. Very often, as we gestured in our treatment of Berger and Luckmann above in a foregoing sub-section, it is these ‘untypified’ moments that can form the basis of our knowledge on social life as any other visible form of institutional practice. Undoubtedly, very often our interactional resources are used to address an unknown situation or a dilemma. The key here is how this gets to be done and what ‘capacities’ get to be reenacted in the process, all of which need to be creatively re-described from the perspective of everyday life and its practices.

Even more frontally, in the realm of the everyday, the separation of a pre-given, supposedly accessible, meaning system as distinct from its application in situations of practice is hardly sustainable. Amidst the apparent contradictions emanating from multiple orientations, fuzzy identifications and unclear conditions of interaction and negotiation, it is the very moment of action and the many ‘quotidian acts’ that configure it that become the focus of family life (in fact, this point completely evades Menon 2013a, notwithstanding her focus on ‘everyday domesticity’ in the Odia cultural context). Particularly striking for me is the resilience and focus on ‘relationship-building’ and ‘belongingness’ – rendered in the foregoing section as ‘*aapanapana*’, and further ruminated upon here in the present sub-section as ‘being attached’ - which the children consistently displayed in my field-setting despite all the bitter-sweet experiences of family relations within the home. I guess our outlining of the framework of ‘moral sentiments’ also comes into renewed light in this context.

Paradoxically enough, while the theme of ‘differences’ and cultural instantiation is quite central to the projects of anthropology and cultural psychology – and engages me as well, as a fledgling scholar in sociology in an Indian/South Asian context – I am not entirely sure whether the limits of such often culturally-ordered scholarly enterprises is being properly heeded (see also Shweder and Power 2013). Thus, for instance, take the influential and thought-provoking essay by A.K. Ramanujan titled ‘Is there an Indian way of thinking? An informal essay’, which specifically calls attention to a foundational difference between Indian and Western modes of thought (see Ramanujan 1989). Drawing on a range of linguistic and anthropological evidence, he suggests that the norms of thought and reason are conceived as ‘context-sensitive’ in India, whereas in the West they are ‘context-free’. Without doubt, I have no objection as such to distinctions of this sort, but only to their application (see also Taylor 1985b). Surely, some conceptions of the rational are found in both cultures, even as some concepts may be found in one, but not present in the other. The point, however, cannot be to reiterate differences across cultures; rather, the effort must be to discover new possibilities so as to enrich a common human vocabulary and its associated forms of life. It is one thing to frame a concept as distinctively Indian or Hindu or even Western; it is quite another to examine what that form of cultural subsumption entails and the use of further terms to qualify the difference. ‘Being attached’, then, as a specific emotion or feeling attached to the sense of ‘*aapanapana*’ brings to the fore a ‘mode of mattering’ that can help to re-inform aspects of agency and emotion among children in particular (as indeed within the home, amidst parents and elders and other kin).

Of Early Socialization and ‘Overdetermination’: A Final Flourish

To quickly reconnect with a point made in the foregoing pages, we had spoken briefly about the imperative of freeing oneself from overly deterministic models of knowledge and practice. I propose to take up this point further, although my immediately preceding subsection anticipates somewhat the terms of the ground which we will be traversing here in a ‘final flourish’. We also saw the ‘shadows of socialization’ hovering over the ground of our delineation, although we consciously strove to straddle a course somewhat independent of it. But surely there can be no side-tracking from the theme of

socialization as a whole in any work of sociology – and especially one, such as ours, given over to exploring children’s lives within the home/family - even as one remains wary of all ‘oversocialized’ conceptions of human agency and action. We propose to return to this charged and overly challenging theme of socialization therefore in an effort at reconceptualising the very grounds of theorizing on this theme. But even as we do so hereon, there is also another question of sociological determination (specifically, the middle class composition of our prime informants, as also of the urban neighbourhood as a whole in which our study is located) that needs to be tackled. Let me begin this final section with the latter question, albeit treating the matter somewhat peripherally in keeping with the overall emphases of our study.

Glancing at middle class cultures: beyond the folds of overdetermination

Evidently, as our delineation of the fieldwork setting of our study (largely, Ch.3; but see also our Appendix I and II) has disclosed, there is a predominantly upper-caste and middle class structuring to our Sripalli (S1) neighbourhood as a whole. Broadly, this is true of our 8 children spread across 6 families as well (although, in a strictly official sense, 3 of the 6 families belonged to the dominant ‘Other Backward Classes’ (OBC) category, 2 families to the ‘General’ category and 1 family was Muslim). Considering that the neighbourhood as a whole came to be in the 1970s, the broadly middle class professional profile of its residents is a striking fact of its existence. To be sure, fashioning a middle-class identity in the Odisha context – and in the context, specifically, of the capital city Bhubaneswar as such – is thoroughly embedded within local discourses of progress and development as indeed of Odia identity and prestige or honour (*Odia Jatira Garba O Gauraba*). This is perhaps true of neighbourhoods in most other cities in India as well, although the local and global aspects of ‘middle class lifestyles’ may show distinctive variations across various urban locales and contexts (see, for instance, Caplan 1987; Derne 1995; van Wessel 2004; Srivastava 2007; Nisbett 2007; Upadhyay 2009; Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2009; Brosius 2010; Saavala 2010; Donner 2011; Baviskar and Ray 2011, as also Dickey 2011; for a more generalised discussion of the ‘new Indian middle class’, see Fernandes 2006, as also Deshpande 2003 and Jodhka and Prakash 2016). Definitional complexities apart – as indeed the question of the newness of the ‘new middle class’ – it is important to recognise that the ‘middle-class’ is a

formation that is somewhat expansive in that it is accommodative of a variety of professions and social and cultural backgrounds. In fact, Deshpande is most succinct when he notes sharply that “[a]lthough it is true that the middle class is a notoriously loose term, it is striking that hardly anyone wishes to decline membership and even those who are ineligible wish to be included in it” (Deshpande 2003: 129). Alternatively, in the context of demanding attention to the middle class as a social and cultural phenomenon, Andre Beteille has emphasized that members of the urban middle class accord ‘status’ by taking into consideration distinctions of class rather than caste; and, what is more, that the family has emerged as an important site for the reproduction of inequality in contemporary India (see Beteille 1996, as also 1993; for a recent reiteration of this line of argument, see Bhandari 2020).

Now, of course, anybody interested in the symbolic world of meanings and moral judgments - as our study ostensibly has, albeit having to do with children in the context of family and home - must show an equal interest in the question of its/their relationship with the material world. In more sociological parlance, this can mean integrating both a Marxist and a Weberian approach to class in the fashion, say, of Pierre Bourdieu (see his 1984 and 1993) or, alternatively, Sherry Ortner (2006). As such, one may demonstrate that contemporary middle class practices often exist within a cultural realm of honour, skills, achievement and morality that invariably obscures their material privileges and social locations (see Liechty 2003; as indeed the contributions in Baviskar and Ray 2011 and Bhandari 2020). Similarly, one may also, from within the contours of our own study, gesture at a dynamic relationship between aspects of the ‘world at home’ as disclosed and the ‘strategies of cultivation’ that underwrite different class perceptions and lifestyles (a point, incidentally, that we broached briefly in a sub-section of the previous section). There may well be a deep connection between the socio-material world of my informants and their symbolic world of meanings and moral judgements, which of course we have hardly sought to explore (and consciously so!).

In perspective, besides, from within the contours of our ethnography, there may be a dialectical relationship between the socio-economic standing of my subjects and their families and the subjective universe of desires, aspirations and anxieties as voiced and

experienced by them (albeit transmuted in the worlds of my primary interlocutors, namely, the children themselves). Indeed, in the more expansive sociological literature, any such scholarly recognition would necessitate a fuller engagement with the subjective experience of class (as, for instance, in the work of Michele Lamont 1992). In fact, this latter scholar has consciously clarified that she is “exclusively concerned with the subjective boundaries that we draw between ourselves and the others” and that she “pay[s] no attention to ... objective social boundaries ...” (Lamont 1992: 9). It is also perhaps striking that, given our own study’s emphasis on ‘moral sentiments’, Lamont’s work stresses particularly on the place of ‘morals’ and the role of ‘moral boundaries’ in distinguishing between classes (see also Dickey 2011 and Saavala 2010 for an extension of this point). Precisely, on this register, one may then point out that the ‘world at home’ as disclosed mark out the subjective boundaries of a distinctive class location whose contours have to do less with material standing or possession than with claims to certain moralities that are construable as being middle class (in fact, precisely such a claim underscores Srivastava 2014, who astutely points out that being ‘middle class’ is essentially a moral claim).

But surely the foregoing admissions are not meant to question the very basis of our study; nor do they require some further justifications for the strategies marking out our study. In fact, our early chapters (specifically, Chs.1-2) as also our interlude chapter (namely, Ch.4) have hopefully justified and commanded the ground of our investigation. There is yet a further argument to be made about our research strategies and questions, namely (to echo a part of our present sub-section’s caption) ‘beyond the folds of overdetermination’. Indeed, we have been hinting at this dimension all along, in that it is consistent with our desire to avoid ‘oversocializing’ the subjects of our study, while also avoiding the full terms of an overtly ‘cultural’ reading, and is in keeping with the imperative of freeing oneself from overly deterministic models of knowledge and practice. Perhaps it is opportune to push the point still further.

It is important to remind ourselves that a great deal of the sociological work on middle class cultures (as indeed more generally on a variety of themes and subjects) springs from a tacit, if not explicit, interest in the phenomena of ‘social reproduction’. In other words,

societies or virtually all states of social being or existence are seen to be in the business of social reproduction. This has meant that societies/social forms all embody institutional manifestations and cultural patterns, which they strive to maintain (even as they do not remain unchanged), and even as their individual members age and die and the young are acculturated and come to assume adult roles. This necessarily would mean approaching the ‘objects’ of our research – whether human actors or even impersonal social processes – with overly deterministic models of knowledge and practice in which (as Veena Das has noted) “the personality of the researcher is converted into a neutral observer rather than to the specificity of thought on the connection between forms and life” (Das 2007: 227).

To be sure, ‘social reproduction’ can take place at many levels (including the family). But whatever the level, it seems to me that the problematic of social reproduction inevitably translates into what we are summarily rendering as the folds of ‘overdetermination’, wherein the ‘social’ comes to be seen as an overarching presence configuring the presence of the ‘agential’. Of course, in the wider literature on sociological/social theory (see, for instance, Bourdieu 1992 or Giddens 1979 and 1987, and Archer 2003), one is privy to a complex intermeshing of the questions of ‘structure’ and agency’, and inevitably a more accentuated dynamic between the social and the agential ensues. And yet, it seems to me that the hangover of the inherited and overarching sociological problematic of social reproduction still continues to obtain. Sociological determinism of any kind is certainly not the answer, but neither is ‘social conditioning’ or ‘social construction’ an adequate alternative. Getting beyond the folds of ‘overdetermination’ then, and yet recouping the grounds of socialization, remains a challenge. In what follows, we shall from within the terms of our work as represented in the foregoing pages open up to the challenge. But hopefully, for the moment, the justification for why we have not yielded entirely to the problematic of social determination in the shape of (say) the caste and class location of our subjects is clear and in place. Let us move now to recouping the space of socialization, or, more particularly, ‘early socialization’.

Recouping early socialization: enhancing the terms

In an extensive examination oriented towards reconceptualising ‘socialization’, Long and Hadden (1985) have noted the following:

The concept of socialization is pivotal to social theory. So long and reliably has the idea served the social sciences that hardly anyone now questions its meaning or utility. At a societal level, the idea of socialization summarizes how and to what extent diverse individuals are meshed with the requirements of collective life. At the individual level, socialization is seen as society’s principal mechanism for influencing the development of character and behaviour (Long and Hadden 1985: 39).

Paradoxically enough, as the authors’ observed, the concept has nevertheless been “inadequately conceived”, with many scholars “talk[ing] about the socialization process, but no one specified exactly what it was conceptually” (ibid.). In many ways, the situation that Long and Hadden were describing has still remained, although, within both sociology and the broader domain of the social sciences, it continues to be acknowledged as a basic and foundational notion that people are ‘socialized’ – indeed that there is a causal link between their early social experience and the predominance of specific attributes in their present behaviour (see Handel 2006). Of course, the weaknesses in the study of socialization (as indeed *early* socialization, the process which I am particularly interested to theorize) can be attributed to the fact that various theorists have approached both the concept and the process that it describes without being very specific about how it (socialization) concretely works. For instance, the broadly Durkheimian idea that socialization establishes collective representations in individuals through their submission to moral authority - see, for a detailed discussion along this axis, van de Walle 2008 - while certainly suggestive, remains quite vague about the precise paths of this socialization (see also Long and Hadden 1985). It is important to ask, not only about who exactly ‘socializes’ beyond the vague references to it as a social process, but also about what concrete mediations are used to do so? Also, and this is important particularly from the perspective of our study, what role do children play in the process of their own socialization? Indeed, how can we explain that different socializations obviously occur within a same society or social field? I am not entirely sure whether these questions can be answered solely from within sociological theory.

To be sure, the various trends in childhood studies that we critically addressed in our preliminary chapters, especially Chs.1-2, have been conducive for a deepening of the terms of socialization analysis. Indeed, an empirical social approach to children of the kind that our study has tried to endorse and encapsulate is quite favourable for reconsidering socialization. Importantly, in recent years, the work of Allison James (2013) has been directed at precisely this question. Thus, as she carefully remarks in the opening pages of her book:

Thus the title of this book – *Socialising Children* – is, first and foremost, intended to capture children’s active participation in processes of socialisation; to show that children are social and how, through their socialising, they come to know and understand the world and their own place within it. *But the ambiguity in the title permits another reading* – it points to the process of socialising children, something that is done to them by others. And the uncertainty this produces is deliberately provocative. It allows me scope to consider the extent to which children are - or are not – objects on which society writes its script as is so often popularly assumed; ... to consider the structuring consequences that institutions such as the family and the school are said to have for children’s everyday experiences and, indeed, for childhood itself; and, in turn, therefore, *to examine children’s experiential encounters with the generational space of ‘childhood’* as it unfolds in particular times and places (James 2013: 1-2, emphasis added).

She, accordingly, attempts to “resurrect the concept of socialisation ... [so as to] enable us to see more clearly what the process of growing up looks like from children’s own perspective” (ibid.: 4). Be that as it may, it is important to determine whether this order of emphasis is enough to deliver into socialization processes, especially when (as we saw in the course of traversing the shifting grounds of childhood studies in Ch.1) a number of works are directed at exploring children’s constant possibility of resisting or overcoming the demands of socialization. In fact, having traversed the grounds of my investigation, I am inclined to think somewhat retrospectively that studying children carefully and even immersively need not in and of itself constitute an enhancement of the study of early socialization. We need more critical and constructive evaluations of both theoretical and empirical approaches to children so as to give meaning to the materials that one harnesses about early socialization in different sociocultural contexts.

It is imperative to go back to the questions that I formulated early on in this subsection: not quite only about who exactly ‘socializes’ and the concrete mediations that are used

to do so, but also about what role children play in the process of their own socialization and how we can explain the different socializations that obviously occur within a same society or social field? Needless to say, even as we had expressed some uncertainty about whether these questions can be adequately answered from within sociological theory as a whole, I must also admit they remain unanswerable from within the empirical contours of our own investigation as represented in the foregoing pages. Surely this is not to undermine the contours of our entire investigation, which still is illuminating I should think for exploring children's everyday lives within the home. My challenge here, in this conclusion, is to determine the *theoretical* entailments for a study of early socialization that could issue from this engagement, one which could also lay the basis for my own further work in the area and in the near future.

The framework of 'moral sentiments' within which we recovered specific aspects of children's everyday lives within the home can be, I think, still very helpful in grasping aspects of early socialization. Indeed, the tripartite schema of its enunciation that we outlined in Ch.4, and their enactment across the space of three further chapters (namely, Chs.5-7) involving selected children and their families, clearly establishes that there need be no opposition between the direct observation and engagement with children and their integration into analytical frames. It must be conceded, yet, that it is not always easy to connect the lively ethnographic experiences with conceptual thinking; and in fact, as we conceded in Ch.2 and further elaborated in Ch.4, our conceptual schema was put in place after active fieldwork as we tried to make sense of our ethnographic forays with the children and the families themselves. While we certainly did not assert it as such, the framework of 'moral sentiments' and the 'everyday' as outlined and enacted through our study did entail a different view on the relation between a theoretical and empirical approach to children. What is more, it also brings into focus the imperative of relating between social and psychological accounts of human learning and everyday forms of human practicality. While sociologists have always tended to ignore developmental psychology in its generally accepted form – and perhaps rightly so – it is important that they (sociologists) open out to the existence of alternative psychological traditions which have always adopted forms of social epistemology and offer insightful resources for advancing a 'social sciences' of childhood (in this latter context, see particularly Jerome

Bruner 1990, whom we shall presently open up to more fully; but see also passingly Berry, Dasen and Saraswathi 1999). The affective and symbolic cores that constitute family life in various socio-cultural settings, besides, will require the resources of sociology and psychology to be brought into creative dialogue if new hypotheses regarding the concrete trajectories of socialization are to be formulated.

All the same, our ‘moral sentiments’ framework would need further conceptual augmentation if it has to yield both theoretically and empirically on the phenomena of childhood and early socialization. Let me try and explain. Given that ‘socialization’ in the context of our conceptual schema translates into a complex series of actions on, with and by children, it is important to acknowledge that much of it is itself ‘practical’, that is to say, it does not necessarily flow through consciousness but rather involves (as our narrations through Chs.5-7 disclosed) routines and habits or habituation, and as such is often very implicit and informal. The conceptual challenge here is in more precisely locating these mostly unconscious and routinized processes of socialization. Increasingly, in recent times – and I confess it was not entirely so in the context of my own personal and academic trajectory – I have been opening up to the (feminist) concept of ‘embodiment’ (see Thapan 1997 and 2009; as also more generally Reckwitz 2002) so as to capture the fact that ‘socialization’ is a set of actions that not only devolve on the body, but also happen ‘*through*’ the body, through its use and specific manipulation by socializees and socializers (in our instance, children and their parents/elders respectively).

Of course, our ethnography as recounted in the foregoing pages did not quite deliver on this specific aspect of early socialization, specifically as it concerns children in the context of the family and the home. But I hope to deliver more actively into this conceptual space of my ethnography in the near future, while keeping in view the practical language of socialization as mediated through our framework of ‘moral sentiments’. Interestingly, as Bourdieu has explained in his *Pascalian Meditations* (although I remain wary overall of his sociologically determinist ways):

We learn bodily. The social order inscribes itself in bodies through this permanent confrontation, which may be more or less dramatic, but is always

largely marked by affectivity and, more precisely, by affective transactions with the environment. ... *The most serious social injunctions are addressed not to the intellect but to the body*, treated as a ‘memory pad’ (Bourdieu 2000: 14, emphasis added).

And, yet, even as we take on aspects of the sociology of ‘embodiment’ as just elucidated, we must also open up more actively to the role of ‘*narratives*’ in daily socialization. Again, it is not as though our ethnography as delivered with, by and through children has not tried to document this circumstance within the family setting. Indeed, as our recounting of the spaces of ‘moral sentiments’ as it bears on and issues from children has clarified, it is not only the learning or patterning of a distinctive style or particular ways of behaving within the home and in the context of the world that is the object of socialization and its analysis. Even more resolutely, as our chapters recounted, the ‘world at home’ is also chiefly concerned with the acquisition of a *capacity* that corresponds as it were with a variable probability of mastering the world, or, better still, with designing distinctive personalities in conformity with a family habitus as expressed through the idea and ideal of ‘*aapanapana*’ (cf. thus our earlier extended discussion of this symbolic notion in the sections/subsections of the present chapter).

Indeed, to fully grasp the potential contribution of the ‘world at home’ to socialization, it is imperative to come to terms with the role of narratives in daily socialization. It is precisely in this context that the work of the cultural psychologist Jerome Bruner recommends itself (see Bruner 1990, as also his 1996; an effective summation is Mattingly, Lutkehaus and Throop 2008). Across the space of the works just indicated, Bruner significantly identifies a distinctive feature of narratives (as compared to other forms of language, such as sentences or propositions as examined by linguistics); namely, that narratives, by definition, evoke actions carried out by a real or fictive character, and thus present a special affinity with practice. Narratives also, as he points out, usually serve as tools for emphasizing the ‘special practices’ that deserve attention (that is to say, what is worth telling) according to a given social norm. Indeed, they express a viewpoint regarding these practices, typically when (as our ethnography also elucidated) they are qualified as ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Thus, as Bruner expressly observed: “Our capacity to render experience in terms of narrative is not just a child’s play, but an

instrument for making meaning that dominates much of life in a culture. ... *Our sense of the normative is nourished in narratives, but so is our sense of breach and exception*" (Bruner 1990: 97, emphasis added). The question, therefore, arises as to what these narratives do to children (even as the latter themselves may use narratives about their own practice or the practice of others) – indeed of what socializing power they (the narratives themselves) have in the complex stream of daily life.

Doubtless, the dimensions of our ethnography only confirm Bruner's point, although it must be emphasised that the latter (Bruner) himself did not really translate his views on narratives as practical routes of socialization into empirical investigations (see also Miller and Moore 1989 and Miller et al. 1990 for combining cultural psychology with ethnographic studies with children). In the near future, I hope to consolidate this focus on children in their home settings into a fuller engagement with practical socializing trajectories across varied social and cultural contexts. Indeed, this sociological appropriation of 'narratives' as tools supporting specific ways of seeing, organizing and enabling action across specific actors - including, in my instance, children - could well lead to the affirmation of a distinctive 'habitus' whose contours will require further unravelling as studies of socialization (and, pointedly, early socialization processes) gather pace.

Hopefully, the work of my foregoing pages has set up a further agenda for research in the exciting space of childhood studies, both in India and abroad, even as it delivers into more substantive questions about the analysis of processes of socialization. As I have gestured off and on, the future contours of my work, as indeed a renewed engagement with my ethnographical material as analysed and represented here, remain sharp and clear. Sociology and cultural psychology certainly have a role to play, as long as they remain ethnographically anchored and theoretically inspired to take on the key questions of sociality and sociability across the generational space of 'childhood'. Certainly the spirit of inquiry across various fields of discipline may be of more importance than its letter. We consequently must keep our minds open if we want to fully understand the role of childhood studies for animating key questions about human agency and the making of selfhood across terrains of social and cultural life.

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Appendix I



Socio-economic Profile of Sripalli (S1) Neighbourhood

HOUSEHOLDS

TABLE 1.1: HOUSEHOLDS WITH AND WITHOUT CHILDREN

HOUSEHOLD TYPE	NUCLEAR	JOINT	TOTAL
WITH CHILDREN	131	102	233
WITHOUT CHILDREN	120	27	147
TOTAL	251	129	380

TABLE 1.2: SOCIAL PROFILE OF HOUSEHOLDS

CATEGORY	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS
GENERAL CATEGORY	230
OTHER BACKWARD CASTE	60
BACKWARD CASTE	33
SCHEDULED CASTE	28
SCHEDULED TRIBE	7
SIKH	2
MUSLIM	3
CHRISTIAN	8
NOT AVAILABLE	22
TOTAL	380

ADULTS

TABLE 2.1: EDUCATION PROFILE

EDUCATION LEVEL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
NO EDUCATION	4	10	14
UNDER MATRIC (< 10TH)	27	77	104
MATRIC (10TH)	46	89	135
DIPLOMA	13	1	14
INTEGRATED (+2)	41	46	87
GRADUATION/ LLB/ B.ED	212	194	406
POST GRADUATION/ LLM/ M.ED	103	75	178
ENGINEER/ AMI	89	15	104
CHATERED ACCOUNTANCT	5	0	5
MBA/MCA/MTECH	45	18	63
MBBS	9	4	13
MPHIL/PHD	32	15	47
NOT AVAILABLE	3	1	4
TOTAL	629	545	1174

TABLE 2.2: OCCUPATION/WORK PROFILE

TYPES OF OCCUPATIONS	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
STUDENTS	58	36	94
PEON, DRIVER, COOK, MAID, GUARDS, HOUSE KEEP- ING, WAITER, DELIVERY MEN, LABOURER, HELPER	35	8	43
CLERK, SECTION OFFICER, TYPIST, SALES PERSON, AGENTS, FARMER, COMPOUNDER,	60	7	67
ASSOCIATE, ASSISTANT, LIBRARIAN, CONSTABLE, PETTY BUSINESS, PASTOR, PRIEST, MECHANIC, ELEC- TRICIAN, AUDITOR, SURVEYOR, COMPUTER OPERA- TOR, DESK OFFICER	124	15	139
SCHOOL TEACHER (GOVT., PVT.), LECTURER (PVT)., SCHOOL HEAD MASTER (GOVT.,PVT)	21	45	66
GOVT. GRADE II OFFICER, BUSINESS, ACTORS, MUSI- CIAN, BANK OFFICER, ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE, COUN- SELLOR, INSPECTOR, NOTARY, AUTHOR, JOURNALIST	85	11	96
ENGINEER, MANAGER, DOCTOR, LECTURER (GOVT.) READER, JOURNAL, EDITOR, NGO FOUNDER, RE- SEARCHER, CHARTERED ACCOUNTANT	99	19	118
GOVT.ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER, SR.ADVOCATE, DI- RECTOR, SECRETARY, GENERAL MANAGER, VICE CHANCELLOR, COLLEGE PRINCIPAL, PROFESSOR,	93	12	105
BUSINESS OR FIRM OWNER, PROPRIETOR	23	1	24
HOUSEWIFE	0	383	383
NO EMPLOYMENT	5	6	11
NOT AVAILABLE	26	2	28
TOTAL	629	545	1174

CHILDREN

TABLE 3.1: AGE PROFILE

Age (In Years)	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1-3	20	24	44
4-6	34	16	50
7-9	31	30	61
10-12	35	29	64
13-15	37	35	72
16-18	33	27	60
TOTAL	190	161	351

TABLE 3.2: DISTRIBUTION ACROSS JOINT AND NUCLEAR FAMILIES

TYPE OF FAMILY	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
NUCLEAR	106	79	185
JOINT	84	82	166
TOTAL	190	161	351

TABLE 3.3: CHILDREN ACROSS ENGLISH AND ODIA MEDIUM SCHOOLS

MEDIUM OF TEACH- ING IN SCHOOL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
ODIA	30	20	50
ENGLISH	88	80	168
TOTAL	117	100	218

Appendix II

III

Socio-economic and Family Profile of Selected Children

ATMAN HOUSEHOLD

HOUSEHOLD INMATES' INFORMATION

CHILD	NAME	GENDER	AGE (Years)	STANDARD	SCHOOL TYPE & MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION	TUITION TYPE	EXTRA-CURRICULAR
PARENTS & OTHER RELATIVES	Atman	Male	15	9th	D.A.V Public School (Private); English Medium	Home Tuition	Sports, Music
	RELATION		AGE (Years)	EDUCATION QUALIFICATION		OCCUPATION	
	Father		52	AMIE Degree		Mechanical Goods Retail Shop	
	Mother		48	Graduation		Home-maker	
	Elder sister		22	Engineering		Engineer, MNC	
	Paternal grandmother		83	High School Passed		Home-maker	
OTHER INFORMATION	CASTE:		Teli			RELIGION	Hindu
	HOUSE TYPE		4 rooms, kitchen, hall, Puja room & store space; Private, 2 storied.			PROPERTY	Share in village house, & 2 city houses
	VEHICLES		1 Four-Wheeler; 1 Two-Wheeler			HOUSE-HELP	Part-time

ATMAN EXTENDED FAMILY INFORMATION

PATERNAL SIDE:

	RELATIONS (In ascending order of seniority by birth)	PROFESSION/ QUALIFICATION
I	(Lt.) Grandfather (<i>Jeje</i>) Grandmother (<i>Jeji</i>)	: Grade I Officer, State Government : High school passed, Home-maker
1st	(Lt.) Father's Eldest Sister (<i>Peeusi</i>) Father's Eldest Sister's Husband (<i>Peeusa</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>) Cousin Brother's wife (<i>Bhauja</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>)	: Graduation, Home-maker : Rt. Grade III Officer, State Government : Ph.D., Lecturer : Middle School Teacher : Engineer

	Cousin Sister's Husband (<i>Bhinei</i>)	: Engineer
2nd	Father's Elder Sister (<i>Peeusi</i>) Father's Elder Sister's Husband (<i>Peeusa</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Sister's Husband (<i>Bhinei</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>)	: Post-Graduation, Home-maker : Rt. Grade I Officer, State Government : Management, Job abroad : Management, Job abroad : Post Graduation, Private Job
3rd	Father's Elder Sister (<i>Peeusi</i>) Father's Eldest Sister's Husband (<i>Peeusa</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>) Cousin Brother's wife (<i>Bhauja</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Post-Graduation, Home-maker : Rt. Engineer : Engineer, MNC : Engineer, Start up : Engineer, MNC
4th	Father's Youngest Brother (<i>Dada</i>) Father's Youngest Brother's Wife (<i>Khudi</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Home Business : Graduation, Home-maker : Student : Student

MATERNAL SIDE:

	RELATIONS (In ascending order of seniority by birth)	PROFESSION/ QUALIFICATION
I	Grandfather (<i>Aja</i>) Grandmother (<i>Ayee</i>)	: Grade I Officer, State Government : High school passed, Home-maker
1st	Mother's Eldest Sister (<i>Mausi</i>) Mother's Eldest Sister's Husband (<i>Mausa</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Graduation, Home maker : Staff, Government Steel Plant : Engineer, MNC : Student
2nd	Mother's Younger Sister (<i>Mausi</i>) (Divorced) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Post-Graduation, Home-maker : Student : Student
3rd	Mother's Youngest Brother (<i>Mamu</i>) Mother's Youngest Brother's Wife (<i>Maeen</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>)	: Grade I Officer, State Government : Graduation, Home-maker : N.A.

LUV & KUSH HOUSEHOLD

HOUSEHOLD INMATES' INFORMATION

CHILD	NAME	GEN- DER	AGE (Years)	STAND ARD	SCHOOL TYPE & MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION	TUITION TYPE	EXTRA- CURRICU- LAR
	Luv	Male	14	9th	Saraswati Sishu Vidya Mandir (Private); Odia Medium	Group Tui- tion	Nil
	Kush	Male	14	9th	Saraswati Sishu Vidya Mandir (Private); Odia Medium	Group Tui- tion	Nil
PAREN- TS &	RELATION		AGE (Years)	EDUCATION QUALIFI- CATION		OCCUPATION	
OTHER RELATI -ONS	Father		47	Post-Graduation		Grade III Officer, State Government	
	Mother		44	Graduation		Home-maker	
	Elder sister		19	Pursuing Engineering		Student	
OTHER	CASTE:		Khyatriya			RELIGION	Hindu
INFOR- MATIO- N	HOUSE TYPE		2 rooms, kitchen & hall; Government Quarters (Flats)			PROPERTY	Share in village house & landholding
	VEHICLES		2 Two-Wheelers			HOUSE- HELP	Nil

LUV AND KUSH'S EXTENDED FAMILY INFORMATION

PATERNAL SIDE:

!	RELATIONS (In ascending order of seniority by birth)	PROFESSION/ QUALIFICATION
I	(Lt.) Grandfather (<i>Jeje</i>) (Lt.) Grandmother (<i>Jeji</i>)	: Land-Owner, Farming : Homemaker
1st	Father's Younger Brother (<i>Nana Dada</i>) Father's Younger Brother's Wife (<i>Chua Bau</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Bank Officer : Home-maker : Student : Student
2nd	Father's Younger Brother (<i>Sana Bappa</i>) Father's Younger Brother's wife (<i>Khudi</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>)	: Forest Ranger : Teacher : Student : Student
3rd	Father's Younger Brother (<i>Dada</i>) Father's Younger Brother's wife (<i>Khudi</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Business in Mumbai : Teacher : Student

4th	Father's Younger Sister (<i>Peeussi</i>) Father's Younger Sister's Husband (<i>Peeusa</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Home-maker : Private job : Student
5th	Father's Youngest Brother (<i>Dada</i>) Father's Youngest Brother's Wife (<i>Khudi</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>)	: Employee, Chemical Factory : Nurse, Government Hospital : N.A.

MATERNAL SIDE:

	RELATIONS	PROFESSION/ QUALIFICATION
I	(Lt.) Grandfather's Eldest Brother (<i>Bada Aja</i>) (Lt.) Grandmother's Eldest Brother's Wife (<i>Bada Aayee</i>) No Issue	: Land-Owner, Agriculture : Home-maker
II	(Lt.) Grandfather's Elder Brother (<i>Majhiya Aja</i>) (Lt.) Grandfather's Elder Brother's Wife (<i>Majhiya Aayee</i>)	: Land-Owner, Agriculture : Home-maker
1st	Grandfather's Elder Brother's Daughter (<i>Mausi</i>) Grandfather's Elder Brother's Daughter's Husband (<i>Mausa</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Graduation, Home-maker : Post-Graduation : Scientist : Engineer
2nd	Grandfather's Elder Brother's Daughter (<i>Mausi</i>) Grandfather's Elder Brother's Daughter's Husband (<i>Mausa</i>) No issue	: Graduation, Home-maker : Post-Graduation
III	(Lt.) Grandfather (<i>Aja</i>) (Lt.) Grandmother (<i>Ayee</i>)	: Land-Owner, Agriculture : Home maker
1st	Mother's Eldest Sister (<i>Mausi</i>) Mother's Eldest Sister's Husband (<i>Mausa</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>)	: Engineer : Graduation, Home-maker : Ph.D. pursuing : Student
2nd	Mother's Younger Brother (<i>Bada Mamu</i>) Mother's Younger Brother's Wife (<i>Bada Maeen</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: M.B.A., Industrialist : Post-Graduation, Company Owner : Student : Student
3rd	Mother's Younger Brother (<i>Majhia Mamu</i>) Mother's Younger Brother's Wife (<i>Majhia Maeen</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>)	: Employee, Private Company : Post-Graduation, Home-maker : Student : N.A.
4th	Mother's Youngest Brother (<i>Sana Mamu</i>) Mother's Youngest Brother's Wife (<i>Sana Maeen</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>)	: Graduation, Agriculture : Graduation, Home-maker : Student : Student : N.A.

MANTU HOUSEHOLD

HOUSEHOLD INMATES' INFORMATION

CHILD	NAME	GEN- DER	AGE (Years)	STAND ARD	SCHOOL TYPE & MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION	TUITION TYPE	EXTRA- CURRICU- LAR
	Mantu	Male	8	3rd	Stewart School (Private); English Medium	Nil	Nil
PAREN- TS &	RELATION		AGE (Years)	EDUCATION QUALIFI- CATION		OCCUPATION	
OTHER RELATI- -ONS	Father		45	Graduation, L.L.B		Bank Insurance, Legal Advisor	
	Mother		40	Post-Graduation		Home-maker	
OTHER	CASTE:		Karan			RELIGION	Hindu
INFOR- MATIO- N	HOUSE TYPE		4 rooms, kitchen, hall, outhouse; Pri- vate, single storied.			PROPERTY	City house, share in vil- lage land
	VEHICLES		1 Two- Wheeler			HOUSE- HELP	Nil

MANTU EXTENDED FAMILY

PATERNAL SIDE:

!	RELATIONS (In ascending order of seniority by birth)	PROFESSION/ QUALIFICATION
I	(Lt.) Grandfather (<i>Thaku Bapa</i>) (Lt.) Grandmother (<i>Thaku Ma</i>)	: Grade I Officer, State Government : Home-maker
1st	Father's Elder Brother (<i>Bada Bapa</i>) Father's Elder Brother's Wife (<i>Bada Ma</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Dada</i>)	: Doctor : Doctor : Student
2nd	Father's Elder Sister (<i>Peeusi</i>) Father's Elder Sisiter's Husband (<i>Peeusa</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Dada</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Didi</i>) Cousin Sister's Husband (<i>Bhinei</i>)	: Graduation, Home-maker : Officer, State Government : Student : Post-Graduation, Home-maker : Engineer
3rd	Father's Elder Sister (<i>Peeusi</i>) Father's Eldest Sisiter's Husband (<i>Peeusa</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Didi</i>)	: Graduation, Home-maker : Grade I Officer, State Government : Engineer

MATERNAL SIDE:

!	RELATIONS (In ascending order of seniority by birth)	PROFESSION/ QUALIFICATION
I	Grandfather (<i>Dadu</i>) Grandmother (<i>Didu</i>)	: Business : Home-maker
1st	Mother's Eldest Sister (<i>Bada Mausi</i>) Mother's Eldest Sister's Husband (<i>Bada Mause</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Didi</i>) Cousin Sister's Husband (<i>Bhinei</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Dada</i>)	: Home-maker : Grade II officer, State Government : Home-maker : N.A. : Student
2nd	Mother's Elder Sister (<i>Majhia Mausi</i>) Mother's Elder Sister's Husband (<i>Majhia Mause</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Didi</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Dada</i>)	: Home-maker : Bank Officer : Student : Student
3rd	Mother's Elder Sister (<i>Sana Mausi</i>) Mother's Elder Sister's Husband (<i>Sana Mause</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Dada</i>)	: Home maker : Staff, Block Office : Student
4th	Mother's Younger Brother (<i>Bada Mamu</i>) Mother's Younger Brother's Wife (<i>Bada Maen</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Shop Owner : Graduation, Home-maker : N.A.
5th	Mother's Youngest Brother (<i>Sana Mamu</i>)	: Shop Owner

SAMIKSHA & AKSH HOUSEHOLD

HOUSEHOLD INMATES' INFORMATION

CHILD	NAME	GEN- DER	AGE (Years)	STAND ARD	SCHOOL TYPE & MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION	TUITION TYPE	EXTRA- CURRICU- LAR
	Samik- sha	Female	14	8th	Loyola (Private); English Medium	Nil	Science Club
	Aksh	Male	10	4th	Loyola (Private); English Medium	Nil	Yoga
PAREN- TS &	RELATION		AGE (Years)	EDUCATION QUALIFI- CATION		OCCUPATION	
OTHER RELATI -ONS	Father		45	M.B.A		Business (Private Education Institute)	
	Mother		40	Graduation College		Home maker	
OTHER	CASTE:		Baniya			RELIGION	Hindu
INFOR- MATIO- N	HOUSE TYPE		4 rooms, kitchen, hall & courtyard; Pri- vate, single storied.			PROPERTY	City house, share in vil- lage land
	VEHICLES		1 Four-Wheeler; 1 Two- Wheeler			HOUSE- HELP	Nil

SAMIKSHA & AKSH EXTENDED FAMILY INFORMATION

PATERNAL SIDE:

	RELATIONS (In ascending order of seniority)	PROFESSION/ QUALIFICATION
I	(Lt.) Grandfather (<i>Jeje</i>) (Lt.) Grandmother (<i>Jeji</i>)	: Grade III Officer, State Government : Home- maker
1st	Father's Eldest Sister (<i>Peeusi</i>) Father's Eldest Sisiter's Husband (<i>Peeusa</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Sister's Husband (<i>Bhinei</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Sister's Husband (<i>Bhinei</i>) Cousin Brother	: Home-maker : Ph.D., Professor : Engineer : N.A. : Home-maker : N.A. : Engineer, Private Company
2nd	Father's Elder Sister (<i>Peeusi</i>) Father's Elder Sisiter's Husband (<i>Peeusa</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Brother	: Home-maker : Bank Officer : Job Abroad : Private Job

3rd	Father's Elder Sister (<i>Peeusi</i>) Father's Eldest Sister's Husband (<i>Peeusa</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>)	: Home-maker : Grade II Officer, State Government : Engineer, MNC : Engineer
4th	Father's Elder Sister (<i>Peeusi</i>) Father's Eldest Sister's Husband (<i>Peeusa</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Home-maker : Staff, Electricity Board Office : Student : Student

MATERNAL SIDE:

	RELATIONS (In ascending order of seniority)	PROFESSION/ QUALIFICATION
I	Grandfather (<i>Aja</i>) Grandmother (<i>Ayee</i>)	: Retail Business : Home-maker
4th	Mother's Younger Brother (<i>Mamu</i>) Mother's Younger Brother's Wife (<i>Maeen</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Retail Business : Graduation, Home-maker : Student

SANIA HOUSEHOLD

HOUSEHOLD INMATES' INFORMATION

CHILD	NAME	GEN- DER	AGE (Years)	STAND ARD	SCHOOL TYPE & MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION	TUITION TYPE	EXTRA- CURRICU- LAR
	Sania	Female	12	7th	Stewart School (Private); English Medium	Home Tui- tion	Nil
PAREN- TS &	RELATION		AGE (Years)	EDUCATION QUALIFI- CATION		OCCUPATION	
OTHER RELATI- -ONS	Father		38	Graduation		Grade III Officer, State Government	
	Mother		30	Graduation		Home maker	
	Younger sister		3	Nil		Nil	
	Paternal grand- mother		62	Middle School Passed		Home maker	
OTHER	CASTE:		Nil			RELIGION	Muslim
INFOR- MATIO- -N	HOUSE TYPE		2 rooms, kitchen & hall; Government Quarters (Flats)			PROPERTY	House in native town
	VEHICLES		1 Two- Wheeler			HOUSE- HELP	Nil

SANIA EXTENDED FAMILY INFORMATION

PATERNAL SIDE:

!	RELATIONS (In ascending order of seniority by birth)	PROFESSION/ QUALIFICATION
I	(Lt.) Grandfather's Eldest Brother (<i>Bada Dada</i>) Grandfather's Eldest Brother's Wife (<i>Bada Dadi</i>)	: Ph.D., Professor : Home-maker
1st	Grandfather's Eldest Brother's Daughter (<i>Phupi</i>) Grandfather's Eldest Brother's Daughter's Husband (<i>Phupa</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Graduation, Home-maker : Graduation, Business : Ph.D. Student : Student
2nd	Grandfather's Eldest Brother's Daughter (<i>Phupi</i>) Grandfather's Eldest Brother's Daughter's Husband (<i>Phupa</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Graduation, Home-maker : Staff, Railways : MBA, Job : Graduation : Student

3rd	Grandfather's Eldest Brother's Daughter (<i>Phupi</i>) Grandfather's Eldest Brother's Daughter's Husband (<i>Phupa</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>)	: Home-maker : Graduation, Business : Student : Student : N.A.
II	(Lt.) Grandfather (<i>Dada</i>) Grandmother (<i>Dadi</i>)	: College, Business : Home-maker
1st	Father's Elder Sister (<i>Peeusi</i>) Father's Eldest Sister's Husband (<i>Peeusa</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: College, Home-maker : Business, Watch Shop : Student : Student
III	Grandfather's Younger Brother (<i>Chote Dada</i>) Grandfather's Younger Brother's Wife (<i>Chote Dadi</i>)	: College, Business : Home-maker
1st	Grandfather's Younger Brother's Son (<i>Chachu</i>) Grandfather's Younger Brother's Son's Wife (<i>Chachi</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Bank Officer : Teacher : Student
2nd	Grandfather's Younger Brother's Daughter (<i>Phupi</i>) Grandfather's Younger Brother's Daughter's Husband (<i>Phupa</i>) Cousin Sister	: Graduation, Business : Home-maker : N.A.

MATERNAL SIDE:

!	RELATIONS (In ascending order of seniority by birth)	PROFESSION/ QUALIFICATION
I	Grandfather (<i>Nana</i>) Grandmother (<i>Nani</i>)	: Rt. Grade III Officer, State Government : Home-maker
1st	Mother's Elder Brother (<i>Mamu</i>) Mother's Elder Brother's Wife (<i>Mami</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Graduation, Food business : Home-maker : Student : N.A.
2nd	Mother's Younger Brother (<i>Majhia Mamu</i>) Mother's Younger Brother's Wife (<i>Majhia Mami</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Brother (<i>Bhai</i>)	: Graduation, Business : Stitching College Instructor : N.A. : N.A.
3rd	Mother's Youngest Brother (<i>Sana Mamu</i>) Mother's Youngest Brother's Wife (<i>Sana Mami</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>)	: Graduation, Business : Graduation, Home-maker : N.A.

VINAYAK HOUSEHOLD

HOUSEHOLD INMATES' INFORMATION

CHILD	NAME	GEN- DER	AGE (Years)	STAND ARD	SCHOOL TYPE & MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION	TUITION TYPE	EXTRA- CURRICU- LAR
	Vinayak	Male	8	2nd	D.A.V Public School (Private); English Medium	Home Tui- tion	Nil
PAREN- TS &	RELATION		AGE (Years)	EDUCATION QUALIFI- CATION	OCCUPATION		
OTHER RELATI- ONS	Father		44	Engineer	Engineer, State Government		
	Mother		39	Graduation, O.A.S	Grade I Officer, State Government		
	Paternal Grandfa- ther		72	Post-Graduation	Rt. Accounts Officer,		
	Paternal grand- mother		68	Post-Graduation, O.F.S.	Rt. Grade I Officer, State Government		
OTHER	CASTE:		Khandayata			RELIGION	Hindu
INFOR- MATIO- N	HOUSE TYPE		7 rooms, 2 kitchens, 2 halls, Puja room & outhouse; Private 2 storied			PROPERTY	Share in 2 city houses, share in village land
	VEHICLES		2 Four- Wheelers			HOUSE- HELP	Part-time

VINAYAK EXTENDED FAMILY INFORMATION

PATERNAL SIDE:

!	RELATIONS (In ascending order of seniority by birth)	PROFESSION/ QUALIFICATION
I	Grandfather (<i>Jeje</i>) Grandmother (<i>Jeji</i>)	: Rt. Accounts Officer, Public Ltd Company : Rt. Grade I Officer, State Government
1st	Father's Eldest Sister (<i>Peeusi</i>) Father's Eldest Sisiter's Husband (<i>Peeusa</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>)	: Audiographer : Film Producer : Student : Student
2nd	Father's Elder Sister (<i>Peeusi</i>) (Divorced)	: Director, Pvt. Education Institution
4th	Father's Younger Brother (<i>Dada</i>) Father's Youngest Brother's Wife (<i>Khudi</i>) Cousin Sister (<i>Bhauni</i>)	: DGM, Hospital : Engineer, MNC : N.A.

MATERNAL SIDE:

!	RELATIONS (In ascending order of seniority by birth)	PROFESSION/ QUALIFICATION
I	(Lt.) Grandfather (<i>Aja</i>) (Lt.) Grandmother (<i>Ayee</i>)	: Grade III Officer, State Government : Home-maker
1st	Mother's Eldest Brother (<i>Bada Mamu</i>) Mother's Eldest Brother's Wife (<i>Bada Maeen</i>) Cousin	: NGO job : Home-maker : N.A.
2nd	Mother's Elder Sister (<i>Bada Mausi</i>) Mother's Elder Sister's Husband (<i>Bada Mause</i>)	: Teacher : Real Estate Contractor
3rd	Mother's Younger Brother (<i>Majhia Mamu</i>) Mother's Younger Brother (<i>Majhia Maeen</i>)	: Job Abroad : Job Abroad
4th	Mother's Younger Brother (Divorced)	: Engineer, MNC
5th	Mother's Youngest Brother (<i>Sana Mamu</i>) Mother's Youngest Brother's Wife (<i>Sana Maeen</i>)	: Engineer, MNC : Engineer, MNC

The World at Home: Exploring Children's Lives in an Urban Neighbourhood in Odisha

by Arpita Sahoo

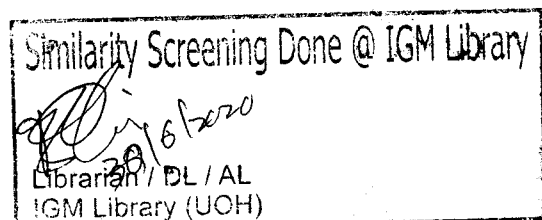
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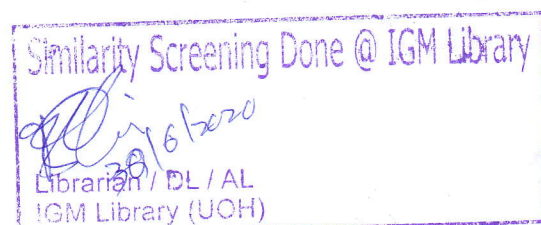
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FAMILY FEELINGS AND ME: LOOKING AT EMOTIONS AS SOCIAL RESOURCES IN CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING OF FAMILY RELATIONS

Arpita Sahoo

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Received: Oct. 2018 Accepted: Nov. 2018 Published: Dec. 2018

Abstract: In India, Childhood as a concept has been operationalised more to understand cultural processes, social structures, community characters at large and less to understand Children's immediate everyday life affairs in their own narratives. Child, until recent times, had remained buried under the overwhelming frames of 'Familial Body' and Familialism. Given this background, our current situation which sees a proliferation of child specific and children friendly institutions like, gives us a very interesting area of research pertaining to the changing nature of social relations that the child finds himself and herself in. Conducting an in-depth study on children family life, in an urban neighbourhood of India, I find an intricate dynamics of 'Family Feeling' sustained through individual motivations and differing demands. In the present paper I would focus on 'Emotions' and sentiments as social resources to describe how children access and use it in their day to day lives to build an understanding of family relations as well as advance their own cause.

Keywords: Childhood, Emotion Felt And Displayed, Family Life, Individual Space.

Childhood Studies: Background in the Western Countries: Historically in the west there tended to be three dominant cultural images of the child: the innocent child, the evil child and the miniature adult that underlined early scholarship and policy measures (Sorin 2005). But it was psychology that childhood studies. Psychological model brought 'development' as a key concept to study childhood framing it as a biological, universal phenomenon which every individual experienced in a passing phase (Jenks 1996). This generalization of childhood as a biological reality was challenged by cultural anthropology which claimed that societies varied in their cultural notion of childhood and hence *childhood was a cultural category* (Mead and Wolfenstein 1955). This made childhood symptomatic in understanding of larger cultural processes which facilitated only indirect and secondary approach of studying children lives (Alanen 1988) focusing on social units like family, school and policies with a concern to 'manage childhood' (Jenks 1996).

In 1980's the scenario altered influenced by Constructivist and Interpretative discourses. This acknowledged child as an active participant in various social processes who both affects and is affected by culture (Alanen 1988, James & James 2001). Scholars thus recommended that, 'children should be seen as competent, knowledgeable informants who can be involved in social research in order to learn more about the world' (Uprichard 2010, p9). James and Prout (2005) encourage for adapting a potential framework called, 'Emergent Paradigm' of childhood studies which sees childhood as a social construct made simultaneously by actions of the society at large and children themselves in everyday and professional realms. It also advocated ethnography as one of the suitable methods to study children (p8).

In practicing the new paradigm of childhood, scholars have however rightly alerted that it is important to maintain the distinction between 'child voice' as an actor as different from 'child voice' as an activist. Exploration of children representations in academics should not be appropriated by reform and political



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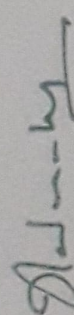
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FAMILY FEELINGS AND ME: LOOKING AT EMOTIONS AS SOCIAL RESOURCES
IN CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING OF FAMILY RELATIONS

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Drinks and Drinking Habits of the Bondo Highlanders

Arpita Sahoo

ABSTRACT

During my college days, an interesting phenomenon caught my attention. On the one hand, there was a growing popularity of booze. Boozing amongst the peers was seen as modern, liberal, progressive. On the other hand, back home parents viewed drinking liquor as a social evil, undesirable influence of western culture, associated mostly with social discrepant. Parents often were haunted by the horror of their children giving in to boozing there by ruining their reputation and future. The question thus arises, are these only two available perspectives on booze and social drinking or do we have any other value system around the same prevalent in a society? Is social drinking a sign of the modern liberal society? Is it a foreign influence hazardous for Indian culture? Do we have an alternative story on the culture of drinks from within Indian community? I found that there are historical documentations on drinking habits in royal courts, merchant guilds, etc. However, it was among the tribes of India that, I found the most extensive cultural practices, and a holistic value system on indigenous drinks and drinking habits. In this paper, I would like to describe the role and use of indigenous drinks in the life cycle and various ceremonies of one of the identified Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, called the Bondo Highlanders.

DRINKS

A standard drink is any drink that contains about 14 grams of pure alcohol (about 0.6 fluid ounces or 1.2 tablespoons)¹. However, the meaning and practices of drinking and intoxication prove to be ambiguous, evading definition (Heron, C 2003). 'Spirits', 'Liquor', 'Liqueur', 'Hard liquor', 'Booze', 'Hooch', 'Moonshine', 'Aperitif', 'Digestif', 'Cordial', are some of the many modern terms used to convey drinks of different made, taste and use.² Gately, I. writes, 'Throughout history, the place of alcohol in our meals, medicines, and leisure activities has been a matter of fierce debate. Whereas some cultures have distinguished it as a sacred fluid, whose consumption should be limited to ceremonial occasions, others have treated it as a kind of food... and a few have even tried to exclude it from society altogether' (2008, 1).

Brewing and drinking practices in ancient India were matter of elaborate art.

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