

**SELF AND IDENTITY OF THE YOUNG CHILD: EMERGING TRENDS IN
CONTEMPORARY INDIAN FAMILIES**

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Abstract

This research study attempted to consolidate a presentation of children's voices related to their self and identity. These voices have been framed with an elaboration of the context within which children's lives find meaning. In addition to descriptions of setting, interviews with significant others and observations of children at play provide focussed attention to activities and opinions of children and others. The methods to access these data included interviews with children and adults and observations of children interacting with a specific set of objects provided. Interviews with children addressed issues of preferences and participation in activities, especially school. From adults, usually but not always mothers, changes and choices related to the children were discussed in order to explore their descriptions of and aspirations for their children. The findings of the study reveal several important findings related to self and identity of children growing up in Indian families. Although the findings can not claim to represent a pan-Indian application, there are several important trends that resonate well with traditional as well as contemporary notions of childhood and family life in India.

One of the most important contributions of this study has been to find that without culture, there is no sense of self. The child derives a core sense of who she or he is from the social setting. The sense of self is critically defined by the people among whom a child is growing up. Rather than an independent entity, the child is inextricably linked with 'others', the rural child with a larger constellation of people than in the urban, although not uniformly so. Positioning and not personal attributes define a child. In this regard, siblings (and cousins, if living together) are key companions with whom and in relation to whom, a child's identity is formed and expressed. Most children are dumbfounded by requests to isolate them from siblings in tasks that are targeted towards the individual child, preferring always to let the older and better informed (usually older) child speak, or to speak on behalf of the younger. Sibling relationships are thus a key factor in a child's sense of self. Context is defined most clearly by the people among whom the children live, rather than by the material aspects of their lives. Ranging

between the poor to the wealthy, their experiences draw centrally from the caregivers and companions. School is taken as inevitable, whether it is liked or not. Teachers are mostly feared and the interface between school and child is predominantly antagonistic, except in a few instances of school success. It is only among the highly educated families who spend a great deal of time and effort focussing on a child's learning that school success is accomplished. Very clearly, schools fully accept children only when they have been fully prepared for schooling by the home. This plays out very unfairly for children from low income families where parents are illiterate. They are sometimes even pushed out of school. Thus, children's identity as well as their learning and cultural experiences are predominantly defined by the others with whom they live. I hesitate to use either collective or dependent as adjectives for their sense of self since both these terms indicate the absence of autonomy and individuality. The children were found, even at this young age, to be able to stand up for themselves in familiar surroundings, even among the disadvantaged settings, in fact more so. Rather, it emerges that children's sense of self is distributed, as is their learning and knowledge of the world. It is when this familiarity is taken away from them, and they are placed in a setting or tasks which demand individual activity that is exclusive of familiar 'others' that they are most uncomfortable and even unable to react. The inclusive participation of others, where children appear "taller than they are" is the most natural context for them. School provides a dramatic contrast to that familiarity, and this is a frequent cause for academic failure.

This disconnect between the way our children are being reared and the way we approach their learning is in need of serious attention since it is causing much disturbance and even disadvantage. As per the experiences in this study, motivation on the part of the family is the necessary but not sufficient condition for school success. It appears that along with this, maternal education was critical in determining school success, even when other members like the father may be educated. Simply wanting the child to be better at school and enrolling the child did not seem enough. This is a serious drawback in the educational system in a country with a high prevalence of illiteracy. Why is our educational system supporting those who already have support from within?

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Self and identity of the young child in contemporary Indian families is the focus of this research project. The young child is a vitalelement of family and community life all over the world. Childhood implies renewal, and all known societies of the world have methods of preparing young children for later life, for participation in the adult world of family and society. Although the activity of children's care and training is a universal feature of every society, the ways in which these activities are transacted have displayed much variety. Arguably, the care of children is an amalgamation of ecological adaption and cultural history. Children are born into a meaningful system that kicks in as soon as the idea of a child is born. The child means something even before it is born, and these meanings, both personal and collective, will surround the growth and development in all phases of life.

In the Western classical tradition, the notion of childhood as a separate state was not written about until about 2 or 3 centuries ago (Aries, 1962; Raman, 2000). Although this publication led to a surge of interest in the issue and much documentary evidence about the recognition of childhood emerged from different parts of the world, the Western notion of childhood became the norm for the rest of the world. On account of changes in the economic orientation of modern society, particularly the need to spend long years in school, there has been a consequent transition in families to reduce the number of children. From being seen as assets, children are now being viewed as liabilities to independent adult living (Lancy, 2008). Another consequence that defies simple logic is that those who can afford to have more children have fewer.

Historically speaking, different countries within Europe have had very diverse experiences with childhood. Unlike the prevailing atmosphere in the rest of the neighbouring countries, 17th Century Netherlands Protestantism flourished and society became more liberal, this also affected views on childhood (Kloek, 2003). In exile from his home country, the experience of Dutch society influenced John Locke after which he brought Dutch ideas on child rearing to England (Locke, 1693/1694). These changes reached the rest of Europe a few centuries later. Religious beliefs notwithstanding, Italy, which once had the highest birth-rate in Europe, currently has the world's lowest (Lancy, 2008). Europe experienced the great transition in

demographics, the slowing of the birth-rate of its population subsequent to the entry of birth control, support for which still remains paltry in the US in comparison to other parts of the world (Martin, et al., 2003). Similar changes (of slowing down of birth rates) are taking place in Japan, where elective infertility is on a rapid rise (Jolivet, 1997). And yet, there are communities and countries in the world (like Somalia), where bearing children even under very difficult circumstances, remains a matter of pride in spite of the hardship.

Developing countries like ours battle with high rates of infectious diseases and infant mortality, despite significantly improved health statistics in the recent decades. China remains a singular example of the enforcement of the one child policy in 1979, now relaxed. Adjoining its borders, Russia rewards women for having babies on account of the dearth of children, whereas a Chinese woman would be fined for her second child (Lancy, 2008). The value placed on children is clearly different in different communities and over the course of history, and is sometimes easy to understand, and often defies any logic. Clearly, sexuality and procreation, the biology and social processes related to bearing and care of children have become untethered (Strathern, 1992). By the modern world, high fertility is seen as anti-social. Perhaps the film, *Children of Men* (Cuarón, 2006) that depicts an eventuality of universal infertility in the year 2027 may not be very far from the direction in which the world is moving (Žižek, 2010).

The process of evolution of species relates very closely to the study of development. Exploring changes in the processes of reproduction and natural selection and any gives species relates to three clear principles: chance, order and selection (Konner, 2010). The biological dimension of human behaviour and its development are fundamental, although this does not at all imply the lack of plasticity and cultural influence. Childhood as a phase of development is something we share with many species, as is the process of socialisation. Socialisation and enculturation are different phenomena, since birds, mammals, and especially higher mammals, express socialisation (Konner, 2010). It is important, therefore, to remember that neither childhood, nor the care of the young is a uniquely human phenomenon. The legacy of the evolution is deeply ingrained in our adaptation to the contexts in which we live. The human infant is, undoubtedly, the most precocious in sensory capacities, and most altricial or underdeveloped in motor aspects (Konner, 2010). With this background, there is also no denying that ours is the only species that can imagine and contemplate about childhood in ways that are

characteristically human. Biology does not negate culture, the two processes are actively integrated in each living being.

The study of childhood as a science in the Indian tradition of Ayurveda has had a carefully detailed notion of stages of development (Anandalakshmy, 2010; Mistry & Saraswathi, 2003). Findings from different cultures indicate that children's development is contingent upon several factors ranging from personal, social to cultural and national and beyond. In presenting a study of how children develop and how their identity advances, it is essential to incorporate these different dimensions within a study. Ecological factors, economic differences, social practices as well as beliefs about children are all key players in the field of children's development of identity. Some of research from other cultures has indicated that the context within which children grow, the beliefs of parents about changes and challenges and pathways that they imagine and work towards are the three primary dimensions of the situation within which children live. Beliefs influence practices and these determine the final interaction between parent and child. Recent research also indicates that children are active agents in their own development, and their adaptability and innovation is greatly adapted towards the social setting and not simply internalised as a pre-existing condition. The theoretical proposals of Cultural Psychology have been adopted to understand childhood in context. Rather than seeing children as individual identities, products of their parenting, it is believed that children and culture are deeply connected through family and community interactions. Culture and individuals make each other up (Valsiner, 2007), and children contribute to culture as much as culture influences children. The mediating factors of family life and cultural beliefs are critical to understanding the sequence and significance of development. Human development must be understood as a cultural process where individuals develop as participants in cultural processes (Rogoff, 2003).

About research on the diverse experiences of childhood, Weisner (1996) writes that,

In all of these studies, the sense of childhood being lived in another cultural space, with their different cultural careers...stands out. If you went to these or a hundred other cultural places, you would discover the startling, disturbing, wonderful variety of what it means to be a child or a parent, and the variety of forms that development can take. Children there would surprise you with the remarkable cultural activities they have acquired and which they

clearly are developmentally prepared for cultures to discover. The theories, findings and developmental concerns of the authors of these cross-cultural studies, vary enormously, but that is another matter (p. 306).

While looking at cultural trends in children's development, research has primarily focussed on differences on comparative tasks often without exploring reasons for differences and the contextual framework within which conduct is expressed. When these factors are not considered, and when singular tasks are used to compare between groups of children, there is a tendency to favour accomplishments that emerge from within technologically advanced settings, thereby privileging the notion of a particular cultural version of development. It is not simply that culture matters, but *how* culture matters in human development (Rogoff, 2003). This research study was initiated in an effort to develop an exploration of children's identity, actively constructed from their own activities, conversations and relationships, emerging from the context of their lives rather than from a distant perspective.

Scholarly writing in India has been very focused on the ideology behind putative practices related to the care and socialisation of children towards specific culturally valued identities (Sharma, 2004). Empirical work has, however, been quite sparse to say the least. Direct observations, ethnographic engagement and intensive interviewing of family members travel much further in constructing a reasonable picture of life circumstances in dynamic contexts. The field of Cultural Psychology has provided us with a critical shift in the understanding of development in context, arguing for the fact that culture and context are critical to understanding processes of human development (Valsiner, 2007). Instead of searching for methods that explore the insides of people's minds as evidence for cultural activity, Valsiner argues that it is culture as conduct and context that best displays human developmental processes. Inter-mental activity takes precedence of intra-mental activity in the exploration of cultural processes.

The international attention towards childhood has gained a new status with the UN convention on the rights of children. There are several important criticisms of the global trend to homogenize the idea of childhood, of which an important one is outlined by Raman (2000) when she argues that the convention takes Western notions of childhood as the starting point and from there on starts the process of globalising this version, first through colonisation, and now through international aid (Ennew, 1995, p. 202). Several scholars have argued that the rise in the fields of

international law and human rights have, in fact, undermined cultural autonomy and state sovereignty. For years The US of A was a key member in the scripting of the CCRC but have refused to ratify it on account of this very reason, that it putatively underestimated the importance of the family. In a country where childhood experiences are different, where continuity between children and adults' lives is more fluid, and where there is greater inter-generational reciprocity, the child is firmly framed within a social group like the family or community (Raman, 2000) and it is difficult, if not impossible to consider the idea of the independent rights of the child. Another problem is confronted when we consider the age of a child, at 18, the limit set by the CRC, many children in different parts of the world are well into adult roles and relationships, sometimes already married and heading a family, making their status as a 'child' quite inappropriate, to say the least. Many children start work early, contributing to the household income. Here, the case of Rajesh (name changed) is an exemplar.

Rajesh is a 14 year-old boy who lives with his parents and younger brother as housekeepers in a neighbour's home. Rajesh is sprightly, alert and active, has been from a very early age. Since both his parents used to work as housekeepers and cooks in different homes, Rajesh had learnt to be by himself from a very young age. Once the younger brother, now 5 arrived, Rajesh was constantly expected to care for the child. The little one was a bundle of energy, very healthy and active and rather uninhibited. Rajesh took care of him when the parents were working for which he often had to skip school. Somewhere along the way, the mother was diagnosed with brain tuberculosis and had to undergo several procedures for which she would often be away to the government hospital. Her sister took care of the two brothers in these times at her home, a bit further away. She was better off and had only one child and was very happy to care for these two. Rajesh's school attendance and consequent results were poor, so the first thing the father did was to put him in a much lower fee school. Soon his parents realized that Rajesh was not doing well, and would spend much time in wandering. Quick to respond to the situation,

the father took a decision and enrolled the boy as an attendant in a local office of a Chartered Accountant, two houses away from their own, this also allowed him to keep an eye on the boy. Rajesh is now employed, dresses well every morning and is in a regular job earning well for himself and contributes to the family income. He is only 14. In theory, he is in violation of the CRC, but Rajesh is happy, confident, more sure of himself. Constantly getting poor results and rejection from school had made him quite under-confident.

Rajesh's life is typical, and the elevation of his status, from being a useless student to being a confident earner, is for him a significant one. Also, for the family, he has moved from being a consumer to a contributor. Everything about his life is now changed. This family has no concern with international standards, they are fending for themselves in a harsh world, working hard and earning money for a living. For them, the convention makes absolutely no sense. If Rajesh had been good in studies, there would have been no question, "We would have kept him in school" says the father (Raju, personal communication, 15th May, 2014), "but he is better off here, it also keeps him out of trouble". The potential risk of having a school drop-out getting into criminal activity was not wasted on the father, on account of which he took quick action. These observations resonate well with the research on 36 groups of young workers in South-east Asia and Africa. Discussing the findings from the Children and Work project, Woodhead (2000) says that it in the study of Child Labour is essential to look at children's perspectives about work; that children felt they were contributing to the family, and communicated a sense of pride in what they were doing, both for themselves as well as for the family. Although schooling has been around in the West for almost a hundred years, it received stiff resistance at the start. When parents in recently literate societies find that schooling is not providing an evidence of a return, they prefer to put children to work (Neill, 1983). Children's participation in craft work of the family among craft communities is expected, but the participation is always dependent on the display of early talent for specific jobs (Anandalakshmy & Bajaj, 1981; Edwards, 2005; Maynard et al., 1999), and the participation of young children is carefully monitored so as not to interfere with the product or the process (Nieuwenhuys, 1994). In conversation with a Madhubani artist who had come to speak about his work at our institution (personal

communication Satyanarain Lal Karn, 12th November, 2003). Asked since when he had been sketching, he said that till he was twelve, his mother who was his mentor, also a master craftsman, would not even allow him to make a single motif, she would smack him on the hands if she saw him making an attempt. By the time he was considered ready to sketch, he had watched and secretly desired to draw for years. The restraint, he said, was very stern since it was believed that it would spoil his skill. He would take a stick and often try to sketch out on the ground when no one was watching! Much of the craft work is taught through apprenticeship as with other family-based occupations, but parents are not always believed to be the best teachers (Goody, 2006) and much of the training would be through some instruction and mostly just be around, watching and assisting when called upon. For instance, a Japanese potter will know that he is making progress when a master picks from him work for firing rather than destroying them (Singleton, 1989).

As Raman puts it:

The existence of legal pluralism in the south Asian subcontinent where the prevalence of a plethora of customary and personal laws raises complex issues regarding the nature of the relationship of the individual and the collectivity, particularly when this has been defined and worked out differently in different groups. Besides, the rise of majoritarian chauvinism in south Asia and its implications for the rights of minority groups poses even more serious problems. However, even if one were to disregard these untidy complexities, it is quite clear that the role of the parents and family in shaping the views of the child and thereby in the child's socialisation is seriously undermined (2000, p. 4058 – 4059).

Children's lives are framed within the dynamic organisation of family relationships and community living. The diversity in context, content and processes is critical to explore using culturally familiar methodology and grounded theory approaches. In researcher dominated by standardised explorations, we sometimes conflate domains, truncate variation and misunderstand diversity, since the interpretations are driven by a deductive approach that is affiliated with a positivistic paradigm in the understanding of human processes. Although we have had some

important insights using these methods, hidden spaces of cultural activity that is at the heart of human interactions remain unexplored since they are not accessible using these methods. It becomes like searching for microbes using a telescope.

Why do we need to study childhood separately from other human activity? Among humans, we have the longest dependency of any species on earth. This is a period that seems quite focussed on the development of social and mental capacities. It is no wonder that the energy that is spent on physical advancement in other species, the equivalent period of infancy receives this diverted energy towards brain development. Although we find that in affluent nations, the full-blown expression of adulthood seems to go further and further into the future, this is not true of children in other parts of the world (Lancy, 2008). The control and attention to fertility, child bearing and related investments has permitted the extension of the experience of childhood and a consequent postponement of adult responsibility. In fact it is our biology that permits such a wide range of entry points for culture (Ridley, 2003). Children's entry into a family signals cultural renewal as well as continuity. Why people have children is a matter of intense discussion and debate, but this much is clear: that we have children when we are sure that there are supportive kin around us to assist in their care, when we believe that these children will be future workers for the family. In the absence of either or both these conditions, humans have been known to reduce their fertility (Turke, 1989). Among foraging communities, for instance, caring for young children is a burden on their mobility, and unlike nearby agricultural communities, they tend to have fewer children LeVine, (1988).

1.2. Childhood and culture

The unique dependence of human beings on culture for sustenance of the species makes it necessary to focus seriously on cultural processes as constitutive for human nature. The notion of 'altriciality' (needing nourishment) describes the disproportionately lengthy period of dependency of the human infant in comparison with other species. This reliance on another person for survival and sustenance is clearly seen as responsible for the many features of adult-child relationships, and also the bedrock for the transference of culture and interpersonal closeness. Despite the robust variety of human social arrangements, our scientific study of human conduct has been largely monotropic. Even where 'other cultures' are studied, the initiation of the work emerges from the technologically advanced world with its ideological

conventions. Other ways of documenting and exploring human lives are set outside of 'science', thereby discarding a huge range of work that could be highly valuable for the study of human nature. Narratives, biographies, travelogues, archives and literature have been placed outside of psychological and social sciences, thereby creating a very skewed and ethnocentric version of human nature, guided by the West. The variety of human existence in reality has been fitted into a narrow frame, according to a narrow set of rules. Any investigation of human behaviour outside of this narrow range of rules, carefully maintained by ethics committees, grant allocations and publication rejections, thereby protecting the industry well, and also alienating a large body of different kinds of scholarly works (Hammond, 1998). In my understanding, expanding psychology to embrace other disciplines and other cultures is critical to its ecological validity.

Let us dwell, for a moment, on the meaning of ecological validity. Wright (1996) uses the expression to indicate the 'real world' simulation of any experiment. However, as Hammond (1998) records the inceptive remarks by Brunswick, the original meaning of the term was intended to urge for psychology as a science to favour descriptive, idiographic and ecologically relevant methods of investigation as opposed to nomothetic, systematic experimentation. Apart from 'representativeness of the subjects, Brunswick (1936) also talks about the representativeness of the 'design', in that it should be familiar to the people under scientific study! Further, it is not simply the subjects that need to be sampled, but also the objects of study. The materials that are used for psychological explorations need to also be representative of the local. In 1977, Bronfenbrenner pointed out that, "the emphasis on rigor has led to experiments that are elegantly designed but often limited in scope. . . . Many of these experiments involve situations that are unfamiliar, artificial, and short-lived and that call for unusual behaviours that are difficult to generalize to other settings" (p. 513). He proceeds to say further, that an observation is ecologically valid "if it is carried out in a naturalistic setting and involves objects and activities from everyday life....And Ecological validity refers to the extent to which the environment experienced by the subjects in a scientific investigation has the properties it is supposed or assumed to have by the investigator" Although Hammond (1988) dismisses this definition of ecological validity as an error, departing completely from the original meaning, this is precisely the meaning that is being accepted here. How far is the imagined childhood we carry in our minds in consonance with the reality of childhood? Since our books are filled with versions of

family life and children's development predominantly measured within the imagined childhood of cultural arrangements and normative descriptions of WEIRD samples, children growing up in other parts of the world are seriously alienated. We read about family relationships that include a family life cycle that is based on the nuclear model of post-industrial revolution societies, where children are born and brought up by a couple who share a romantic relationship after a period of adolescence, emerging into young adulthood and so on. These sequences appear very neat, but depart seriously from the lives we lead. Our students pick up these books and learn about these alien ways with prudent ease that young students develop on account of living subaltern lives. Some text-books pay lip service to other models of family life, inserting boxes and pictures, making token references to the rest of the world, somewhat like Benetton advertisements. The primary paradigm for childhood is one of a precious child, born to a couple, who is toilet trained and weaned by the rules of Western family life, engaged on activities organized for him or her by society, moving into participation in preschool, to school, college and work. Alternate sequences like children's work with the family, or lack of access to schooling (because there aren't any), care of children by other children, and so on, are marked as departures from the 'norm'. Mothers are seen as exclusive caretakers who may use alternate arrangements if they are working. Students of developmental psychology, all over the world, depend on these text-books for their fundamentals.

Whether we engage with the study of human relationships, social institutions, conduct or practice, there is mind-boggling variety in the interplay between nature and culture. Fostered by ecological variety, the ways in which human lives are arranged displays diversity that is often hard to grasp. We are, by the very nature of our socialization, primed to think of our own ways as the basic, and other ways as different. This fundamental formula of human existence has been the reason for society and security, but also for bigotry and war (Berreby, 2005). The ingredients of our identity and sense of belongingness also form the rationale for separation. Childhood is often doubly alienated, first from society by being characterized as special, and then on account of the experiences of a subaltern community. The differences occur on ideological as well as real grounds. Most often, childhood in other parts of the world is evaluated against the dominant picture of the cherished, well-nourished child from a Western nuclear family. Somewhere, majority childhood needs to find its place in academic literature and for this purpose I follow a long line of eminent scholars in the attempt to bring childhood in India to the reader, not as an

apology for the peculiar diversity of odd practices, but as an everyday reality emerging from within a specific social history.

Cultural differences in the experience of childhood are serious. Whereas American families have to arrive at the hospital with a name for the child, families in other cultures delay naming until survival is assured, the child is then considered socially born (Lancy, 2008). Attitudes towards weaker, disabled or terminally ailing children can be quite different depending upon the economic status of a community. Whether a child will be valued as a future asset or seen as an expensive little cherub or considered to be an extra hand at the farm is a matter of cultural history and ecological adaptation. Foraging societies will have fewer children than those subsisting on agriculture (Lancy 2008). Religious groups have also contrasted in the view of a child as a gift from God, to be indulged and even worshiped, or as a product of sin, to be enculturated to weed out the wildness. How a child will be treated depends to a large extent on the cultural images of children. The images of children have indeed been varied. And yet, in the expressions of children, there have been universal features. Children all over the world will play. They will play with siblings, other children, with things that can be found in and around the house, or with material provided for them to play with. In modern societies, such attempts to play are seriously monitored and organised by adults to ensure certain experiences for the child. A world, quite different from the real adult world out there, is created for the child, to be cherished, protected and guided. This structuring of children's time and energy is not a feature of most small-scale societies where children's activities are taken for granted and seen as keeping children busy and out of the way of working adults. However, the present day child in affluent societies can be seen as "economically useless but emotionally precious" (Zelizer, 1985, p. 3) resulting in what Lancy (1996, p. 12) calls a "neontocracy", a culture where childhood is central. Culture often overtakes the evolutionary rationale among human beings, often making choices to counter even their own self-interest, what can be termed as ethical behaviour (Hrdy, 1999). As much as that may be true, humans are also capable of working towards self-interest in opposition to cultural patterns!

When Hillary Clinton quoted an African proverb "It takes a village" as the title of her book (Clinton, 1996), the view of a village child surrounded by enthusiastic, loving adults comes to mind. However, rural child care is a distant experience from this. Rather than adults vying for a place to care for the baby, whoever is around takes on the responsibility of a sort of loose

supervision of children (Lancy, 2008). Most often, children are in the company of other children as adults go on with their lives. In our research in a village near Delhi, we found children to be mostly in the company of other children, a pattern that is also shared with children in urban poor settlements, although the latter was far less secure (Chaudhary, 2013). Once the period of breast-feeding was over, anyone available would take over the responsibility of supervising the children for tasks they needed assistance with, which they mostly learnt to accomplish autonomously or with an older sibling, with amazing speed. Contact with adults was sporadic and perfunctory once breast-feeding was completed, usually after the arrival of another child. The youngest child therefore experienced the longest proximity with the mother, whereas older ones were found to accept being favourites of ‘other’ mothers. The rural formula for childhood was distinct and shared a lot of common features with rural communities in other parts of the world (Gottlieb, 2004, Lancy, 2008). This form of parenting could be termed as “casual nurturance” (Erchak, 1992, p. 50) or co-occurring care (Saraswathi, 2003). Frequently this approach is frequently accompanied by comments of the biological mother is observed to be too overtly affectionate towards her own child (Torren, 1990).

The whole argument of human species survival beyond reproductive age, especially for females rests on the argument that this must be on account of support for the young baby (Lancy, 2008), but one must not forget, that historically, longevity beyond menopause is only a recent phenomenon for humans (Gawande, 2014). Human beings did not live beyond 30 in the period of the Roman Empire, and medical advancement is responsible for this surplus time that humans seem to have in a single life-time. Although what we do with this extended period, is a matter of great concern, the author writes. Medical knowledge has helped us survive, but less and less attention is being paid to growing older and the acceptance of death as an eventuality (Gawande, 2014).

The prolific use of ‘others’ in the care of a child, with ample evidence for the preference for including young girls, is seen as a powerful trend in primate studies as well as human social groups, excluding the Euro-American experience. In a recent observation of a group of rhesus monkeys in the Western ghats of India, the following was observed:

Several Rhesus Macaque mothers with babies were roaming the low branches as we rested during our trek. They seemed quite used to passing humans and ignored us completely.

This permitted an extended observation of the interactions of mothers with young infants as well as photography. This is what I saw: At one point, two mothers (M1 and M2), each with a baby in her arms sat facing each other on a branch. Then tenderly, M1 reached out for the other's infant and stroked it. As M1 was doing this, M2 turned her face and shoulders pointedly away, towards the side, holding onto an adjacent branch for support. It was almost as if she (M2) was soliciting the attention by reducing her own. I would not have noticed this had M1 not turned her face away moments later, as M2 extended her arm to groom her (M1's) baby.

There is abundant evidence of the benefits of alloparenting among primates. The above observation provides clear evidence for the fact that not only are other mothers offered babies, but that the biological mother even steps back a little so that the other female can approach the baby. This interaction with other babies is critical to the care of the infant as well as learning to raise one's own. Although it is next to impossible to replicate studies with humans, there is no denying that caring by others is more the norm than the exception, if one takes a broader perspective of family life. The exclusive and constant care by a mother that is described in textbooks of developmental psychology is based more on an ideological family model, and does not represent reality very well, even within the culture from which it emerges (Burman, 1994).

The role of siblings also remains critical, both in their learning to take care of children as well as keepers for younger siblings. With diminishing family size, this phenomenon is clearly being lost. There is evidence from different parts of the world that older siblings watch younger ones, keeping them busy and out of the way of adults (Chaudhary, 2013; Clinton, 1996; Maynard, 2004). Weisner and Gallimore (1977) studied hundreds of ethnographies from archives and concluded that 40% infants and 80% toddlers were cared for by someone other than the mothers, mostly an older sister. It seems that although the quality of care the siblings may provide can be questioned (Sutton-Smith, 1977), the fact that it is far more prevalent than we have recognised in developmental psychology is undisputed.

The extent to which adults involve themselves in play with children is drastically transformed in the recent times, and still, in the rural model of care, adults spend very little time,

if any, playing with their children. Intervention by mothers takes place only when there is threat of injury. Interestingly, the same benign watchfulness was observed among primates by Baldwin and Baldwin (1978). Lancy (2008) identifies the presence among many societies, of a 'mother-ground' a common play area, loosely defined, with several watchful elders of the community who supervise the children at play among themselves (p. 132). Regarding the grandmother, an interesting evolutionary explanation has been forwarded by Hawkes (Hawkes et al., 2000). The argument was that humans were the only species where physically fit members of the female species lived well beyond their reproductive years. This phenomenon may actually be an evolutionary investment in the well-being of grand-children, they claim. Grandmothers are an important resource for the care of children, all over the world (Lancy, 2008).

Anthropological investigations about the father's role in the care of children is found to be quite minimal, if not absent. Although some arguments claim that fathers (and other men in the family) are actually far more involved than is evident on account of their departure at the time of data collection (Chaudhary, 2013a). Several communities in Asia and Africa actually prevent fathers from approaching the young baby and mother, and even sending them off ritually to her parents place for child-birth to provide the much needed rest and recovery (Lancy, 2008). In anthropological literature, Hewlett (2010) found that across several societies, a father's status was inversely related to his participation in child care. Thus we can find that the father's role varies widely across societies, and could be discussed as fluctuating between the categories of intimate, distant and multiple (many male kin carers) (Hewlett, 2010). One of the important conclusions that Shwalb, Shwalb and Lamb (2013) arrive at is that a father's role in a child's life can be characterised by change and variation! There is however, a worldwide need for a discussion of the father's role in the contemporary family.

The role of professional child carers cannot be underestimated. In the affluent, post industrialised world, children are, from a very young age, cared for by professionally trained caregivers. However, this facility is expensive except where state-funded as in the Scandinavian nations. If we look around the world, the main correlate of lower fertility is the absence of dependable kin to care for children. When parents have only themselves to care for the child in this increasingly costly business of child care, they are having fewer and fewer children. Raising kids in the contemporary, technologically advanced world with high mobility and fast access to information has made childcare extremely challenging, and this is showing in the falling birth

rates (Lancy, 2008). Village-based enculturation is just not adapted to city-life and examples of destitution can be seen all over the world. Specific examples are seen among immigrants in France (2005 riots¹) and urban poor in India (Chaudhary, 2013). The distributed care arrangements of the ‘mother-ground’ just do not provide adequate guidance to deal with street life in urban areas. The enforcement of birth control and punitive measures to ensure the success of the single child policy has indeed resulted in a generation of indulged children. These ‘little emperors’ as they are called, are frequently obese and difficult to manage (Lebra, 1994).

Co-sleeping continues through childhood as a norm in Asian families, and mothers nurse their children longer and toilet training happens later, often accommodating to the child’s rhythms or tolerating accidents. In spite of strong influences of Westernisation related to other aspects of children’s care (provisions for toys, activities, books, diapers, decorations, clothes), educated Indian parents still persist with several cultural patterns in the care of their children, accessing multiple sources for advice, the internet, books as well as folk wisdom, tending to provide a sort of eclectic care for young children, actively and deliberately mixing the traditional and the modern (Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010). Perhaps one can go further to say that although external arrangements for care may be heavily influenced by the West, the proximal aspects, like sleeping, feeding and nurturance remain heavily influenced by tradition.

Regarding impact on childcar, rather than maternal employment, it is family income and maternal education that emerge as the most significant factors (Black, et al., 1999). The mother who is well-off can find devices and materials to ease her time with the baby, and if she is educated, she has the capacity to find information and support education. There is no denying that raising children in the context of poverty is a constant struggle, and yet, the fertility rates seem completely irrational in this regard. Conversations with children remain exclusive to parents with higher levels of education. This face-to-face conversation and exchange of ideas is a feature of more educated mothers everywhere in the world (Chaudhary, 2004; Ochs et al., 1992). This parent as teacher role has clearly emerged from a very specific cultural context, the Euroamerican (Alford, 1980). With the larger support system in village life, universally, parents do not need to provide this experience of being a teacher. If at all craft work or occupations are learnt, the exchanges are primarily through the apprenticeship model (Rogoff, 1990) and not by direct teaching. The guided scaffolding of the dyadic teaching system in an educated home just

¹Associated Press, November 11, 2005

will not apply in a rural set-up (Lancy, 2008). Care strategies of the village invite disaster when transported to the city.

1.3.Socialisation and the young child

Play and imitation are the most enduring features of childhood (Piaget & Inhelder, 1973) and this proclivity is actively utilised for socialisation, in making a child a productive member of her culture. The playfulness that comes naturally to a child is actively utilised towards training a child for school among modern, educated parents. However, neither playfulness, nor socialisation are the exclusive reserve of human social groups (Konner, 2010). Running freely exploring their world in the village, children learn actively by watching each other, under minimal instructions, this element of their childhood also makes children growing up rural communities far less adapted to schooling, worldwide. Children love to watch events, especially if these are unusual. All over the world, adults exploit this tendency for teaching children basic norms of social life through different discourse strategies, mostly, although not always, indirect (Atran & Sperber, 1991). De Waal (2001) argues that the tendency to imitate and observe others is concomitant with the desire to adapt oneself to become more like the others that one sees in a group. Playfulness on the other hand brings in the capacity for use of tools (Byrne, 1995), as is evident from the fact that Chimpanzees and humans are the only two species endowed with both skills, clearly related with advanced cognitive capacity. Symbolic play that characterises the use of something to stand for something else is a clear facility that is granted to humans by the advanced brain functioning, and it is no surprise that Chimps also display rudiments of symbolic activity in the lab setting (Savage & Lewin, 1994). Regarding play, it has been observed that pre-literate societies rarely intervene in children's object play, thereby pointing towards the high possibility that modern day micromanagement of children's play must be focussed tacitly towards success at schooling (Lancy, 2008). Unlike urban educated families all over the world, village children rarely have specific objects to play with. They play with found objects which may frequently turn out to be potentially hazardous as well (Marshall, 1972; Whiting, 1941). In my research in the village community, occasional remains of a rare toy purchased for a child would be found in every home, children would still find the interest to pick it up for play, although real objects always proved to be far more engaging for children (Chaudhary, 2013). An important difference between rural and urban environments regarding the guidance and provision

for the range of things that a child is exposed to and guided towards, the most effective remark was made by Morelli (Morelli et al., 2003). Children's activities and their management in villages, the adults world is transacted within the full view of children who actively utilise this for their play, whereas in urban communities, the child has access to a much narrower range of adult activity, especially among the poor.

In today's world, educated parents want to enhance the child's potential with focussed strategies from the time it is born, if not before. This enterprise of talking to the baby, reading books, providing specific experiences for learning and gradually expanding planned activities from a young age is typical of the modern parenting enterprise, actively driven by commercial interests. When a child will start being considered capable of being taught varies widely in anthropological literature (Lutz & LeVine, 1983). Whereas the constant attention to and supervision of the child till adolescence characterises modern Western parenting, research indicates that the cultural routines of this form of childcare are clearly incompatible with a great deal of "variety, duration or frequency" of mother-child play (Lancy, 2007, p. 274). The domestic routines are just too hectic for long engagements with young children except occasionally. Lancy argues that the intense mother-child routine is clearly cultural and not attributable to nature, and must therefore not be imposed on the rest of the world.

Regarding child-rearing and ethnographic literature, it seems quite clear from the cross-cultural records that rather than training the child, there is far more evidence of "culture-seeking" (Fiske, 1997, p. 11). In rural communities, an intelligent child is one displays self-sufficiency, respect for elders, obedience, attention to detail and willingness to work and take care of younger siblings (Wober, 1974), this list was not very different from the one constructed around responses of parents in Indian homes, rural and small towns (Chaudhary, 2013). Several complicated techniques are used by parents to make children comply. Although praise and reward seem more common now than ever before, small-scale societies and traditional childcare seemed to depend on somewhat harsher and direct ways of managing children. Threats are commonly used for frightening children from inappropriate or risky adventures. Ochs (1988) reported that Samoan mothers would speak of animals eating up the child if they don't listen. Similarly, Indian parents frequently used threats like they will give a child away, or that a scary person would take them away if they did not comply. Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) describes how the Kaluli mothers sit their infants on the lap facing outwards and speaking on their behalf, using

kin terms and other forms of greeting to build positive relationships and teach a child through 'ventriloquism'. Teasing and shaming the child are also frequently used in some cultures, including our own. "What will 'so and so' say" is a common and strong enough reason for urging a child to do, or not do something! A similar technique was observed among Indian families where another adult would most commonly be addressed with the kin term from the position of the child if the child was being spoken to, or about. This positioning, of the child as the nodal person for the use of kin terms was a clear strategy aimed at early learning of the highly valued and elaborate kin terminology of the Indian family system (Chaudhary, 2004). Speaking on behalf of children was also observed in some instances. The value placed on rules of appropriate conduct including forms of address, is widespread in the literature on child rearing, whether in the Pacific Islands, African subcontinent, or Native American communities or Japan (Lancy, 2008).

Socialisation for gender roles starts with the recognition of a child's sex that may commence at birth or later. Almost all societies have different strategies for dealing with boys and girls although the timing and nature of the differences are diverse. Whereas young babies in India are dressed without gender marking, children in the West are marked by gender from before they are born, if the gender is known. In villages and small towns in India, all young children wear similar clothes, especially among middle and lower class children. There is a favour for the more practical shorts and shirt for all pre-pubertal girls in the village visited, although a clear feminisation of the dress patterns was in evidence for polder girls. It was sometimes hard to tell a child's gender under the age of around 10 unless you heard the child's name or saw some sign of jewellery. As children grew older, the differences became marked, both in dress and appearance as well as conduct.

Conversations with children have recently become an important source for the study of parent-child relationships as well of cultural transfer. The work on language socialisation proposes that children are taught the use of language as well as culture through language (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Thus language is the means as well as the message. The way in which adults speak to children show a wide variety of strategies, some of them especially geared towards the child, and used exclusively with children; and sometimes with toys and pets, by children and adults (Chaudhary, 2004). Talking with babies face-to-face is seen exclusively in Euroamerican and other westernised cultures, with American adults showing the most exaggerated prosodic

modifications we call motherese (Fernald, 1992). The frequently heard routine of asking the child “What is this?” about an object in Indian families was found to be expressed as “Where is that?” or “Show me how you pray to this picture (pointing to a picture of a deity)?” Whereas in the former conversation, the child is expected to articulate something, in the latter, she would be expected and trained to listen, comprehend and act (Chaudhary, 2004). Such differences in positioning with the baby display clear cultural trends in conversations, ranging between the close bonding between the Japanese mother and child (Caudill, 1988), Fijian children are discouraged from speaking to adults altogether (Toren, 1990) and the Swedish orientation of the highly child-centered positioning where a child has to argue forcibly and eloquently (Dahlberg, 1992). Rural communities rarely expect to have long conversations with children, instructions may be brief and to the point, and they are largely permitted to make sense of their own world (Super & Harkness, 1986). When societies become educated and more complex, this attitude seems to become transformed and adults no longer wait before starting to prepare a child by training for self-control, delaying rewards, and public appearances. The parent then becomes teacher, and although this has led to a high advancement in information, as a consequence, three year olds can face a sense of failure in many parts of the world (Kusserow, 2004).

In a study comparing rural and urban families with regard to story-telling, a story was told to the mother/caregiver, and she was asked to repeat it to the child (Bhargava, 2010). This particular story had one act of insolence by the child in the story, where he/she calls the mother “Stupid mother”. Not unexpectedly, out of a total of 48 adults, only 11 (4 rural and 7 urban) made any mention of the “silly mother” comment; and the same number (5 rural and 6 urban) repeated that the child was “irritated” with the mother. In the analysis, the maximum modification was found in this part of the story (Bhargava, 2010, p. 152, 155). The modifications they made were also interesting to analyse, they either left it out altogether, turned it into a game (switching places in one instance) or simply modifying the story as a teaching lesson. This indicated how strongly the input to a child is internalised by the adult. Insulting a mother or other adult, even in a story, is something that was found to be blanked out or modified. Whether tacit or overt, adults clearly make attempts to modulate the world that they present to children. This was found even among rural families who otherwise do not appear to intervene very much in what children do most of the time. But giving direct input of insolence was clearly not popular!

In traditional societies, folklore provides an important packaging of cultural norms and practices, often directed towards moral instruction through narrative. Cultural transmission was transacted through story, through guidance of play activity and through direct conversation.

One important dimension of the enterprise of childhood is schooling, more specifically formal schooling. Three key objectives of schooling have been identified by Serpell (1993), namely, “the promotion of economic success, the transmission of culture from one generation to the next, and the cultivation of children’s intellectual and moral development (p. 1). An important corollary to this ideology is that beyond the early years, the family is considered insufficiently disposed towards fulfilling these objectives. As the child grows, this interface becomes fraught with increasing complexity. One of the underlying objectives of this research endeavour was also to examine the relationship between home and school in order to evaluate the entry of children into formal schooling and their experiences therein. India has not had a very good record with schooling. The imposed system of formal education still remains out of reach for many children, and the large population of unschooled parents try desperately to provide schools for their children who often fail to either reach or stay in school.

1.4.Culture and the study of childhood

Our assumptions about childhood in developmental psychology derive from less than 5% of the world’s children (Keller, 2007). However, children’s relationships with others, their socialisation and care are substantially divergent in different cultures (Gottlieb, 2004; Keller, 2007; Lancy, 2008; Weisner, 1987). Let us focus on the ideology of individuation. Most Western parenting is focused on the goal of self-sufficiency, individuation and autonomy as a desired goal of parenting, particularly within the psychoanalytic tradition (Erikson, 1950; Mahler, 1972). The entire industry of attachment research is founded upon these ideals (Keller, 2013). Such approaches tend to underestimate the presence of autonomy (without labelling it thus) in rural, small-scale societies, where children live within loose boundaries in close contact with the natural world, often fending for themselves (Chaudhary, 2013), or the independence that is permitted and even encouraged within apparently close relationships of cultures of interpersonal closeness (Chaudhary, 2011). Since these observations fall outside of the neat categories we create, they are ironed out for the sake of scientific clarity. Yet, it is these creases that characterise the fabric of human existence in general and childhood in particular.

Children of the world interact with many social institutions. However, the prescriptions, whether these are for family life, play activities or schooling, are again overshadowed by the construction of an imagined childhood where a happy and welcoming school, available preschool facilities, and socially organized play and games for children are considered the norm. In the absence of such facilities, children are double disadvantaged. Firstly for not attending schools, and secondly for being disadvantaged because they are not attending schools. We fail to realise that many children are not in school not because they don't want to attend school, but because there aren't any, or the circumstances do not permit a smooth entry into school.

If we look specifically at the field of 'attachment' research, the model of mother child relationships that are adopted in the classic model draw a very narrow picture of attachment, derived from the Western notion of childhood (Keller, 2013). Cross-cultural expansion of the lens of childhood displays important challenges to attachment theory deriving from research on siblings as caregivers (Lamm, 2002; Suneja, ongoing; Weisner, 2005) as well as alloparenting (Hrdy, 1999; Keller, 2013, Lancy, 2008). Similarly, studies that derive from a specific location, investigating constructs that derive meaning from the local culture, cannot find universal expression in the same way. Let us take two separate intensely cultural constructs as examples. The notion of *Amae* among the Japanese (Doi, 2001), or *Mamta* among Indians (Chaudhary & Bhargava, 2010) have a semantic gravity that locates them heavily within a cultural context. This does not mean that empathy in mother-child relationships and mother's love respectively, cannot be found in other places, but the instantaneous abduction (Peirce, 1955) of meaning generated and the consequent cultural activity is typically context specific. It would be quite strange to introduce a research study without finding equivalent cultural terminology before an investigation of a comparable construct in a different location. Like language, when a child is immersed in a specific context, the culture becomes its reality, and like fish in water, we often fail to see our culture (Cole, 1996), mostly until we confront a different context from ours.

For instance, when education is attempted, it is critical for the developing child's home environment to find important place in learning, so that a child's knowledge can move from familiar to the unfamiliar. The advancement of educational learning by separating children from their circumstances rather than taking an embedded approach is common practice in today's world, especially among developing communities. This is arguably one important reason why some children find themselves at a disadvantage. Somewhere along the course of social history,

the demand to impose an education towards idealized goals, external to the cultural setting became adopted as favourable for the future. This was demonstrated during colonization attempts with the majority world, missionary efforts, and more recently, globalization and ‘development’ among ‘backward’ communities. I had the opportunity, recently, to travel to Korba District of Chhattisgarh in Central India. The Pahari Korba tribals are a shy community who sustain on hunting and gathering and live in close contact with nature, shunning the practice of elaborate clothing as well as other activities of the progressive world. Unlike the Gonds and Oraons also living in their area, they have little interest in progressing towards modern lives; education and health services and contact with the world outside of their forest dwellings. To outsiders, they appear unkempt and untended. They own very little, and keep these things in the open. When they perceive too much interest from outsiders, they move to the interiors of the forest to recover their solitude. Several times, organizations have attempted to offer clothes, food and other services. Their lives and condition brings several critical questions to the forefront. If their practices are adapted to a life in the forest, then what is the rationale behind ‘rehabilitation’? How does one justify the provision of infrequent and inadequate facilities in the name of development, and would not any intervention bring along with it unanticipated consequences? The visit left me profoundly ambivalent about development work and social action. The survival of these people in the forests is their strength. Will not ad hoc interventions transform this into a weakness?

No intervention, not even schooling, is socially neutral (Cole, 2005, p. 196) and the relationship between school and society is different for different communities. The global trend towards large schools with uniform curricula tend to undervalue diversity and local cultures, thereby creating many of the problems associated with school failure and distancing of entire groups of children, often resulting in being ‘pushed-out’ rather than a drop-out! According to Cole (2005: 197) adapting to the local culture to form increasingly hybrid forms of schooling will be necessary if we are to reduce the tension between the local and global. Some of this tension can also be seen in views regarding play. Whereas prescriptive positions on play among children recommend specific approaches and clear recommendations for promoting creativity and optimizing development, other ways of bringing up children are seen as outdated, sometimes even neglectful towards children’s learning.

In a study of three different models of responsibility given to children in domestic work, Ochs and Izquierdo (2009: 411) find that children's work with the family contributes to both social and moral responsibility-taking, and must be viewed as a valuable cultural process. The conversations among US children and their parents suggested a significant dilemma in the care of children as opposed to promoting independence. In comparison, children's active participation among Peruvian and Samoan families, was found to contribute towards practical competency and social responsibility, as well as moral responsibility. When children are required to consider needs and desires of others, their sense of responsibility is enhanced. This research supports the escalating cause for viewing childhood and society in continuity rather than otherwise. Children's participation in the care of (and also play with) other children, is an expectation from a growing child in many cultures. Lessons from India definitely add support to this trend by examining the value of children's interactions with other children in informal and relatively unsupervised sessions. As Ochs and Izquierdo (2009) advise, there is an important value of children's participation in domestic work in general, and the care of children in particular (Chaudhary 2013a).

Can children play without 'toys'? Do material provisions in fact have a critical impact on play activities by enhancing children's capacity for play? And if so, what is the nature of this impact? The toy industry is a burgeoning success story with all the trappings of a highly advanced advertising campaign. Manufacturers have convinced us that there are age-specific play materials and that boys and girls need different things to play with. In fact, the notion of play has almost become conflated with play materials. Perhaps in this chapter, it is important to remind ourselves that children play enthusiastically with any material they can find, and specific toys are more often linked with adult beliefs about the need to provide the latest toys. Simplicity and multi-functionality are critical to sustaining interest in play. Children will play with anything they find, but it is also important to remember Prasad's warning (1997, p. 35), play that encourages active engagement is far more favourable for childhood than material that supports passive entertainment. This discussion is not against the commercial toy industry since materials have brought tremendous joy to children and families, as much as it is a caveat, that we must not conflate play with marketed toys, and in economically constrained circumstances, what is of utmost importance is providing for children's activities without too much expense. Parents should not feel compelled to buy the latest expensive toy in the market because this is the

magical innovation to playful learning of alphabet or number. Oftentimes, parents buy into this commercial trick that is played out in the media, not realising that there are many other, perhaps more effective ways for the child to learn as he or she grows. A majority of the families in the world live in situations of limited resources, and given that fact, the promotion of purchase play materials as essential for optimal development is neither favourable, nor possible. The child's mind needs to engage with materials that surround him or her, and it is that relationship with the environment and the openness to engage actively with their world, with or without specially arranged play material, which is key to playful activity. As adults concerned about children, we need to remember that children learn even when they are not being taught; this is often forgotten, and Balmes (2010) reminds us of this with aesthetic appeal through his film.

1.5. Childhood in India

The immense diversity among Indians, both within the country and among the large populations of people of Indian descent living in other parts of the world, is sometimes impossible to grasp. Characterised by variety in every aspect of life including religion, language, ecology, clothing, food and family, Indian culture is unified by this diversity (Saraswathi & Dutta 2010: 224), with several underlying and unifying ideologies, particularly among Hindu communities (Malhotra 2013: 39). Similarly, the experience of childhood is also varied, depending heavily on the context within which children are reared. However, the fact of variation does not preclude several underlying ideas about children and their care which cut across communities, and even found to prevail among people of different ethnic groups and religions living in close proximity. The “constant barrage of humanity” through illness and early deaths that Wadley noted in her early visits to Karimpur, still frame the lives of Indians to some extent; something that she, as an American found as alien as the festivities and friendships (Wadley & Derr 1993: xxii). This first-hand experience of everyday liveliness and despair of the human experience persists in present day India, where life is transacted between the home and street with earthy openness, often daunting for the foreign traveller. On account of the continuity principle, children are very much a part of this reality, both as participants as well as observers of these circumstances, favourable and otherwise. Children's engagement with playful activity is transacted within this cultural truth. One of the earliest records of the study of childhood by

Murphy (1953) records this continuity and sharing of spaces between adults and children as a persistent feature of the social life of Indians.

In an excellent study on the situation of children among the Kashmiri Pandit community (now a displaced people following ethnic tension in Kashmir), Misri (1986) notes that childhood in this community can be discussed along three axes, the human-divine axis, the individual-collective axis and the fixed-changing continuum. Confoundingly, the child is both impure as well as sacred, male as well as female, outside of society as well as central to it, human as well as divine! This unbounded and fluctuating identity of a child is gradually lost as she reaches adulthood, Misri (1986) concludes, perhaps also losing a sort of individuality that is acceptable for a child as social control kicks in. Impositions of schedules for feeding, weaning and toilet training were also not found among the weavers of Varanasi (Anandalakshmy & Bajaj, 1981), although gender-based occupational training for weaving and household work was clearly evident. Although independence of the children was not articulated, the fact that each child brought with itself its own destiny was always recognized (Anandalakshmy, 1996). Selfhood is thus a social concept since it is deeply embedded in the context in which people live (Raman, 2000).

The orientation towards a special status of children, in need of care and protection, especially vulnerable to experiences, is evident in the research findings among the urban, educated families, perhaps because they have access to the global discourse on childhood (Bhargava 2010; Chaudhary 2013b; Seymour 1999). By and large, however, the care of children in Indian families is distributed in nature, on two counts. Firstly, children are cared for inclusively rather than exclusively, both with other adults (what Seymour refers to as distributed care) as well as simultaneously, where the caregiver is likely to be doing other tasks at the same time, or co-occurring care (Saraswathi & Pai 1997: 76). The value for multiple caregivers, the orientation towards people, the importance of multiple generation households especially for children's well-being, has been evident in all studies on child care, from the early ethnographies to the contemporary studies on child care even when the family is living as an independent couple. The constant presence of and conversations with others for advice on child rearing is a common strategy that parents use, both for the welfare of the child as well as to include older people in the discourse about care. Rather than abandoning traditional care practices, mothers were found to adopt multiple strategies including using the internet as a resource among

educated families (Tuli & Chaudhary 2010: 479); quite like the way in which languages are mixed in everyday life. The arrival of children is a point at which there is a desire to return to tried and tested ways of rearing children, and couples are more welcoming of multiple generation households (Chaudhary, 2013c).

An important articulated goal of children's development was their consideration for family members, responsibility rather than reason was a dominant objective of socialization, quite similar to the findings in other non-western communities (Nsamenang & Joseph 2010). There was a high value for relationships and the social dynamics with family life, where not equality and equal rights, but vertical and horizontal arrangements, hierarchy and interpersonal dynamics are considered critical to a meaningful life. Indians are deeply conscious of social status, socialized within the family to engage differently with people who are 'seen' as different. Social discourse, even the style of language used (forms of address, other markers) are deeply sensitive to social status. It is sometimes said that in encounters with unfamiliar people, Indians tend to first evaluate the relative social standing of the other person (Roland 2005; Sen 2005; Verma 2005). It has been found that children were expected to learn this rule fast enough, that they had to behave differently with different people. In one study, it was found that older children were expected, encouraged and supported to take care of younger children every day, not as much as substitute caregivers, but as mentors during play. Birth order and age are important details that children noted in each other and younger children listened to and followed older ones, and were found to enjoy the benefits from their more advanced knowledge. For their contributions, older children were found to receive respect, followership, and constant companionship of their younger siblings. They in turn protected them in the company of other children, even adults, but sometimes relinquished their protection in case some relationship was to be preserved with another child. Care of children by children, the learning from other children and the social dynamics among children was found to have an important contribution to make in the experience of childhood among these families. Children spent far more time in the company of other children than they did with adults. For example, children were found to hardly spend any time playing with adults. They were accompanied by adults, supervised by them, fed and clothed by them, but 3-year olds played more with their sisters, brothers, cousins and neighbours than they did with adults (Chaudhary, 2013a). Children's care and play activities are thus deeply adapted to the social, physical and historic settings in which children have lived in specific and

significant ways (Singh & Srivastava 2008). This finding is in consonance with the works of Cole (1996, 2005), Rogoff (1990), Rogoff and Gauvain (1986), LeVine (1977), Greenfield and Cocking (1994), and Greenfield, Maynard and Childs (2003).

About childhood in general, it is a shared belief in Indian society, that childhood is a continuous stage in the development from birth to adulthood (Saraswathi 1999a: 27), and as a consequence, children are part and parcel of everyday activity and share spaces and events with adults in most social settings. In family life, living spaces, sleeping arrangements (Shweder, Jensen & Goldstein 1995), schedules (Seymour 1999), and social events (Trawick 1999), display the ideology of inclusion of members of all ages, and thus children are always around in the company of others of all ages. There is a constant, loose supervision of children within the rural model of family life what is trans-national. Urban Indian, nuclear and extended families are different in their focus and strategy, not their ideology. Large urban families as well as small town living also resonate with the same collective sharing of children's supervision, which often leaves children free from the focussed gaze of adults, although they are always around. This is the most frequent social context within which play occurs in the Indian family. It has been found that many urban, educated young parents yearn for and also plan towards multiple generation households when they decide to have children, almost reversing the assumed trend of nuclear families with increasing urbanization (Uberoi 2003: 1062), creating a sort of hybrid and changing family structure, either carrying children to grandparents' homes daily or creating a temporary or periodic expansion of co-residence (Kapoor 2005). This trend is also seen among the Indian diaspora (Anandalakshmy 2010). Children spend much more time, even during adolescence, doing things with family members (Verma & Sharma 2003). Childhood is described as a 'time when I did not have understanding', a still frequently heard phrase since the Wadley encountered it during her fieldwork (Wadley & Derr 1993: xxv).

It is difficult to discuss childhood in India without referring to the schooling system. Now committed to Universal Primary education for all children, the Government is stuck between an unwieldy network of schools that are antagonistic towards the very majority that they are meant to serve, becoming bound within a vicious experience of negative attitudes, falling assessments and difficult schedules, children are caught between a rock and a hard place, and are most often pushed out of school by these factors (Kumar, 1997).

1.6.Traditional beliefs about childhood

Childhood in the Indian tradition is somewhat hard to describe, precisely because of the different versions. Whereas the Sankritic tradition is largely illustrative of the patriarchal bias, where women and girls receive little mention², except as functional for family life, strong matriarchal traditions like in the Garo community of the North-East provides a completely opposite orientation (Raman, 2000). There are several pockets of matriarchal groups in India that provide a significant contrast to the largely patriarchal majority. To examine tradition as something invariable, therefore, would be a huge error. Traditions are as various as their interpretations.

In one version of traditional Hindu thought, young children are believed to be passing through different phases regarding their demands and needs for interaction. Quoting a famous couplet, Krishnan (1998) discusses that there is a stage-wise recommendation for adult interactions with children, which can be interpreted as guidelines for play.

For the first five years, a child should be treated with affection. For the next ten years he should be treated with strict discipline. Upon attaining the sixteenth year, he should be treated like a friend (1998: 34).

The interactions thus emerge through the following recommended sequence: symbiosis, dyadic intimacy, dyad in the family, dyadic dissolution, familial ties, and family dissolution (Kakar, 1981). Very few of the early studies on socialization practices actually discuss children's play activities since the focus was primarily on the adult-child interface, thereby leading to the misplaced conclusion that play was not in evidence although it seemed to be absent only from the direct involvement of adults during the observations.

Anandalakshmy (2010) enumerates the poetic descriptions in ancient Tamil literature dating back to two thousand years in which children's stages regarding interactions are presented for the period of infancy. Whereas the first month requires protection, crawling, prattling, kissing and walking follow at 5, 7, 9 and 11 months of age. The 12th and 18th months are characterised by 'walking' and 'playing with the moon'. As an example, the last stage is presented here:

In the 18th month, the child reaches the *Ambuli Paruvam* or the 'moon stage'.....It describes the mother asking the moon to come and play with her child. The child is compared to the moon, and is described as bright

²Whether this is a problem in the attention or interpretation is a disputed matter.

and beautiful. The implication is that the child and the moon, being similar, would make good playmates! The child sees the moon and is attracted and wants it. The mother 'persuades. The moon to come down, using four traditional socialization methods: *Saama*, *Daana*, *Bheda* and *Danda*..... gentle persuasion, reward, comparison and punishment (Anandalakshmy 2010: 11).

In this tradition, the changes in a child are recognized without imposing structure or rules on them, these spontaneous manifestations gradually become 'formative' when there is increasing structure of work placed on the growing child (Lannoy, 1971: 195). Regarding traditional play with language, Anandalakshmy (2010) describes the complex literary task labelled 'eight-fold concentration' in Sanskrit and several other south-Indian languages. *Ashtaavadhaanam* was a game meant to sharpen the memory, language and skill with verse. The games involved quizzing the learner playfully about verses, word sequence and positioning from any of the extensive Vedas. Playfully, the abilities of the student were revised and reviewed.

Regarding tradition, Ramanujan (1999) uses the metaphor of Aristotle's knife as a metaphor for continuity of myths and beliefs in India. When asked how long the carpenter had had the knife, he replied to the philosopher's query that he had owned it for thirty years, having changed the blade a few times, and the handle several times, but it's the same knife! Thus, no tradition is original, and none is a simple re-telling. This is the quality of the enduring past in present ways of living in India. The same applies to the ways in which children are brought up (Tuli & Chaudhary 2010), although there is constant renewal in provisions for play as families become more modernized, even among the upper-class educated families, the participation of older members to provide continuity for children was believed to be highly valued, dissolving the conventional assumption about the separation of tradition and modernity (Sharma, 1996).

1.7. Adult ethnotheories about children

Adults' beliefs about children demonstrate a greater confidence in processes of maturation over and above learning (Anandalakshmy, 2010). An important feature of Indian parenting is the relatively infrequent use of praise. Much more commonly a child is checked, scolded, tricked, or threatened towards appropriate behaviour rather than praised for doing the right thing. However, very young children have been found to be not pushed into doing things,

usually allowing them to gradually build a rhythm (Saraswathi & Dutta, 2010: 236). Parents believe that “children’s work is to play” and since children play anyway, the modern trend to learn through playful activity in preschools is sometimes undermined. Parents often question the expense that a preschool may entail, especially if a child is seen to be “just playing” during the day. “Why should we send them to school to play? If they go to school, they should learn how to sit properly and read and write” are commonly heard complaints of many parents (Chaudhary, 2013, p. 77 - 79). The awareness about non-formal education is on the increase, but by and large, these views are quite common. Parents are anxious about admissions into ‘good’ schools and hope to have an additional head-start through preschool. Play, therefore often has to take a back-seat in family life, because children are believed to play anyway. Adults with lower levels of education were found to be more ‘serious’ about children learning formal skills of writing and recitation, eager for them to be able to display their learning, and this was separated from play since the children were expected to be focussed and un-distracted, somewhat inappropriate for this early age when we look at international standards. However, if we assume the stance of the parents, this frenzied attention to writing is understandable; they wanted, as fast as possible, for children to learn and do well and also improve their future prospects in doing so. For their part, children found adults to be inadequate play partners in one study. While talking with adults about their play activities as children, Gupta (2005) found a great deal of reminiscing among parents which was full of examples of regional as well as seasonal variation. The period of Diwali (the festival of lights) was mentioned as a time when play with cardboard cut-outs of ancient battles were common, to cite an example. However, in the present circumstances, there was an indication of the opposition between play and work (formal learning) even for young children.

In a study done by Gupta (2005), most middle-class parents believed play to be universal, accepting the need for play and its significance in preparing children for later life. It was also believed that children spontaneously learn games, rules and boundaries. Related to play, another significant tension that parents have, especially where expenses of the household have to be carefully managed in order to get by, relates to the investment in play materials. Adults often complain that since a child is going to land up breaking the toys anyway, the expenditure is considered wasteful. Eventually, everything is shared, and a single toy may be recycled repeatedly. In one episode in village Shantipur (name changed) in a study done by the first author, a rural household was found to have several children who shared the few toys that were

around. In one observation of a wealthy agricultural family with several members, one tricycle was broken into three pieces, and each portion was being used by a different child, simply pushing or dragging the part along which had wheels, and the one which didn't was used as a gate in a make-believe game of a school entrance (Chaudhary, 2013, p. 97). Each expense is carefully optimised, and children are encouraged to share, recycle and reuse play materials. Perhaps only among middle and upper class urban parents, the desire and practice for buying toys regularly has gained popularity, but even there, recycling of toys and passing them onto other children is commonplace, to siblings, to household helpers, or other children. Almost everything children use is recycled for other children.

The differential treatment of boys and girls were found to prevail in several societies, where mothers tended to train girls earlier than boys (Whiting & Edwards, 1988, p. 86). Adults believe that there are clear sex differences in play preferences of boys and girls, both in activities as well as materials that they choose to play with (Gupta, 2005). These beliefs seemed more exaggerated than findings related to play preferences in ethnographic accounts of children's play (Bhargava, 2010; Chaudhary, 2013), although some studies do report a greater engagement of girls in fantasy play related to food and boys in their activities with automobiles and aeroplanes (Subhash, 2010).

1.8.Children's activities

All over the world, and through history, children have contributed to the work of the family and community. With the exception of the very rich and modern families where children are enrolled in school, every society has expectations from children to contribute to the household, either in the form of child care or participation in the livelihood of the family. Whether it is farming communities in Nepal (Nag et al., 1978) or Tanzanian hunter-gatherers (Blurton-Jones, 1993), or the Kpelle (Lancy, 1996) or pre-industrial Europe (Stella, 2000) or Thailand (Taylor, 2002), children have been expected to contribute to the household. Children's play seems like a massive "vacuum, sucking up everything that happens in the village and transforming it into child-sized playlets" (Lancy, 2008, p. 230). Hunting, gathering, cooking, caring for others, fishing, all seem to become incorporated in children's play as they keenly observe adults go about their lives. Under these circumstances, the ubiquitous image of a child at play becomes a matter of privilege. It is not that children do not play, but they usually play when

the work is over, or when adults are too busy to supervise their participation. Among isolated foraging societies all over the world, it has been found that childhood is the most unrestrained. Children are free to play, with no demands on them for work, almost no physical punishment, and where adolescence is stress-free (Hewlett et al., 1998), perhaps a pattern inherited from pre-historic society.

Play is natural, spontaneous and universal for children and can, evolutionarily speaking, be argued as a “basic tool kit of activities” for a species as opportunities for learning (Lancy, 2008, p. 191). Children do not have to be taught to play. The conscious encouragement of play activities among children appears to be a symptom of contemporary parenting strategies in the technologically advanced settings, but there is evidence of this involvement everywhere, to a lesser or greater extent. Accepting the ubiquity of playfulness among children, it is universally acknowledged that children will play, as said by one participant in a study “Children’s work is to play” (Chaudhary & Shukla, 2015). However, the extent to which it is structured is another matter. Play, for modern society has become almost like it is “..too serious an activity to be left to children”, Lancy (2008, p. 192) remarks. There is evidence for writings on playful activity and age-appropriate engagement with the child even in ancient times (Anandalakshmy, 2010). Play occurs when children do not feel anxious or threatened. Among urban families in Delhi, it was found that children enjoyed playing with people and objects together, rather than only with objects (Mehra, 1995). In her doctoral research, Bhargava (2010) found that when they were given dolls to play with, children expressed a wide variety of activities like attempting to feed the doll, making dolls fight with each other, dressing them up and simply manipulating them. Although the play environments of rural and urban children were very different and urban children showed a greater ease with the hand-made dolls, all children showed interest, and played with the dolls actively (Bhargava, 2010). Whereas there is evidence of more play among educated communities in other parts of the world as well, Brazilian children were found to spend much more time playing among middle and upper classes in comparison with the village (Morais & Gosso, 2003). While examining rural urban differences in the guidance of children’s activities, it can be seen that whereas adults in rural families do not hesitate to divert children to other productive activities when they are playing, educated urban parents will fret over adequate opportunities for imaginative play (Greenfield et al., 1990). Lancy (2008) takes this further to

conclude that imagination is actually opposed to imitation since it is assumed to be linked to more complex thinking and contribute to success at school.

I see the gulf between the largely imitative, make-believe play of the village and the socially and intellectually taxing make-believe we see in the middle-class suburban neighbourhoods and nursery schools as very wide. It is not surprising therefore, that reformers would see an opportunity here to improve the school the school readiness of children from the urban ghetto or Third World village. However, several researchers have uncovered flaws in the type of intervention research and question these strong claims.....In fact, it may well be that more direct methods to foster the growth of academic and social skills to these children would be more effective (Lancy, 2008, p. 219).

Whereas I agree with the doubt about the efficacy of imposed strategies on account of the fact that play is adaptive to the context and children's activities are basically within a context, what we attempt in interventions is actually to impose another way of playing. How deeply is this rooted in power play and not children's play at all is a contentious matter. Based on the experiences with village children, I wonder if this dichotomy is artificial, that imitative play is also imaginative, and imaginative play is also imitative, just that the former seems repetitive to outsiders and the latter seems innovative, but the imitation is of imaginary events and figures! This does not in any way intended to underestimate the difference between the major difference in play between villages and cities, the active involvement of adults in children's play. My worry is that when a child plays with a goat, he is considered to be imitating, whereas when a child plays with lego, it's considered imaginative! Is this about power of play or the play of power? Adult enterprise in the modern world has been taken to yet another level with what has been identified as helicopter parenting³, rushing children from one learning session to another, whether it is swimming, math, theatre or the little league (Lancy, 2008).

In a recent study of 58 rural, small town and city families with young children in and around Delhi, it was found that there were distinct differences between communities regarding the provisions for play materials and adult intervention, although the divergence in the way the

³http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helicopter_parent

materials were used (when these were provided during the observations) were not dissimilar. It was found that play comes naturally to all children. Even in environments with very little specific play material, children would find things to play with, and had no hesitation in accepting and playing with the material provided by the researcher⁴. In one event from a low income area, a group of children found an unfinished house where some rubble was lying. They spent long hours in a space above their home where construction was in progress, sometimes even crossing somewhat precarious spaces, the children carried building material to one corner and made a sort of shrine and put pictures of gods against the wall. One of the boys was clearly a leader and instructed the others to bring rubble from the adjoining area. The construction was elaborate and interactive (Chaudhary, 2013, p. 98). These three year old children and their siblings and friends were seen to play all the time, while they bathe, eat, get ready, in school, at home, on the street, with friends, with adults, alone, with siblings, using toys, playing games, or with household materials. Further, children's play, work and learning were seen to be wonderfully mixed at this young age, although adults often had separate categories for this as was demonstrated by the reactions to children's 'play'.

Regarding sibling relationships, Smith (2002) finds reports of clear evidence to show that children with siblings have facilitative effects on children's thinking, especially related to theory of mind and related tasks. My study supports this finding. Children with older and younger siblings appeared more able to handle issues of scale related to small objects. They seemed to know more about relative sizes and appropriateness than children who were by themselves. This finding is contrary to much of research on the advanced milestones of first born children on account of the exclusive attention of caregivers, especially in language expressiveness (Elliot, 1981). However, when unsupervised, siblings could be quite assertive, teasing (Grindal, 1972) and even manipulative (Chaudhary, 2013).

In urban homes, adults were found to use the opportunity of children engrossed with playful activity as a popular setting for feeding young children, sometimes even carrying small boxes of home-cooked food to playgrounds as children played with others, strategically slipping in morsels of food portioned out with their fingers into the unknowing child's mouth. This phenomenon was not in evidence among rural and urban poor families, where children learned to

⁴We carried a bag of toys which constituted low-cost, locally purchased play items like a kitchen-set, doctor's set, cars, a chair, blocks and two hand knitted dolls.

eat by themselves early in life. Perhaps the divide can be seen to correspond with other intra-cultural departures in care practices between the rural and urban models of child care. According to Singh and Srivastava (2008) adults were not popular play partners as they did not reciprocate same levels of energy and enthusiasm for play. They are seen as ‘stationary’, where there is absence of agility and movement!

Play during childhood was found to be primarily unstructured and informal for the vast majority of children, taking place under the spaces children share with others. Children play more frequently with other children using materials that are around them and easily available. The purchase of a variety and abundance of play material with due consideration to developmental needs is experienced mostly among urban, educated and wealthier families, where adults ‘playing’ with children is also more commonly observed. Adults tend to let children play, and when they entered the scene, there was mostly with an additional objective to the interactions, in some instances to feed the child distracted by play, teach the child number or alphabets, encourage the child to engage with others, or simply to guide the child in specific directions (draw pictures of family members, for instance). The desire for the children to emerge as ‘better than us’ was omnipresent, and education was seen as its route, and play as indulgence as the child grows older; although what was considered good education seemed to vary (Chaudhary, 2013, p. 78).

In rural India and among the urban poor families, availability of toys or equipment for children to play with is a rare site rather children play with natural materials like tree branches, leaves, animals, wood, sand or a few remnants of a rare toy (Kopp et al., 1977, in Lancy chapter 6 ref), whereas in urban homes children have toys of different types and sizes depending on the gender of the child, girls will have dolls, doll houses, soft toys and boys will be seen playing with cars, guns, blocks or more mechanical things (Bhargava 2010). Pretend play is also commonly observed among young children in both rural and urban India. Children take up adult roles and play with other children. In instances during make-believe play with objects, it was found that children played out that they had made very detailed observations of adults in action. Although gender differences in domestic work persist, children do not always display similar preferences during play. Although boys were more frequently with cars, they also actively engaged in cooking, making tea, serving others and preparing *sabzi* and *roti*. Many of these cooking sessions were dramatic and detailed, where careful placement of pots and pans, and

elaborate rituals of tea-drinking were followed (Chaudhary, 2013, p. 96 – 101). Subhash (2010) also found a similar trend in his study of children in Kerala. Although not as common, solitary play is also evident (Chaudhary, 2013; Trawick, 1990). When children played in groups, the older ones guided play activities. And when children play in the absence of adults, it was possible to see their unmediated dominance, leadership as well as followership among themselves. Very few encounters of pushing and shoving were seen during spontaneous play sessions. Other findings related to dynamics among children showed that among children close in age, there was a lot of imitation. If one child did something, so did the other, if one child picked up one particular thing, it was seen to become the coveted object, even if it was a discarded stick. The older children were always aware of the researcher's presence when they were doing some sort of manipulation during play, which could always be noted on camera by a quick look towards the researcher before an attempt. In this study, very few children were seen actually playing with adults, and only among urban educated wealthier families. The rural families of all economic status and children of the urban poor mostly played with other children. Since they belonged to larger families or crowded homes, the presence of other children was also more common (Chaudhary, 2013, p. 98).

Regarding materials for play, toys, (Edwards, 2005) remarked that these were largely missing from villages, there was only some evidence of older children making toys that they played with. Our experiences in India corroborate this finding. In a recent visit to tribal villages in Chhattisgarh, I found young children in a village street running excitedly from one end to another, with a dried *Mahua*⁵ leaf in their hand, carefully twisted and held as a pin-wheel. The oldest of the lot helped younger ones to get their toy just right so that it would spin. The toy industry is a burgeoning business. In Korea, for example, toys that are assumed to stimulate left-brain activity are considered to be more desirable (Cho, 1995) and the Barbie doll has become the ultimate symbol of the contemporary toy industry. Clear gender differences can be found in play all over the world, whereas girls play more spontaneously, boys will display more activity and even aggression (Lever, 1978), with some exceptions (Low, 1989).

Regarding interactions between mothers and infants, Keller (2007) identifies different parenting systems of care, namely primary care, body contact, body stimulation, object stimulation, face-to-face, and narrative envelope. Although all cultures manifest all parenting

⁵Madhuca longifolia

systems at some given time or another, there are differences in the dominant modes, that are essentially adaptive, moving from physical proximity and body contact among agricultural and pastoral communities, to face-to-face and object stimulation as dominant modes in technologically advanced cultures, creating what Keller (2007, p. 22) calls, cultural styles of parenting based on the combinations of parenting systems found. Indian rural and urban families have different orientations, according to Keller. Whereas the rural (Gujarati) families displayed a higher frequency of body contact and body stimulation, a model of caregiving that facilitated inter-dependence; Urban educated families expressed what was identified as an autonomous-relational model of parenting (Keller, 2007, p. 169). As LeVine (1994) argues, everyday life is replete with cultural meaning, and the care of and interaction with children is no exception. In a review of 186 archived ethnographies, Barry and Paxon (1971) found a wide variety in the amount and kind of interactions between mothers and infants.

Another important difference between the old town (formerly agricultural) families and urban, new town residents in Seymour's study are relevant here (1999). Among educated families, the quality of mother-child interaction during everyday activities was characterised by what Mead (cited in Seymour, 1999) termed as the 'illusion of independence' among the children, although the mother was very much in control. This resonates with Keller's (2007) conclusions as well. Some effort was made by the more modernized families to make the child feel in control, although it was simply a game. The old town residents, on the other hand, did not make any such effort during their interactions, they were clearly in control as and when there was an interface with children (Seymour, 1999), while leaving them on their own, but within supervision range when they were with other children, playing around in the areas around the house (Chaudhary, 2013, p. 96). Children in rural homes and among the urban poor were free to roam out of earshot, from one house to another, to the school building and adjoining markets, but they never crossed a road with traffic. Because these groups were of mixed ages, younger children are always in the care of more capable siblings during these trips around the village or colony.

A wider network of relationships is involved in the care of children that is transacted, not as a warm, loving, exclusive indulgence, but a rather comfortable, collective, supervised, shared and distributed care of children, in which the role of fathers (Roopnarine, & Suppal, 2003) and older siblings (Sharma & Chaudhary, 2004) has gone largely unrecognised by research. Sharma

(2000, p. 247) finds that as children grow older and more independent and mobile, the care by others, siblings, aunts and other peripheral members increases dramatically. However, the care by grandmothers was found to be high during infancy, when the child needed more physical care. Thus, the expanding circle of interactions for a child move from the central position for the mother and grandmother to other members as the child grows older.

With higher mobility, migration and departure from native places, there is inevitably an increase in the prevalence of the nuclear family despite persistent long distance connections with the larger family. However, there is evidence to suggest that this change is important for the role of the father, since the involvement of fathers, the closeness to his own children is found to be significantly higher in nuclear families (Roland, 1988). Roopnarine, Talukder, Jain et al. (1990) found physical play was not common for both mothers and fathers. However, in a more recent study reported that the North-American proposition of the dominance of rough play by fathers for the development of attachment (between the baby and the father) may not apply to the Indian family, and several other cultures as well (Roopnarine, Krishnakumar & Vadgama, (2013, p. 232). Over the years of close observations of Indian families (Chaudhary, 2012), and based on the recent study (2013), I have found that the findings related to father's engagement with children are prone to reduced attention on account of some important features of the research experience in India, over and above the existing patterns. Predominantly, researchers working on issues related to family life in general and children in particular, tend to be young women; and this creates a certain distancing in the spontaneous involvement of the father, as well as of selected others, and tends to highlight and zone in on mothers, sometimes on account of habitual research practices as well as the dominance of women in fieldwork of this nature. There is no doubt that conventionally, men are shy about interacting with their own children in the presence of others, as Kakar has noted in his writings (Kakar & Kakar, 2007).

Play with other members of the family, particularly grandparents also needs attention here. Several studies have found the great sense of engagement in play between children and grandparents (Gupta, 2005, Seymour, 1999; Sharma, 2000; Singh & Srivastava, 2008; Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010). Apart from the fact that grandparents spent significant amounts of time with children, it has also been mentioned by parents, that they really value these interactions, both for the older generation as well as the continuity in culture that they assume happens for the next generation (Chaudhary, 2004; Gupta, 2005; Saraswathi, 1999).

Recently, a lot of concern has gathered around the issue of play opportunities for children with special needs. Responding to the Multiple Disabilities Act (1999) of the Government of India, there have been several efforts towards making specific provisions for people with disability. Apart from the several programmes with this objective, the Indian Institute of Technology (Kanpur), Humanities Department, launched a large research study to investigate the trends, application and production of play materials to support learning among children with special needs. It is one of the largest projects of its kind in the country⁶, and an issue with which much more focussed planning is needed.

The language interaction between adults and children displays important power dynamics and assertion of authority, even if it is subtle (Ervin-Tripp, 1982). The freedom to explore the world and retain a sense of playfulness derives from an ideology that seems somewhat distant from the seriousness that is associated with learning and work. The dichotomy between work and fun is quite unknown to children and creates much difficulty when it is imposed on them. However, even in the adult world, as Gandhi (1993: 405) famously wrote in an essay, the opposition of work and fun is an error in judgement and must be reconsidered for having a meaningful life where the boundary between the two does not, and should not exist (Prasad 1997). Badeka (1995) makes the point by adopting the experiment of leading a classroom as a challenge, determined to transact the curriculum without suppression and power, but by engaging children in ways that they enjoyed. Divaswapna (Badeka 1995) is a classic text on the joy of classroom learning in Indian schooling, and has inspired thousands of adults to reconsider their ways of approaching children's learning. It seems that school discourse is positioned for alienation from the child and its home environment, and we have to learn to integrate these three positions if children's lives have to retain the element of enjoyment that is demonstrated when they play by themselves. Integrating playful activity by dissolving the boundaries between work and fun are an essential way forward to make the classroom more inclusive towards everyday lives of children (Prasad, 1997).

Most researchers assume that their objectives in research are equally clear to the participants in a study. This intersubjective correspondence is necessary to advance with any study since we need to believe that the phenomena we are studying are indeed the ones that the

⁶See <http://www.iitk.ac.in/drpg/gvp/currentcampain/ProjectreportforspecialPlaylab.pdf> Retrieved on 7th October, 2013.

respondent is also considering while giving a reply or other response. Although this is a critical step, thinking that participants have understood, can sometimes be a mistaken assumption. Unless the people understand what it is that you are doing with them, or asking them, and towards what end, however much it is simplified, errors may emerge on account of this discrepancy. Working with Indian communities, especially unschooled adults at a distance from institutions of higher study, has often been a challenge. From informed consent to rating scales and standardized tests of individual ability, procedures in research often become clumsy and awkward during the transaction on the ground (Anandalakshmy, Chaudhary & Sharma 2008: 235). Seymour (1999) finds that the abstract construct of ‘child-rearing’ as a matter to reflect upon was restricted to the residents of the new town (Bhubaneswar, Orissa) and not the families who lived in the old town. In the study of rural Gujarati families, Abels (2008: 215) notes that getting the simple message across to the families “Play as you usually would...” was indeed quite a complicated expectation. The objective of the instruction was to observe and analyse ‘natural settings of playful activity’ among rural Indian families. Well, not quite what the people understood from the instruction. Some mothers responded asking the researcher to “wait until the older child returns, she/he usually plays with him/her”. It was quite evident that sitting and playing exclusively with the child was something the adults were not used to doing, “children’s work is to play”, but sitting and playing with them? That is something adults felt alien to their ways of understanding childhood. This awkwardness (and even embarrassment) was also found among the rural and urban poor families in other research (Chaudhary, 2013; Seymour, 1999; Stipek, 1995). Except among the upper class, educated families where dyadic play episodes were experienced, adults tended to watch children play, and that too because of the interest the researcher was showing in their activities. Seymour (1999) writes

Old town residents were largely following unarticulated scripts that probably have evolved over a long period of adaptation to an agricultural way of life (1999, p. 42).

Similar findings were also reported by Bhargava (2010) as a difference between rural Rajasthan families and urban Mumbai parents. Therefore it is important to understand that when a particular domain is under investigation, especially if one is shifting communities, exploring the meaning and experience of the phenomenon from the local perspective is essential to a reasonable understanding of the process as we have demonstrated in the instance of play among

rural families in India. It would be falsely concluded, either that children do not play (since the arrival of a researcher demands much attention) or that adults never play with children (they might sometimes, but they will never play in front of a stranger).

Adult supervision of play, as mentioned earlier is seriously different in different cultures, and a clear concentration of adult input, supervision and guidance is seen among modern educated parents, the world over (Morelli et al., 2003; Rogoff, et al., 1993; Roopnarine et al., 1994). Reading to young infants, guiding their narrative towards speaking bookishly, children's activities are highly structured on account of the impact it is assumed to have on children's learning (Lebra, 1994; Kim & Choi, 1994; Martini, 1995). Even when toys were handed over to the children, adults let children explore the objects on their own while carrying on with their own work (Chaudhary, 2013; Göncü et al., 2000; Rogoff et al., 1993) or lower class families in the US (Heath, 1990; Ward, 1971). Most mothers tend to say that children play, they want to play all the time. But the link between play and development of thought is a connection that has reached the educated public through theory and research in developmental psychology. The fact that children's object manipulation is higher among children whose play is encouraged is thus not a surprising finding (Power, 2000), but the reasons for this finding may not be as lucid as the conclusions.

Early childhood education and care is now a global phenomenon. Tasks that were earlier fulfilled by the family prior to schooling have now been taken over by institutions, and the pressure is mounting to universalize pre-school education since it is believed to be the magical solution for retention and participation in school, particularly for the poor. The magical results of projects in the US (Head Start) and the UK (Sylva & Pugh, 2005) have inspired agencies throughout the world regarding the effort towards enhancing participation in school and improving learning outcomes, particularly for minority and marginalized communities, either due to economic or social factors. Whether it is cognitive learning or simply an induction into the culture of schooling is a debatable matter, since the current research endeavours make it impossible to disentangle the social-emotional and cultural factors from the cognitive. In fact, this task may be impossible, since learning is so deeply cultural.

The Indian Government has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to Early Childhood Care and Education within which the provision for play for children through non-formal activity is a large and significant component. The policy promotes the provision for care, nourishment,

health and play for children between birth and six years, especially in disadvantaged settings. Under the aegis of the Department of Women and Child Development, the most recent version of the draft policy is available on line⁷, and articulates the basic objectives of the Government policy. Keeping the ideology of valuing the early years of life, the support for children in difficult circumstances and special needs receives specific focus in the document. The document also mentions the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme, a holistic welfare programme for young children and families with a focus on pre-school years that was initiated in 1975 and now covers a significant population through its 10,44,000 centres nation-wide covering around 72 million children (6 months to 6 years of age) for supplementary nutrition and around 34 million for pre-school education, as per one estimate (Planning Commission, 2012). However, repeated evaluations of the ICDS programme have revealed several important problems with the nationwide programme which dilute the outreach of the services. The non-formal play services are believed to be the weakest link, with health and nutrition receiving larger attention and coverage in planning and delivery. In spite of these challenges, the ICDS programme is the largest of its kind in the world, and several important experiments in conjunction with local NGOs and international agencies, have resulted in effective delivery and provision for play for children in many of the centres. Local collaborations have proved to be very productive for facilitating conditions where children can learn through play among families who do not have access to resources, but much more work needs to be done in this area (CECED, 2013b). One of the important tasks is also to understand why a programme is often not accepted by the local community, and the operational reasons why the services fail to reach the children and families.

Language is a critical issue for India. In the latest survey (Devy, 2013) a total of 850 languages were counted with 22 of them being registered as 'official'. How is this diversity treated at the level of interacting with young children at school? When early childhood education is considered, there is no denying that the mother tongue is the most favourable of all languages. Much of the policy on the universalization of Indian education was determined by the policy during the British Raj, the English language was to have a primary role. Although many scholars opposed this move, the change had impacted the system, and till today, the introduction of local languages has remained an immense challenge for the school system, even during the early

⁷<http://wcd.nic.in/schemes/ECCE/National%20ECCE%20Policy%20draft%20%281%29.pdf> Retrieved on 8th October, 2013

years. Contemporary scholars are working hard towards developing a culturally and developmentally appropriate curriculum for Multi-lingual Education (MLE) (Mohanty, 2008). Young children's informal activities find serious support in early childhood programmes if the mother tongue is used. Thus having teachers from the children's own community who are trained in and familiar with the languages spoken is the most effective approach to early childhood education, especial non-formal education and playful activity through which young children naturally learn. The use of an unfamiliar language creates a distance between the child and the environment, thereby placing serious limits on playful engagement in the classroom/preschool.

Another important lesson for the integration of art in education comes from the Gandhian scholar, artist and educator Devi Prasad (1997). He advocates that, rather than teaching art, the incorporation of different forms of art in education provides a fundamental grounding of children's learning in their daily aesthetic engagement with the world, something that seems to be lost in our modern interpretation of education in general and art education in particular. The activities of different forms of art are engaging as well as relaxing for the child, therefore providing the optimal atmosphere for learning. Elaborating further between the recent proclivity for passive entertainment versus active engagement in playful activity, Prasad (1997) suggests that this trend will be detrimental for society, since we have yet to trace the full path of its consequences on the human mind. A child's creative expression needs to be nurtured in a classroom, and when the reverse is promoted, where a child's product is evaluated and worse still berated, as is commonly experienced in the Indian classroom, the impact is far from favourable, he adds, articulating the creative, practical and diagnostic functions of play with art among children (Prasad, 1997).

Regarding planning for children's play, several important concerns emerge from a careful study of research findings. Among them is the availability of open and safe spaces for children to play, that is becoming a serious issue in urban spaces, especially lower income areas. There needs to be a concerted effort towards building these provisions for children of all ages. As a nation, we are losing safe and secure spaces of rural and tribal communities as people move rapidly to cities, and planning for play is essential. Secondly, the inclusion of children with special needs is a crying need. We need greater access, visibility and resources allocated to this concern. In traditional society, people with special needs were not excluded, they were around, albeit without any specific resources allocated to their care and mainstreaming, but they were

always around. Urban environments are increasingly competitive and therefore exclusive, leading to the distancing of people with special needs. Another important area is the knowledge of local cultural, economic, social and linguistic practices. A lot of effort has been put into the nation-wide early childhood programme, but the visible benefits are not commensurate with the investment. When the programme receives support from another agency or community groups, it has found to have made a significant contribution to the community, and takes the welfare of the children and their future as a primary concern, there seems to be an acceptance and even ownership of a programme⁸. For instance, the care of children by children and the constant company of siblings, wanting to be in the same place as the older brother or sister is a frequent sight. Such patterns of family life can easily become incorporated as a feature of an educational or play facility for children.

Teacher training is another important area. Language use, attitudes to the local community, facility with interactions with children, ease and comfort with playful activity and innovativeness and a general sense of joy in being with children are some of the important ingredients of a teacher's disposition. Another important accomplishment in the Non-Governmental sector has been innovations in teacher training in which the NGO BODH (mentioned in the footnote) is a leader. Promoting democratic principles, and rights of children to learn and lead better lives by gaining access to good schools, the greatest investment that the organisation made was in its teacher training by taking local people from within the community and developing a programme around what they found. They are now advisors for several other organisations in the field of teacher training (CECED, 2013a).

Planning for children therefore requires partnership, concern and commitment based on a fundamental sense of equality and the right to a better life. This is all the more important since child care and children's activities are adapted to the context, and attempting any intervention must consider the local culture and work in partnership with people in order for programmes of care and education of children to be meaningful and acceptable. Simply imposing a 'better option' from above has been known not to work effectively. There must be a belief in the rights of children to have provisions where they can feel safe and play freely as well as learn.

⁸See <http://www.bodh.org/> for an excellent example of an early childhood programme in Jaipur. Retrieved on 9th October, 2013.

Play during childhood in India is primarily unstructured and informal for the vast majority of our children, taking place in the spaces children share with several others. Children play more frequently with other children using materials that are around them and easily available. The purchase of a variety and abundance of play material with due consideration to developmental needs is seen primarily among urban, educated and wealthier families, where adults 'playing' with children is also more commonplace. Adults in almost all families tend to let children play, and when they enter the scene, as they did in urban middle and upper class homes, there is always an additional objective to the interactions, in some instances to feed the child distracted by play, teach the child number or alphabets, encourage the child to engage and get along with others, or simply to guide the child in specific directions (draw pictures of family members, for instance). Participation in family relationships and social exchanges were an important theme during play among children when adults made an entry. Children were expected to participate actively in domestic work and learnt a lot from these exchanges, as is evident from the research on children's activities during play. By and large, it is play between and among children of all ages, informal and unstructured, under the marginal supervision of adults that seemed to prevail. The child-to-child model for play, and the care of children by children was found to most prevalent, and it is when children were not present, that adults seemed to enter the scene of play.

Regarding childhood and cultural differences, there is no doubt about the need for a science of childhood that is culturally inclusive, to be able to understand the fundamental needs and abilities of children in different contexts. Presently, the academic canvas, at least in developmental psychology, is somewhat limited to address issues of cultural diversity adequately. Cultural psychology has made far better progress in this regard, where the playing field between cultures is treated as a fact and not an aberration and culture and person are believed to 'make each other up'. We need to expand our research as well as our theories, to include different interpretations of family life and childhood experiences so as not to marginalise the majority.

Along with the recognition of cultural diversity, there must be an acceptance of fundamental equality of all people, one of the most frequently misused phrases in today's world. A genuine sense of equality does not dismiss difference or work with 'tolerance' of others in our world-view; but embraces difference as fundamental to life forms, and therefore to culture.

Economic equality persists as an important defining feature of international exchange, but if we address present conditions by considering historical events, imperialism is a jarring, to say the least. Affluence is constructed on the shoulders of past excesses that are easily forgotten as we go about our daily lives, and this is unfortunate. Aid for families living in poverty is mostly transacted with an approach of ‘those poor people out there need our help’. *We need to accept* that any instruction that promotes arrogance and a sense of superiority of a specific world-view is fundamentally anti-human, even when it is inadvertent. At the same time, *we need to accept* diversity (and not homogeneity) as basic to social life of humans. *We need to accept* that any singular model of family life cannot be prescribed world-wide. *We need to accept* that care, education and play for children need to emerge from within culture, espousing the immediate context as primary, not exclusively, but gradually emanating outwards towards ‘other’ ways of living. All intervention programmes have a moral position, and this must be acknowledged in order to provide transparency. It is when these debates are silenced under the label of welfare, that problems arise. As Burman (2008) recommends, we have to be willing to accept the tensions that arise between diversity on the one hand and universality on the other. When there is unwillingness to dialogue between these two forces, those of making recommendations based on certain standards, and those of considering variability, reason is compromised and the majority world is placed on the margins.

Cole’s (2005) recommendation for the future of meaningful education also carries an important message for trends in play:

The alternative will be, if and when it comes into being, a hybrid of new and old forms, of the standardized and the locally adapted. It will eschew the notion of human education as the preparation of children to triumph over nature and teach us how to live within, as a part of nature, including nature’s multicolored, multicultural, enormously heterogeneous forms of society. If the social sphere is to become re-integrated, it will not be by returning to the past but by creating a new kind of future in which central values of the past combine with the amazing accomplishments of the present to enable us to live in a sustainable garden, for and with our children (2005, p. 215).

The intense desire to retain older ways of interacting with children while adopting modern ideas is something that seems particularly characteristic to Indian society, since it is a recurrent finding in field work with families. We need a greater tolerance of flexibility and variety in the models of childhood (Burman, 2008) so that we do not land up ‘throwing the baby with the bath water’ to use an apposite expression. Recognizing ‘other’ ways of bringing up children, Konner (2010) proposes that:

It is possible that the ways in which we in the West today do multiple care differ from how it was done in traditional kin-based and extended-family cultures and have different consequences. But it is clear that, cross-culturally and historically, children have survived and thrived in a wide array of multiple-caregiving arrangements (2010, p. 451).

1.10. The study of children in India

There is universal agreement about the fact that the experiences we have as young children have lasting impact on our lives, what some authors describe as the ‘long arm of childhood’ (Martin, 2009). Yet this idea has not been explored sufficiently in the Indian setting. Western research about young children’s experiences and development form the bulk of most of our readings and we rely heavily on these for the training of students and research scholars. In the absence of local research, the training sometimes lacks the substantive elements of local communities. Although much can be learnt from these texts, there are particular instances where these writings are unable to fulfil local requirements. As an example, if we look at the socialisation of the young child, we find that western text books focus primarily on the experiences of children in the company of mothers and/or fathers. Although many writings have focussed on grandparents and other adults in a child’s life, we are unable to translate the findings to the Indian setting primarily because it is not just the presence of grandparents, but the characteristic feature of multi-generational families that characterises the Indian family. Further, the focus is on the development of domains guided by the categories of study in the western world (Khalakdina, 2008).

In a recent study of the beliefs of parents regarding their young children (3 – 5 years), Tuli (2008) found that the priorities of urban Indian parents (residing in Delhi) were quite substantially different from text-book chapters about young children. Parents’ responses did not

fit into the neat categories developed by academics. They (the mothers) were found to be concerned about issues like eating and social conduct that rarely appear in reviews of literature on young children. Although typically characterised as focussing on interdependence (Keller, 2007), Indian parents tended to provide what was perhaps better described as ‘elective interdependence’, choosing to encourage autonomy and individuality in some domains (like peer interactions in the street) and inter-relatedness and inter-dependence within family relationships, and complete dependence in some areas of interaction like eating! This complex interplay and fluctuating ideology is seriously glossed over in simple deductions based on alien categories during research study. These patterns are likely to have an important impact on the developing sense of self of young children.

Living in a network of dense relationships characterised by multiple mothering (Roland, 2005) must be having important influences on the psychology of the growing child. Some of the important concerns of young parents include living with extended family, socially appropriate conduct, loyalty to the family, gender socialisation, birth order and adult-child relations (Chaudhary, 2004, 2008). Perhaps the time is right for developing a perspective on the developing sense of self of young children that deal with the local reality of the contemporary Indian family as an area of study using the framework of the local culture to provide meaning guided by recent work in the field of cultural psychology. As a discipline, cultural psychology argues for locally meaningful study of cultural and psychological phenomena (Valsiner, 2007; Cole, 1996; Shweder, 1990), rather than treating culture simply as an independent variable responsible for superficial transformations in conduct. Culture and psychology are believed to ‘make each other up’ and the study of one without the other is believed to be inadequate. We have, in the past had studies on socialisation (Sinha, 1982) and Anandalakshmy (1981). Since these publications, we have had sporadic and insufficient effort at documenting and interpreting childhood experiences in the context of the family towards describing the cultural psychology of childhood experiences. There is an urgent need to study this important domain of early experiences of young children that will be critical in shaping their sense of self and identity in contemporary Indian society. Especially with the putative transformations that media and technology is resulting in.

An additional factor that often escapes the eye of a researcher is the role played by individuality; the child’s own dynamic situation, temperament, resilience and life-course. Each

child has a unique experience of life circumstances, family situation and personal factors. It is through such methodology that it becomes possible to explore idiographic patterns of individual children and their identity.

Developmental psychologists have built up considerable evidence to demonstrate that early experiences with the family have impact on the developing person. Cultural differences have been documented regarding several issues like empathy, autonomy, self-expression, theory of mind understanding, play behaviour, and several other features (Keller, 2007, for overview). However, these differences (in most studies) have been attributed to large categories like nation or cultural ideology. There is not that much work in progress to attempt linkages between what adults actually DO with their children, and what the likely influence of these, more proximal experiences are. There is an urgent need to focus on the actual social encounters which determine the paths that children's development is likely to take, the emphases that their minds will be oriented towards on account of repeatedly experiencing some events.

There is also some research and writing available about parent beliefs about children. Many of these works rely again on the large global orientations believed to be characteristic of a people like collectivism or interdependence. Do these national level orientations actually find their way into the everyday transaction of socialisation practices? And if they do, then what are the ways in which children's conduct is guided by parents, whether it is in the area of socially appropriate behaviour, eating, or where children sleep? Further, how do these 'pathways' (Keller, 2007) find linkages in the actual things that children do and how they understand the world.

1.9.Culture and the self

It is important to recognise that selfhood or personhood is actively social in its origin. Even the ideology of individualism is socially generated. The human mind has the exceptional capacity to confront itself and create a whole story about the self. Developmentally speaking, the solipsistic infant only gradually emerges into an awareness of itself and the context within which it lives. At the outset, the immediate is everything. Gradually, the familiar context becomes adopted in the mentality, carrying a life-long favourability towards a familiar way of being and living. The fundamental attribution error of the human mind towards subjective bias is extended to the context as well, and ethnocentrism emerges. The story of the self is constructed, and as

Hume as early as 1748⁹ had argued, in fact created from bundles of transient and even disconnected impressions, thereby placing serious doubt on the existence of the 'self'.

The sense of self of a person gathers narrative gravity (Nair, 2003) as the child grows, and is guided by the context within which it is developing. Familial relationships, social structures, kin relationships, tribe/caste status and features of the ecological setting deeply impact who children are and what they see themselves as (Raman, 2000). Given the unevenness, both of its geography as well as socio-economic conditions, this fact is intensely true for the plurality of childhood experiences in India. Held together by the strength of national identity from a long-standing tradition, not as an independent nation, but as an idea, the dynamics of culture and self among Indian children is deeply pluralistic, even at the ideological level.

1.12. This study

In this study, I have attempted to take selected families from different communities in and around Delhi to map the beliefs and behaviours of adults with young children along with the systematic investigation of children's development in selected areas of study that are of current interest in the field of developmental psychology. For the purpose of defining the areas of cultural activity that have found to be particularly salient in recent research studies related to identity development referenced above. These are:

Ethnotheories about self and identity: Expressions of beliefs, ideology, ethnotheories

Growing up in the family and early school: Experiences, practices, resources

Future aspirations for children: Pathways of development

Contemporary influences on parenting and its impact on emerging identity

There has been an attempt to first investigate these domains to validate their importance in the development of a person's identity. Subsequently, adults were interviewed for their orientations towards children and childhood in general and their own children in particular. This was the ideological context for study, defining the meaning of family dynamics and interpersonal encounters, especially with reference to children. Given these orientations, selected areas of children's self-development were investigated to attempt linkages between cultural experiences

⁹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Enquiry_Concerning_Human_Understanding accessed on March 7, 2015.

and children's development. In this effort, context sensitive methodology was used. Both children and family members were interviewed after which a play session using a standard kit of play materials was presented to explore the ways in which children play and the interaction surrounding these events. In this regard, the domains of study were guided by local priority areas so as to best reflect the expressions of children. Regarding methodology, it has been noticed that often, children's performance is frustratingly impaired by the simple fact of unfamiliarity of procedure. In my experience, children are often awkward, occasionally amused and sometimes even 'frozen' by the demands of research tasks, thereby seriously interfering with their conduct during research. Care was taken to develop approaches where such an eventuality is minimised. While progressing with the study, although there was primary focus on the young child, this was not at the exclusion of others; older children, parents, other family members and people who interact with children every day, thereby allowing a naturalistic social context, rather than separating the child for individual assessment.

2. METHOD

The methods used for gathering data are known to influence what we find. This study was an endeavour to depart from standardised, pre-coded methods in developmental psychology with the distinct purpose of looking away from *entified* categories and into the lives of people, bringing the data and phenomena closer together (Crawford, & Valsiner, 2003). For this reason, the more palpable procedures of observing and interviewing people were chosen as the main methods. Multiple-choice answer formats in questionnaires, rating scales and standardised techniques with rigid scoring systems were purposefully excluded, since these are known to limit the outcomes of a research study in discovering the possibilities within phenomena (Valsiner, 2012).

The over-representation of participants from predominantly white, middle-class populations has been the subject of much discussion and energetic debate¹⁰. This bias is further complicated by the fact that most of the techniques derive from the same cultural context, often misunderstood by people from other cultures. Several other associated complications may also arise. Sometimes constructs under study may have completely different meanings or procedures

¹⁰*Behavioural and Brain Sciences*.(2010). Vol 33.

may become a cause for awkwardness or incredulity. For instance, in a recent study of pro-social behaviour in collaboration with a German University, we set-up a robust research procedure for a laboratory study in India for the first time. Earlier collaborations, on socialization goals, mirror self-recognition, compliance and other studies were all conducted within the homes of young children, infants and toddlers. This time, we thought about embarking on a laboratory study in order to create controlled conditions. Soon we realized that the simple recruitment procedures that we had used in earlier studies were simply not working, we failed to convince many people to come with their 18 month old to a laboratory located in the comfortable ambience of a preschool with full compensation for time and effort. We held workshops for parents in schools, requested doctors' clinics to assist with subjects, distributed fliers, placed messages on social networking sites. No headway. Only a handful of enthusiastic parents came. Some arrived reluctantly and dropped out for the next session. The laboratory study was a disaster! As a result, we have about a fourth of the intended sample in three times the amount of time and resources. Things came to a head when a mother actually ducked out of sight when she saw a researcher approach her, again (Shashi Shukla, personal communication, March, 25th, 2014)! From the reactions of parents and lack of enthusiasm (which we never confronted in home-based studies), we realized that the participants would ultimately be a very small section of hand-picked enthusiasts, certainly not 'representative' even of the educated middle-class. Although the procedure, the tools and techniques were all appropriate, the highly controlled setting and narrow age-range of the children required, proved to be a disaster. Thus from the initial conceptual discussion of a study where constructs and processes are selected for research, to the approach, the tools and methods, every step along the way can be a source of serious mis-direction in research.

The database from which we draw conclusions about the behavioural and developmental aspects of human nature is very narrow. An estimated 98% of subjects of research investigations in psychology were selected from Western populations, 68% of who were from the US. Moreover, 99% of these studies were conducted by scholars from Western universities (Arnett, 2008). Thus, 96% of the data we refer to came from 12% of the world's population. Arnett (2008) goes further to declare that the American undergraduate student is thus 4000 times more likely to be selected for a study in psychology than a randomly selected person from elsewhere! The randomness is thus, very selective. From the local, there is a desire to jump to the global

(Gergen et al., 1996), and it is in this epistemic leap that a majority of the world's population is alienated, even though some people argue for the validity of taking American undergraduates with the flimsy claim that we will all soon become like them. What a terrifying notion for some of us! Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) aptly created the acronym WEIRD to label the groups as the White Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic societies. Emerging from Canada that has had a long-standing resentment against the US, the article still carries economic clout behind it, and the support was strong and criticisms kind. I doubt the paper would have even been published (or if published, read) if a non-white person had written it. Nevertheless, the strength of the argument is undeniable, and many of us (who work, live and research among non-WEIRD people) were relieved with this

Many radical views on relativism deny any claims for shared commonalities among human societies (Gergen, 1973). However, there is no denying that if we take a broad-based view of humans, there would be a large range of common features, as much work in anthropology suggests (Brown, 1991). But people do differ in important ways. Undeniably, many of the differences are cultural in origin, brought about by social transmission of ways of living (Nisbett, et al., 2001). Then there is genetic variation as well as the complex dynamics of phenotypic plasticity as an adaptive manifestation (Gangestad et al., 2006). Any attempt at apriori ignoring issues of variability and diversity leads to a limited analysis that becomes inadequate and even erroneous when this is taken as representative of the species, a common assumption. Some of the largest errors in this domain have been to use Western children to set standards for developmental milestones, internationally. As has been substantially proved, children's development is not simply an outcome of maturation, and skilful adaptation to ecological settings and parenting practices has been found in the attainment even of motor milestones (Karasik et al., 2010).

A range of differences have been discovered in the ways in which information questions are answered, particularly between schooled children and children growing up in close contact with nature. The way in which schooled children answer a question pointing to a tree would definitely be the category word: tree. Henrich et al. (2010) indicate that such answers, apart from being schooled, also result from living in unnatural and impoverished environments, at a distance from nature. Children growing up in small-scale societies are far more like to give the name of the generic species.

Regarding the approach to be adopted in the study of childhood, it is crucial to understand that human social interaction, and the study of childhood are particularly well-understood within the ethnographic paradigm of qualitative research. Apart from the ecological validity in terms of representative design (Hammond, 1998), childhood can best be explored within the cultural context from which it derives meaning. Ethnography brings “the cultural place to the centre of attention, transforming it from ground to figure” (Weisner, 1996, p. 307). The nature of the phenomena under study makes such a position imperative to discovering the reality of children’s lives. Here, the researcher is forced to join the child in the field, to become an active observer who follows the child, rather than someone who is giving instructions. It also avoids the pitfalls of what Weisner calls “Methodocentrism” (p. 307) the over-reliance on a single technique of study. No single method can claim to have answers to the experience of childhood, and that makes ethnographic investigation far more reliable as an approach to take in such an instance. Once the polarization of qualitative and quantitative research is dissolved, it is possible to find several combinations of methods to investigate different dimensions of behaviours or beliefs. Ethnography is also powerful enough to go beyond exploration and seek answers to specific theoretical questions. This naturalistic tradition in the social sciences is an important complement to scientific study (Weisner, 1996). Although informal participant observation, interviews and field notes in a naturalistic setting are central to ethnography, other techniques are not precluded (LeVine et al, 1980). There are important globally accepted ways of assessing reliability, validity and bias in ethnographic qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in studies on development and childhood (Gallimore et. al., 1993; Weisner, 1984). Ethnography was an important selection for this study on account of the fact that the position of the participant (read subject, client or other term depending upon the approach) within the research design. As Weisner (1996) asserts:

Ethnographic work requires a sustained, long-term commitment to research, with intense personal involvement of the researcher. Ethnographers typically are engaged with *participants* in their research [Emphasis original], rather than assessing subjects, clients or patients. This often places the ethnographer as a participant in events and openly an active constructor of data being collected. The implicit choices in data collection are seen more

explicitly in ethnographic work. The buzzing confusion and complexity of everyday events comes to the fore; neat analytical categories are tested by this intense exposure to real activities....The meaning and interpretation of events is an immediate and continuous problem to the researcher.” (p. 311)

2.1. Coverage and sampling

The sample for this study was 43 families with 4 – 6 year old children from 7 different clusters within the National Capital Region of Delhi, including neighbouring townships and a village. These children were visited earlier in the year 2012 for another research project¹¹. It was decided to revisit the families as the children for this research study in order to consolidate the continuity and changes in a brief longitudinal time-span. Of the total of 58 families elected for the first project, 43 were available and enthusiastically agreed for this study. The criterion for selection of families in 2012 was the presence of children between 3 and 4 years of age who expressed willingness to be part of the study. The strategy for sampling included several steps:

- Selecting the locality (Purposive sampling), variation in economic status, ethnicity and residence was attempted
- Entering a community through a known person who was willing to introduce and vouch for the researcher using ‘contact sampling’ (Tuli, & Chaudhary, 2010)
- Identifying families in the locality that have children of this age
- Eliciting participation of the families with young children (Purposive sampling)

The procedure for sample selection borrows from the method of contact sampling (Tuli, & Chaudhary, 2010), wherein a contact person is first identified in a particular area. The introduction of that person was used to enter a specific community to locate families with young children who would be willing to be part of the study. The entry through a known person assures the families of the authenticity of the researcher. Thereafter, purposive sampling was used to identify families with young children. On account of the extended procedure of data collection, any families having a child with evident difficulties of health or otherwise, were not disturbed. During the previous study, the focus was play activities of the children and their interactions,

¹¹Parent beliefs, socialisation practices and children’s development in Indian families. Research project funded under the Major Grants Scheme of the University Grants Commission to Nandita Chaudhary

socialization practices and parent beliefs. For this study, since the children were now between 4 and 6 years of age, it was decided to focus on the three aspects considered significant at this age:

- Parents ideas about childhood and their own children
- Children's views about themselves
- Children's play activities

The primary purpose was to gather a contextualized sense of identity of the children and to explore patterns related to situational factors. Each family was treated as a unit of study rather than attempting to separate the child or the child and caregiver since such attempts were likely to create an artificial separation from the child's *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977).

Through these research strategies it has been attempted to consolidate a contextually constructed sense of identity of the children. Adults' views about the children and developmental changes and continuities from the last session have also been addressed. Additionally, the way in which children play with the objects provided to them was studied to display children's conduct in a specific setting that attempted to showcase children's conversations, interactions and activities, thereby gathering a context sensitive, practical sense of self and others through play.

2.2. Procedure for data collection

Methods that are used to collect data need to be selected keeping in mind the objectives of the study, the participants as well as the cultural setting. As Wesiner argues, when domains of human interaction are being studied, ethnography is an essential approach to adopt, since this is the one method that keeps the cultural context in position, thereby finding ecological validity for the approach, the techniques, the analysis and interpretation. This study was designed as an in-depth investigation into the cultural place that children inhabit within which their sense of self and identity is developing. Thus, the ethnographic approach with qualitative methodology was considered the most appropriate.

Data collection proceeded through interviews, observations and a structured play setting. All sessions were video recorded, the interviews with children, adults and the play sessions. Since similar methods had been tried and validated in the earlier phase of the study, the interview questions and play activities were modified to add questions relevant to the age of the child.

2.2.1. Overview and approach.

The first phase of the research was devoted to discussing and finalising the methodology and testing the procedures for reliability. The primary areas of focus in the ethnographic study of the families were as follows:

1. Conversations with adults through Focus Group Interviews (Chaudhary, 2012)
2. Conversations with children through interviews
3. Structured observations of children during active engagement with specific play materials (Video recordings)

Since the subjects' families had been visited a year before, they were very welcoming of the researcher and spent a lot of time catching up with a mutual exchange of information. Family members were happy to see the researcher and shared many details of their family life and also asked her about hers. The children were somewhat shy, in general, although several children claimed to remember that the researcher had visited them before. Permission was taken for video-recording of the sessions. Each session lasted for about two hours. The participants were provided with an outline of the present study along with emerging findings from the earlier study. Any questions they had during the data collection procedure and related information, were answered.

In the previous study, the families were approached through known persons. The researcher had key people in the community who provided her initial access to the families. The study would not have been possible without these introductions since it is on account of these contacts that the families opened up their doors and their lives to the researcher. The cooperation of the families was sought by using a culturally acceptable stance of presenting the idea of the study as an attempt to learn about children and childhood and how parents take care of children in different communities. Mostly, Indian families have been known to be very friendly and forthcoming about their children, and such was also the experience in this study. Once the family members were confident and secure in the knowledge that they could trust the researcher, both by the introduction provided as well her demeanour and approach to the family members, they were open and enthusiastic about the long hours of an alien presence. The researcher was accepted within the kin terminology and usually given a kin term suitable to her, variously called "*didi, bua, mausi, maami* and *aunty*" sometimes depending upon the relationship with the person who had introduced her. They would find a comfortable term (always with reference to the child

as the central character, so she was the child's *maamiormausi*). During the study, she was made offers of food and tea all the time, which she often refused since it would create a disturbance and extra work for the family which she wanted to avoid, but in some homes, they persisted with their invitations, which were sometimes accepted. The experience of being welcomed as a known and familiar person was intensified in this study on account of the familiarity with the children and the long hours spent with them a year prior to this data collection.

2.2.3. Methods of data collection.

2.2.3.1. Focus Group Interviews

Since background information was already collected from the families, where a note was made of the living area and number of members in the family as well as the surrounding area of the home and other facilities and services, in this study, only additional information about additional members, change in family structure or occupation were noted.

During the interviews with adults, the focus areas were as follows:

2.2.3.2. Conversations with children

In the interviews with children the questions related to issues of school, activities and relationships. Additionally, children were frequently asked to sing a song or recite a poem or tell a story where it seemed to be desired by the adults around. Many mothers wanted to show how well the children could perform before the camera for which the researcher was open and willing. Each family was given a copy of the recordings.

2.2.3.3. Play with toys

A bag full of toys was given to the child and the child was encouraged to play with the toys. This session was kept identical to the previous study in order to allow for some continuity of procedure and to gather longitudinal data which is so sparsely available. The bag contained several objects that were assumed to be familiar to children in their everyday activities. The materials were: Two dolls, a small chair, a ball, a pouch, blocks, cars, a comb, a hankie, a kitchen set, and a doctor's set. This assembly of toys was directed towards eliciting curiosity and manipulation by the children while keeping the child's immediate environment within focus. For this purpose therefore, the local markets where the children live were visited for purchasing the

toys. Care was taken to ensure safety and appropriateness of the toys to prevent injury or swallowing. Further, none of the toys were very expensive for obvious reasons.

Each play session lasted 15 minutes. The children were encouraged to play, and other children in the environment were allowed to enter and exit as they pleased. A certain limit was placed on the number of children participating after one rural session became unmanageable after about 20 children gathered to play and watch the activities, along with several adults. Adults were told to let the child play as he or she wanted and different families treated this particular instruction differently. Some adults commented, others instructed, others played and even others sat and watched children play. The only definite instruction given was for keeping the child's own toys outside of the play session so as to maintain some uniformity of setting.

2.3. Data processing

The data in the study were gathered through different techniques in order to acquire multiple perspectives on childhood identity and relationships along with adults' views about children. The primary sources of data were interviews and observations using the specimen description technique. For a comprehensive and detailed view of the field of study, it was necessary to utilise qualitative methods of study. For each child, there was contextually rich data for which coding was derived, guided by the primary objectives of the study. A keen focus was placed on looking at similarities and differences between the settings, with special focus on rural urban distinctions. Additionally, attention was also given to activities that feed positively into school experiences in order to make some systematic statement about early learning experiences and schooling for children. Education remains an important issue in the country and is therefore attended to in this study. For this reason, it was important to focus on whether it was the adults in the environment who took the primary responsibility of teaching the child, or whether this was the child's own responsibility to learn from adults (Rogoff, et al., 1993). These were visualised as two ends of a continuum and families were placed on this scale in order to assess how much intervention was made to the child's learning. Communicative exchanges between people and the child were also noted and used to provide detailed information about the interactions since language is an important source of information about cultural practice (Hymes, 1964; Miller, & Hoogstra, 1992). During the structured play interactions of each child, a sample of speech exchanges was transcribed to gather specific language data from the families.

Other readings used for guiding the analysis were also referred for the purpose of abstractions from ethnographically rich data on each child and his or her family. Functional Pattern Analysis (Rogoff, & Gauvain, 1986) where the focus is on “unfolding development with purposeful acts within ongoing events” (Rogoff et al., 1993, p. 32) was also used as a guide in addition to Braun and Clarke’s (2006) discussion of thematic analysis for patterns in the data.

The definition of the labels and categories chosen were related closely to the events as a whole rather than separated from the context. Further, behaviours of the people in interaction were also considered during analysis without separating the child. Also, quantitative analysis was included as and when it complements the findings of the study. Careful attention was also paid to any discrepancies in the emerging patterns since each individual case was treated as a coherent whole rather than being seen as composed of separate variables. Since patterns were being analysed, any situation where there was a significant departure from the prevailing sequence of events, a special note is made of the same. In a claim made by Tukey (1977), data analysis was very much like the work of a detective looking for clues. While analysing qualitative data, it was essential to combine strategies of abstraction from details of individual cases and using numbers as and when required. Subsequent to making generalised statements, a key task is to check back with raw data to ensure that the conclusions are in consonance with the individual cases from which these have been taken (Miles, & Huberman, 1984).

Some information about the procedure of thematic analysis is provided here so as to detail how the large quantities of data were managed. Firstly, the whole bulk of the data, or data corpus (Braun, & Clarke, 2006) was visited and revisited, looking at videos of each individual case using the different techniques, at which time preliminary codes and themes were noted. Then, data for each set or technique were viewed in turns, for instance, the interviews, followed by the play sessions, the language task and field observations were screened. In this manner, it was possible to establish positions on the data from different perspectives, the techniques and the individual cases. Since it was a large number of cases, an effort was made to get to know each family.

Thematic analysis provides the researcher with a tool that is flexible and fluid, allowing for customising the process of data management and meaning-making. In the second round of data viewing, extracts of specific events were marked and codes and themes were developed around the objectives of the study. For example, children’s preparation for school was an

important theme. For this, field observations, interviews and play sessions were all scrutinised for specific references, episodes and materials. Similarly, the same data sets were revisited for developing codes and themes in the different domains of children's care, social relationships, physical setting, and activities of children. Each time the data were viewed, a special focus was adopted while remaining flexible towards noting events of significance for another area. In every subsequent round, specific codes were developed by expanding and reviewing the initial list. In this manner, both flexibility and structure were facilitated. By noting specific encounters and language exchanges, it was possible to retain the phenomena during summarising and interpreting the findings. This quick access to the events in the field is an important facility in qualitative research. Prevalence of a theme was not an essential consideration, although recurrent patterns were selected for discussion. However, the theoretical or ideological significance of an event was also an important consideration in its selection. For instance, there were only three events related to physical punishments, where a child was spanked by an adult (two instances) and a child (one instance). On account of the importance of this issue regarding children's care as well as the frequent use of the 'threat' of physical punishment, it was important to make a special mention and focus on this issue, as much for when and how often it 'does not' happen. It is also important to mention whether codes were implicit or interpretive (Boyatzis, 1998). For some of the instances, especially in the first few rounds of data viewing, most of the coding was kept close to the phenomena, to retain their practical quality. However, towards the final compilation of ideas, several significant leaps were made into the interpretive domain. For instance, the separation of 'Focus of adult' and 'Attention to child' as interlinked, but separable dimension of the child-adult interface was possible only when a thorough examination of the data had been accomplished after which higher order theoretical analyses were undertaken. The reason why this process has been explicated here is that often it is assumed (without reason) that qualitative analysis implies that 'anything goes' and the researcher simply lists out random descriptions. In order to demonstrate the rigour of our analysis, these detailed dynamics have been provided. Another strategy worth mentioning here was the use of examples as illustrations. For this purpose again, during report writing, the data were visited to confirm a remembered sequence of events or to provide fresh instances of an analysis. The process of moving back and forth between phenomena and their interpretations is a necessary sequence of analysis in the tradition of ethnography and grounded analysis. Thus the important steps in thematic analysis

include familiarising yourself with the data first (Braun, & Clarke, 2006), generating initial codes for analysis (Miles, & Huberman, 1994), developing themes, reviewing and revising them, and writing up the report.

During the analysis, the data were also approached from three different perspectives. The first was the idiographic where each child and his or her context was bound into discernible comprehensive packages of information. Here there were 39 individual cases for each of whom we had ethnographic observations, language assessments, structured play observations and family interviews. In this approach the focus was on discussing children as single cases in order to get a picture of their life circumstances as well as their participation in research tasks. Secondly, the data were analysed with reference to the different methods used. Here, the overall patterns of activity, relationships, preparation for schooling and children's settings were discussed for the whole group of 39 children. The play with given materials (structured play) activities were analysed for a view on children and their activities, relationships and self and other understanding. The family interviews were scrutinised to gather opinions and trends in beliefs about childhood among the sample. Children's interviews were explored for trends, patterns and particularities related to gender, age, family situation, schooling and other contextual details. The main effort in the analysis was to remain faithful to the events while making them comprehensible. All names of children and places (except Delhi which is retained as a placeholder) have been changed to protect their identity.

2.4. Time Plan

The total study took 27 months and the break-up of the different phases was as follows:

- Preparation of tools, training of research team: 3 months
- Identification of the sample (rural and urban poor): 3 months
- Data collection: 9 months
- Data processing: 9 months
- Finalising the report: 3 months
- Submission of report 2015

3. FINDINGS

3.1. The settings

The sample was selected from in and around Delhi from what is known as the National Capital Region which includes several neighbouring villages, some towns and cities from the neighbouring States of Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh for a study in 2011. Subsequently, an attempt was made to return to the families after a period ranging between 12 and 18 months. Of the total of 58 families in the earlier study, it was possible to locate and gain acceptance from 39 families for this study. The rationale for returning to the families was to obtain longitudinal data, which rare to find in the field of children's development, especially in cultural conditions such as ours.

Locations that were accessible and known to the researchers were selected since that would facilitate entry to the communities and extended sessions of data collection. Given the budgetary and time constraints, the maximum number of cases were enrolled and studied.

The procedure for sample selection borrows from the method of contact sampling (Tuli, & Chaudhary, 2010), wherein a contact person was first identified in a particular area. The introduction of that person was used to enter a specific community to locate families with young children who would be willing to be part of the study. The entry through a known person assures the families of the authenticity of the researcher. Thereafter, purposive sampling was used to select families. On account of the extended procedure of data collection, any family having a child with evident difficulties of health or otherwise, were not approached. In the case of 5 families the data sessions were not complete, leaving xx families with complete data. However, wherever the data was available, these families have been included in the findings.

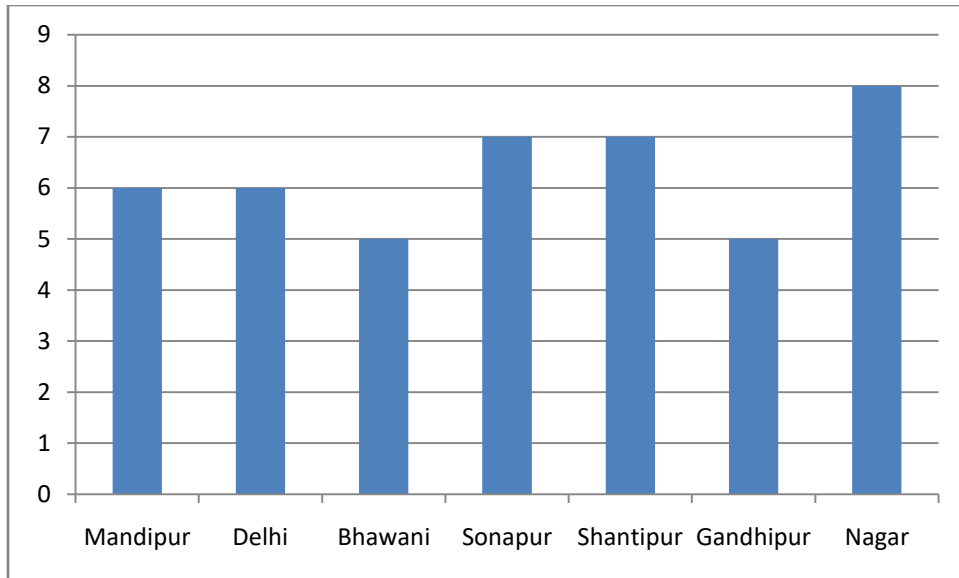


Figure 1: Sample distribution by location (N=44). Names changed, except for Delhi

3.1.1. Mandipur.

Village Mandipur stands at a distance of around 70 km from Central Delhi on the highway in a neighbouring State. The village is well-known for an ancient temple which attracted devotees from all over the northern India. The original temple was situated atop a hillock, with a more accessible adjunct within the village for devotees who cannot climb. The deity, believed to be a manifestation of Lord Krishna, was considered benevolent and powerful. A public fair was held every month where people paid obeisance by climbing the hill, sliding along in a prone position. This form of worship was practiced particularly by people grateful for a 'wish fulfilment' by the deity. All the villagers held this temple in very high regard, often preferring to visit the diminutive version of the deity in the village premises. Reports were also obtained that women and children frequent the temple almost every evening.

The local government school was located adjacent to the temple. Predominantly, the village was home to the Gujjar caste traditionally associated with the care of cattle, but other castes also lived there in small numbers. Although traditional cattle-herders, in this region Gujjars were landowners, engaged in agriculture, construction work and associated occupations. Over the last two decades, the State Government had been gradually acquiring land from the villagers for industrial purposes. The main Delhi-Jaipur and Delhi-Alwar highways near the

village were dotted with industries in and around this area, which made it a very attractive site for development. Gradually many of the families had lost their land to the expanding industry. While some became wealthy overnight, others who were not so astute, have been left with little means, now forced to join the service or transportation industry in the nearby town of Bhawani.

The village had three Anganwadi centres, two government schools and several private schools. Many of the wealthier rural families preferred to send their children to the neighbouring township of Bhawani for 'better' education. The village was a progressive one with electrification and access by paved roads although the interior of the village had some unpaved lanes where homes were accessible only on foot.

Typically, the village scene on arrival every morning would display older women, grandmothers at home with young children, and young adolescent girls around the children going about household chores. Other women were usually away for work in the fields or busy around the house, tending to the cattle or other household work of washing clothes or cooking. The homes mostly had young children roaming in the central courtyard. The doors to a home would always be open to provide access to others. One activity in which the older women were found to engage themselves while chatting with others and supervising children, was rope-making. They ripped open gunny sacks of plastic fibre to make strings of rope for weaving cots. The men were not commonly visible around the house during the day time and would usually assemble only during dinner time. In some homes, older men were seen to be sitting around smoking the *hookah* on an odd day, sometimes engaged with the children. The lives of women and men were separate except for mealtimes, where the women cooked and served others. The children and older women were allowed to move freely between these invisible boundaries. In some homes, men were also seen serving themselves from the kitchen when they were hungry. Children's lives had very little intense supervision, but there were always people around.

There was very little attention to the physical appearance of children in rural homes, who were often seen in clothes that were well-used and sometimes torn, even among the wealthier rural families. Children bathed and cleaned every morning, either on their own or by the mother or other adult women. The bathing and clothes washing area in most homes was outside the row of rooms in an open courtyard. After that they were allowed to play freely with the natural elements around the house, in the open courtyard and on the streets outside the home, led to the inevitable layers of dust on the clothes and person. After the grooming, children were usually left

to themselves to engage with anything and anyone, with little attention and guidance from adults even in situations that seemed potentially hurtful like things thrown around during play, as was observed in the case of one family. Children always had companions for play, mostly other children, either from within the family and neighbours.

While the children played around, adults usually went about their own work or conversation with other adults. Children were often audience to and sometimes subjects of these conversations, but rarely did they enter adult dialogues as partners. Sometimes adults would narrate some detail about the child to others, but rarely addressed them directly. There was a clear lack of special materials for children's entertainment, with the exception of tricycles, (and one home had small broken dinky cars) which were found among wealthier rural families but in a broken condition. Otherwise, there were no toys in any of the homes.

The research work was conducted with ease in most homes, with occasional hesitation. Some time was spent in explaining the objective of the study in ways that would be comprehensible to the participants in order to make them feel at ease with the recordings. The activities with the children were usually considered quite non-threatening, and adults would often leave the children alone in the company of the researcher and go about their daily chores. Neighbours on the other hand, especially children, were overcome with curiosity, and spent hours, leaning over each other, watching the proceedings, joining in to play with the materials as and when there was an opening. Most of them stayed at the borders of the activity, simply watching what was going on. This clustering of people was typical of rural homes where the main door to the family home was always open, and people especially children, enter and exit quite freely.

Mandipur provided evidence for the persistence of village life in India, so many of the scenes were so similar to descriptions from the 50s and 60s. When we speak about social, cultural and technological change, it must not be forgotten that the inertia of motion (not of rest, village life was not stagnant) of Indianness seemed to be sustained by this pervasive life-style in villages and small towns.

3.1.2. Bhawani.

Bhawani is an urban dwelling in a neighbouring State, located on a National highway, around 74 km from Central Delhi. The total population as per the 2011 census was 1,04,883 in

number, having increased rapidly over the last decade. Bhawani is an industrial town and most of the people were employed in the local factories or public services and small business enterprises like shops or manufacturing units. The common language was Hindi, although it was found to be spoken with a local accent. Like in the neighbouring village of Mandipur, some words for common articles were also different, in addition to the distinct accent. People usually used their own vehicles or three-wheeler scooters on hire to move about in the city since there was no public transport system. The township had a much higher population of men as compared to women (63% men, 37% women) on account of the predominantly industrial economy indicating that many men lived and worked there away from their families. The industries in the area included steel, electronics, herbal products, textiles and pharmaceuticals among others.

The area had experienced recent development in the residential sector as well. Several housing societies with flats had mushroomed, since the township became a popular residential area on account of its proximity to Gandhipur, a major satellite city of Delhi. Alongside the main Delhi-Alwar highway, scores of builders were constructing 7 – 10 storey flats on account of which the predominantly agricultural skyline of the past had given way to a largely urban landscape. As a result of the rise in demand, several malls have also been constructed and the township was racing fast towards recognition as a district headquarter, with several hotels, community halls and convention centres for meetings and social gatherings.

The recent expansion of the town has led to escalation in petty crime, some residents mentioned. Unlike the neighbouring village where participants were also recruited from, these urban homes were all recently constructed flats. The main doors were habitually kept closed although visits of neighbours were a frequent sight in many of the homes. Since the doors were usually closed, children mostly played indoors, closely supervised by adults in most cases. In one home, the family had recently moved into a flat from a village and they still preferred many of the ways of the village. For instance, the women chose to cook their *rotis* on a *chullah* that they had specially constructed in the backyard, saying that they did not taste as good from a modern system. In this family, the resonance of a rural lifestyle was still evident. The women usually left the children with the researcher, and went about their daily activities. The lifestyle of this family clearly demonstrated a persistence of a rural lifestyle despite having now chosen to live in an urban locality.

It was found that women were mostly homemakers, with a few exceptions where they may have taken on some work at home. Residents were found to belong to middle and upper income families. The industrial township stood at a distance of around 5-6 km from the residential area. Although there were several schools to which wealthier families from the local villages also sent their children, a paucity for opportunities for higher education was reported, for which children had to depend on the metropolis.

3.1.3. Gandhipur.

Gandhipur is a satellite city in the National Capital Region, the second largest city in a neighbouring State. The city had seen a tremendous growth as an office and residential area in the last three decades, attracting many clients from all over India and abroad. It was also recognised as the industrial and financial centre of the State and had a high per capita income. The relaxation of laws related to the entry of private companies saw the advent of several modern buildings and an international entry into the largely sleepy township of Gandhipur. There were large residential blocks that had been established over the erstwhile agricultural area. The new city mushroomed along the main highway, bypassing the small older city of Gandhipur. In spite of rapid development, Gandhipur was fraught with many of the difficulties typical of Indian cities, bad traffic, poor electricity supply and water problems. The families in the sample all belonged to salaried, upper middle income, all of them well-educated and earning well. Gandhipur had almost all the major schools branches of Delhi schools and was famous for the variety of up-market shopping malls.

A majority of the people living there were migrants to the region in search of employment, education and a better life. The cost of living was reported to be very high, and people said they spent much more on essential goods than in other cities. Local public transport was abysmal, and it was impossible to move around comfortably without private transport. For the person on the street, distances were large and conveniences low. Still, Gandhipur was attractive to live in for young couples on account of the proximity of the workplace and an urban lifestyle. During the time of the study, travelling to and from the city had eased considerably since the establishment of metro services to Delhi. For many of the young working community, the metro provided a life-line for daily commuting. There were some clashes between local and immigrant populations in the city since many of the locals were agricultural families who had

lost their lands to urban development, received much monetary compensation, but lost their livelihood. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why this area was predisposed to confrontations between the largely urbanized immigrants and the locals in terms of petty crime and violent incidents.

The families that participated in the study mostly belong to the salaried, upper-middle and middle income groups. Only one woman was working outside the home in the sample, and men were employed in the private sector in salaried jobs with companies. Some of them were nuclear families with few children. Family life revolved around the work schedule of the employed members of the family as well as around children's daily routine. Unlike the rural areas where children occupy themselves with free play through the day, children were found to be kept under adult supervision, regular care and attention. All the young children attended preschool in local neighbourhoods. With a couple of exceptions where the mother was stitching clothes for her sister and other women of the household were quite occupied with household chores, or otherwise occupied, the mothers spent most of their time in the company of the child or children while going about work in the home. Children usually had several toys around the house to play with, and occupy themselves.

3.1.4. Shantipur.

Shantipur was a recently developed area in a nearby State. Typically the homes were built as multi-storeyed apartments. The township was a popular residential area due to its accessibility. Either side of the main highway was dotted with high-rise residential buildings with up-market rents, fancy shopping malls and entertainment areas. On account of the fact that this area was newly developed, there were no older colonies around. Each of the buildings had their own security and maintenance services, along with swimming pools and safe and secure playgrounds for children fitted with outdoor play equipment.

All the 8 families in this area lived in high rise flats of different colonies and were upper income, salaried or business families. Most of the people there owned the houses that they live in and the couples had a high educational status and worked in salaried jobs, with some women either worked from home or had taken a break in their career to raise their young children. Many of the families mentioned that they were nuclear, but grandparents were reported to be frequent visitors to the homes. There were many private schools in the area which had a high standard of

living. On account of the wide roads, multi-storeyed flats and cooperative societies, the area appeared very different from a typical Indian community, and had recently become a popular model for housing.

All the young children in the area were attending play-schools which were many in number. At the time of arrival of school buses for the younger children every morning, mothers and helpers were seen lining up to pick up their respective children from the buses. After a relatively quiet afternoon at home, the families again emerged in the evening to take walks around the area as children played and older members of families take their evening walks.

3.1.5. Nagar.

Nagar is a major industrial township in the National Capital Region, located in a neighbouring State. The city had many industries and residential areas and was then expanding towards the east. This region has several residential areas apart from the industrial sector and Government buildings. Most of the people who lived in Nagar were immigrants who had come in search of work over the last three decades. There were also pockets of poor families, immigrants in search of work in factories and homes. All sections of society could be found here, from the very wealthy to the poor. There were industrialists, people from the services, Government officials, business families of all sizes, and skilled and unskilled labourers. Another characteristic feature of Nagar was that there is a constant mixing of all sections of society on a daily basis.

One lower income locality was chosen for the study. These immigrants arrived from different states of northern India. They travelled regularly to their native places to keep in touch with life in the village especially during local festivals and other celebrations. The areas in which they lived were seriously short of resources like space, electricity and water. The homes were usually one room with a small area outside before the front lane, facing another home. Families lived in very close proximity to each other, and the women particularly, lived their lives in the constant company of their neighbours, whether it was fetching water from the local municipal tap or going about their domestic chores. Some families lived in a building which had about three floors, with one room per family. This building was even more overcrowded than the single storey rooms since the space outside the room was very narrow. The door to the room was closed only when there was no one at home. Otherwise, lives of families were open to others, and

children and adults from the neighbourhood walked freely in and out of the room without restriction or comment. Some families chose to hang a curtain to maintain some privacy for the family.

Public toilets were at a slight distance, and bathing was usually done in a makeshift arrangement just outside the room in most cases. The women stayed at home or worked as domestic helpers and men as rickshaw pullers, *chowkidars* or vendors. Some of the families had mobile stalls, and early mornings were spent preparing the material with some assistance from older children. The kinds of things that are sold were mostly food items like *gol gappas*, *tickkis* or *chhola bhaturas*. The streets were lined with empty carts during the evenings and nights, to be prepared and wheeled out the next morning for daily rounds through the narrow streets to more open areas where they would go to sell their wares. After the day was done and the men returned home, the women got busy with the daily cleaning of the utensils used during the day. Most of the older children were enrolled in afternoon schools and the young ones stayed at home with the mothers, sometimes being sent for private tuitions.

3.1.6. Delhi.

Delhi is a massive metropolis, and the capital city of India with 16.3 million residents it stands as the eighth most populous city in the world. There were people from all over the country representing the variety of India who work and live in and around Delhi, representing different regions, religions, castes, occupations, and even different nationalities. From the beautiful gardens of the diplomatic area to the old township of *Purani Dilli*, the residential areas of South Delhi to the newly developed northern region, Delhi touched its bordering cities on every side. The cluster of cities around Delhi formed the officially designated National Capital Territory (NCR) even though the neighbouring States continued to retain their boundaries. The total population of the NCR is estimated at 22.2 million people. There were a wide variety of colonies in Delhi including official accommodations for Government employees, private houses, and the populous multi-storey colonies that have sprung up on all sides of the city.

The participants lived in one small cluster of lower middle class homes from the campus of an educational institution, where employees live in hutments with one or additional makeshift rooms as homes. The families were by no means even remotely representative of the variety of families living in the metropolis, but they did characterise some regional variation. Most of them

had settled in the area for the last three generations when their grandparents or great grandparents had come to the institution for employment. In most instances, the present generation of young people were also employed there. The institution was located in the heart of Delhi, and the hutments provided for class 3 and 4 employees were lined along the boundary wall. Typically, these hutments were meant for an employee and his or her immediate family. The limited housing was used by many more people than permitted. The convenience of a central location with wide open spaces for children to play was said to be attractive. The college authorities have struggled with the housing issue since it was next to impossible to impose a restriction on the number of people who live together.

3.1.7. Sonapur.

Sonapur lay around 70 km north of Delhi. The township was also under the National Capital Region and was an urban township where small businesses flourished in the past and even today. With a total population of around a million people, Sonapur was home to massive carpet, alcohol, rubber and automobile parts industries. There were many market areas for the sale of these goods that even attracted customers from the capital to the city for better prices. The small town had many schools, and recently some housing societies and shopping malls have come up along the Delhi highway. Mostly, the older part of Sonapur was an urban area accessible through narrow streets and small independent homes. A major influx of families occurred after the partition between India and Pakistan. These families still continue to live in the area.

The families in the sample were from business and salaried backgrounds. Many lived in joint families, and three lived as nuclear families, having settled here for several years, although relatives were reported to come and go quite frequently. Most of the houses were independent homes built in an area of around 200 – 300 sq yards. Three of the families lived in rented accommodation. Although the market was robust and busy, there were no shopping malls in the area, and the town mostly has smaller markets. The township also lacks other facilities that were available in bigger cities like public transport. All homes usually had a scooter for local running and a car for family use. With the exception of one teacher, all women were homemakers, one of who was taking private tuitions for school children at home. The families mostly belonged to the middle and upper middle income category.

3.2. Description of sample

A total of 44 families consented to be part of this study. The participants were selected for a previous study done when the children were between 3 and 4 years of age (See Chaudhary, 2013). In the follow up, 44 families were located after a gap of a year to two years depending upon availability. The final sample stands at a total of 44 cases, of which 18 were males and 26 were females ranging between 4 years 2 months to 6 years 8 months of age (Mean=59.14 months, 4.93 years, s.d.=7.22 months). The relative mapping of income group ranging between the lower income group to upper income group was, lower (10), middle (18), and upper income (16) groups Figure 2.

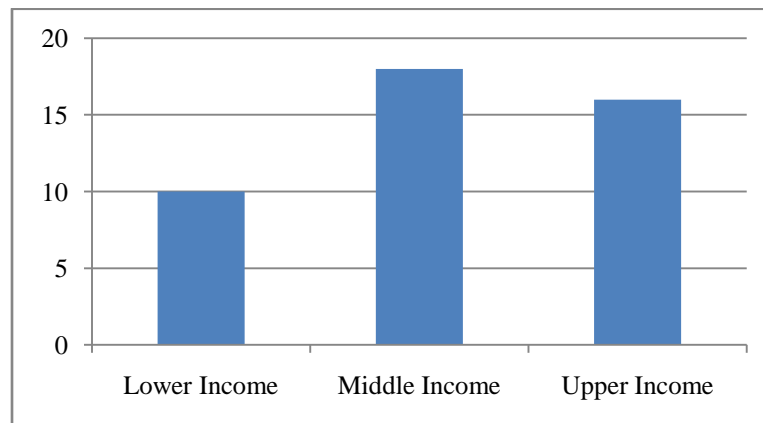


Figure 2. Distribution by estimated income (N=44)

This placement was done with a relative scaling between the three categories. It must be noted that neither the very wealthy, nor the very poor sections of society were accessed for the study. People who lived either on the street or in farm houses were not included on account of the small percentages as well as difficult access. The families were not queried on their incomes since it is known to be an unreliable indicator on account of variable reporting. It has been found

in earlier studies that some people tend to under-report whereas others inflate the amount of money they earn per month (Chaudhary, 2008, 2010, 2013). Additionally, rural participants received some of what they earned in the form of agricultural produce from their farmland and cattle-rearing. This made the estimation of income as a monthly resource very difficult. For this reason, it was considered reasonable to look at what people owned, where they lived, what work they did and how many years of schooling they had rather than cash income. A far better assessment was available from features of families like houses (size, ownership), household goods present, modes of transport owned, education and occupation. After considering these details, the families were marked as belonging from lower, middle or upper income groups. Typically, the lower income group lived in one-room hutments, owned a TV, and had a two-wheeler or *rickshaw*. The middle income group were those who owned a two-wheeler, motorised vehicle, lived in two roomed homes and owned a refrigerator along with a TV. The upper income families owned cars, several electronic gadgets like laptop computers, microwaves, cameras and so forth, and mostly owned the two or three bedroom homes located in housing societies. Education and occupation were also looked at while classifying the families, although material possessions and home ownership were the basic criteria. It was considered appropriate to do this relative positioning of families rather than taking more objective criteria since the sample size and design of the study was more geared towards a descriptive rather than an explanatory style. Further, economic factors were considered as contextual features and not independent variables.

Regarding the educational level of the parents, it was found that on an average, the fathers had 13.20 years of education (Range: 3 – 18, SD 4.40) and mothers had a lower average of 11.48 years (Range 0 – 19, SD 5.61). The distribution is presented in figure 3.

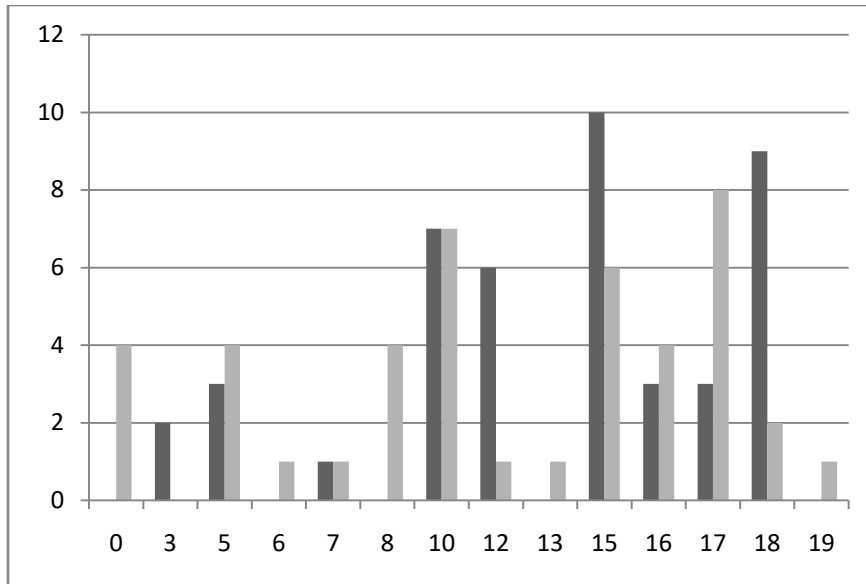


Figure 3: Years of education of parents (N=44 Fathers; N=44 Mothers)

The mean number of members in a household was 6.31, ranging between 3 and 18 members, whereas the number of people present at the time of data collection which sometimes included neighbours was 4.38 with a range of 1 – 13.

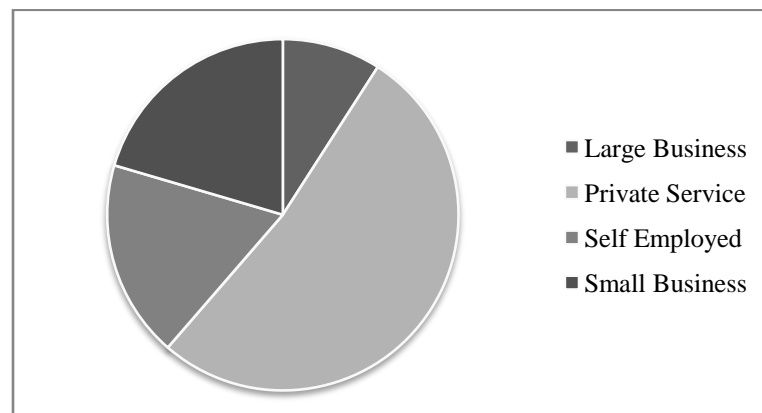


Figure 4: Occupation of fathers (N=44)

Regarding occupation, it was found that fathers were mostly occupied in Private Service of companies or individuals at different levels of income like banks, engineering firms,

accountancy companies, as drivers or security guards. Thirteen were businessmen, with four owning large businesses and 9 had small business enterprises. The 8 fathers who were self-employed had an enterprise running from the home at different levels of the income bracket. Some had food carts, doing electrical repairs, or pulling rickshaws. This was different from the small businesses since those had a specific location outside the home. One father was a doctor with a private practice from home. Regarding the occupation of mothers, it was found that a majority of the mothers were homemakers (28), involved in household chores and the care of children and families. Perhaps it may also be acknowledged here that it was far more likely for a mother who stayed at home to agree to participate in the study on account of the extended interactions involved for data collection. Mothers who worked outside the home were found to be usually very tight for time and it would have been somewhat difficult to conduct the research within the limited time they have with their families. However, several employed mothers who were living in extended families were willing to be part of the study. Three mothers were self-employed: two taking tuitions for children, and one ironed clothes for a living. The work profile of these mothers was as follows: Three of the mothers were in Government service, two in the teaching line (one pre-school and one school) and one was a doctor. Eleven were in private service at different levels, from domestic workers at an upper class home; others were one teacher, a bank manager, an employee in a bank, a statistician at a private company, an employee in the IT industry, a manager and a preschool coordinator.

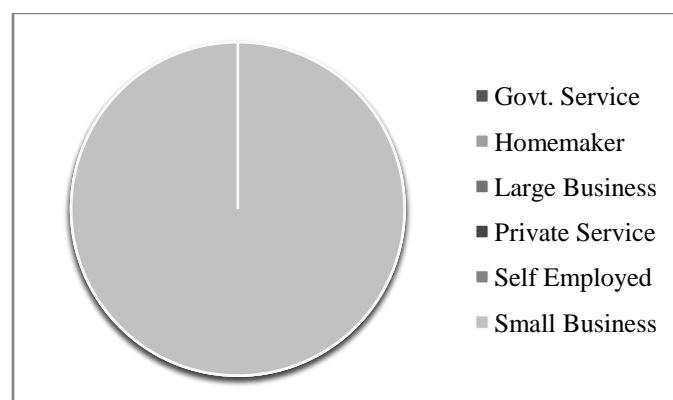


Figure 5: Occupation of mothers (N=44)

A majority of the children were born in hospitals whereas mostly among the lower income group, there were some home deliveries. Five of the mothers reported complications at birth like the bursting of the amniotic sac, premature delivery, and in one case a heart difficulty that needed surgery at two years of age, and another child was born with a defect in her ankles that needed surgical correction. From the last visit a year or so ago, two of the families had had younger babies and one mother was pregnant.

With reference to number of members per household, the findings have been derived from the data-base collected from the larger pool of families a year prior to the study. The data from the 58 families visited is presented in Figure 6.

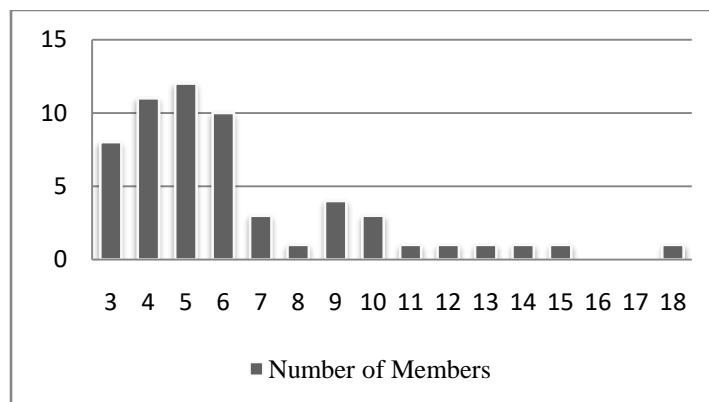


Figure 6: Number of members per household (N=58)

The distribution of members per household shows a positively skewed graph where the mode is lower than the mean and median on account of the greater range of case above the mean of 6.3 (SD = 3.30). In another estimation of the number of people around the child, during data collection was counted to display in numbers, the social context (Figure 7).

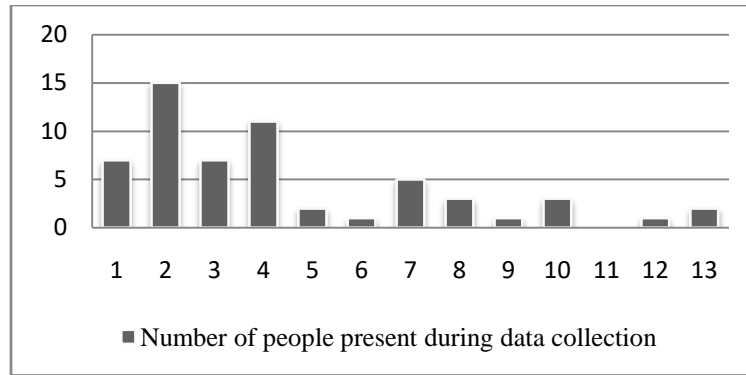


Figure 7: Number of people present during data collection other than the child (N=58)

In the above instance, it was found that there was always at least one person present during the time of data collection, and the number of onlookers went up to a maximum of 13. Regarding the number of other children present at the scene, it was found that the range was between 1 and 13, with a mean of 4.32 (SD = 3.22). We can see that although there were several instances where there was only one other person during data collection, a large number of homes had other children (usually siblings, cousins, children from the neighbourhood) watching or interacting during data collection. This illustrates the ‘clustering’ of people that happens during data collection in Indian families, especially rural homes, where people tend to join in out of curiosity, and often make interjections during data collection, sometimes teasing the child for the special attention being shown.

Regarding the members in the family, we find that in 24 of the homes, one or both grandparents were living in the same home as the child. In all except 2 instances where the mother and children were visiting the natal home, grandparents were from the paternal side. Apart from mother, father, siblings and cousins, there were some homes in which children and adults from the neighbourhood were also present. Domestic helpers were seen in three homes, but they were not found to be participating in the events. Of the people present at the scene of data collection, a separate estimate was made of children, (Mean 2.35, SD = 2.55¹²).

¹²The SD shows a ‘bottom effect’ on account of the high number of zeros in the distribution

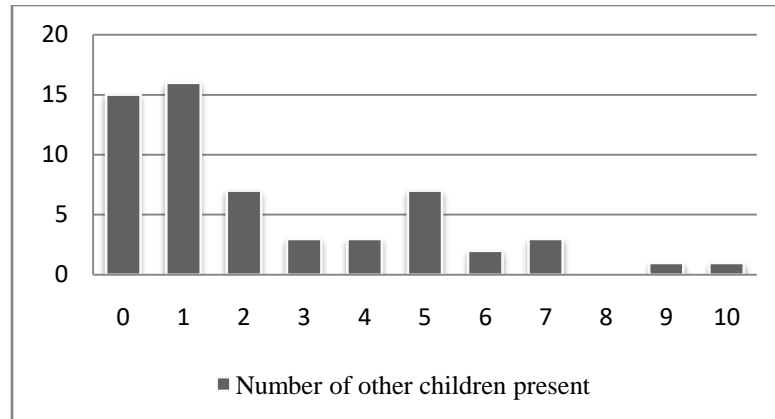


Figure 8: The Number of other children present during data collection (N=58)

An observation was also done of the primary caregivers of the child. It was found that in 25 families, the mothers were taking care of the child either exclusively or along with another child, 7 were instances of only mother and one child. In three instances, both father and mother were seen to be caring for the young child. Grandmothers, sometimes along with grandfathers, were participating in the care of the child in 24 families along with mothers. Other participants in the care of the young child were, aunts (paternal and maternal) and domestic helpers, whereas one child went to a day care for some time every day.

Several other features of the children's environment were detailed. Some of them bear mentioning here. Out of a total of 58 children in the larger data-base, 18 were only children of their parents, although if they lived in joint families, there would have been other children in the home. Only three children had some health concerns apart from the regular colds and coughs, one child had asthma whereas another had a minor heart difficulty. A third, Ankita, was born with her feet at an odd angle for which she had received surgery and was wearing corrective shoes regularly. This fact was discovered after most of the data collection was over.

Regarding family structure, it was found that 26 families were living in nuclear units, many of them were among the poor in Nagar cluster. The remaining 32 were joint or extended families where multiple generations of people were living together, or else there were some family members in addition to the child's immediate family. Of the total, 42 children were attending some form of preschool, whereas the others (15, 1 child's data was missing) were at

home, some of whom went regularly to an older child or a tutor for formal instruction in alphabet and number learning.

3.3. Contexts of childhood

The study was conducted in seven different clusters, and each of the clusters had certain characteristic ways in which the families lived and the way the homes were built, furnished and arranged. A description of the general area has already been provided, and in this section, the settings in which the children lived will be further detailed. Each locality has been discussed separately.

Within this study, it was possible to find three discernible groups as far as children's settings were concerned, each with its individual characteristics. The upper income group had big houses (3-5 bedroom flats), ample space around child, domestic helpers to care for child, and numerous toys. The middle income families were living in 2-3 bedroom apartments, commonly housing high-rise buildings, with a few toys and need-based goods. At the third level are the poor who usually lived in 1-2 room houses, where children played with anything available in the surroundings.

3.3.1. Mandipur.

Mandipur was a rural setting, characterised by 2-3 bedroom houses. Mostly the houses were single-storey, some with a roof-top which children could access. Single units lined adjacent to each other, each varying in its exterior structure yet having some kind of uniformity in the interiors. The external appearance of houses varied largely due to extensions made by individual occupants to cover maximum area possible. Apparently ad hoc looking room extensions and boundary extensions were common. As visible in the case of the homes of Piya and Nina, the houses had been extended to add more space to living area. The houses were all *pucca*, made of bricks and cement, with wooden doors and cement flooring. Rows of houses, running along both the sides of a narrow cement pathway were usually lined outside by an open drain.

A common feature of houses of the wealthier rural families, were large open courtyards. Though the houses varied in terms of land, a central or front courtyard was where most of the recordings were conducted since most of the family members would spend their day in and around the courtyard, rather than the rooms. This space was found to be distinctive and multi-

functional. There was usually a covered earthen pot with stored drinking water, a cot and some *moodahs* for sitting. A fairly common sight was a *chullah* for wood-fire cooking, a smoking pipe, *hookah*, some construction material like tools and wooden planks/sticks and occasionally a desert cooler. Sometimes motorcycles and/or SUVs were seen parked in the courtyards of the families that signalled the presence of men at home. Although the rooms were often closed and dark, there was sufficient space in the open courtyard where children spent most of their time, often running between homes and onto the streets.

Another noticeable feature was the characteristic sea-green colour of the walls inside the houses and the presence of a decorative string (*toran*) on the wooden or iron sheet doors leading to the rooms. The walls were mostly cracked and damaged indicating that not much attention was paid to these aspects. The common furniture in rooms included a double wooden bed, a sitting area in the form of a cot, plastic chair or *moodah* and cement extensions crowded with things like utensils or clothes. The rooms had little or no space for playing and perhaps a two feet wide passage was available to move around the beds. If the room was larger, more beds were pushed in. It seemed that the rooms just served as a shelter space for dressing, storing things and sleeping.

Dev and Tanvi's families had large courtyards with wide open spaces within which cattle were also tied, and peacocks were seen to be roaming freely. In the case of Guna and Ruchi, they were seen playing with other children from the neighbourhood in the courtyard of their house. It was nearly impossible to estimate the residents of a house, since the entire group of 6-8 children, of different ages, played together and moved about from house to house. At one point they were followed to the outskirts of the village with others to look at a dog and its puppies. They climbed the school wall and played there for a while as well.

The individual houses were open to the neighbourhood for free interaction and visits. Children showed no sign of hesitation in going into a neighbour's house and neither was there any restriction upon them from the people where they entered. All houses were accessible and open to people walking in. Several houses had bathing rooms onto one side of the courtyard where water was stored, clothes were washed. Toilets were not to be seen and children were found to just stand against a wall or squat down to ease themselves as and when they wished. In the case of Isha's home, a community toilet located at a distance of a hundred yards or so was visible. Tanvi's home had a small space on the terrace, like a dry toilet.

Pictures of gods were seen in almost all the homes, adorning the walls; either calendars or framed pictures. Some homes also had a couple of photographs of family members arranged on shelves. Although most rooms had open shelves on which clothes were piled, cupboards were available in some homes.

3.3.2. Bhawani.

The houses in Bhawani were spacious; they were all individual flats in a gated housing colony. There were a few nuclear families and some of them had grandparents staying with the young couple. Abhit's family was an upper income joint family, with a large ground floor flat, with plenty of open and outdoor space, and they had modified the house to suit their lifestyle. For instance, because they still preferred to eat *roti* from a *chullah*, apart from the kitchen, they had a special area constructed for wood-fire cooking. There was also lawn at the back of the house where they would warm themselves in the winter sun and dry their clothes. The locality was quite a large complex, with a park and playground. The children in the sample would all be seen playing there in the evenings. Abhit, Ankur and Gunni met the researcher there every day and chatted up with her as they played. Children were also observed playing outdoors after sunset, in the dark, sometimes even without supervision from adults, since it was considered to be safe for children. The lanes between the homes and to and from the park were only used by residents who, all reasonably familiar with each other, drove safely and accommodated to the playing children, something that has been lost in large cities.

With the exception of Gita, Abhit and Ankur who played by themselves, other children were always accompanied by their mothers. None of the video recordings included the men except in Gita's case when her father had accompanied her to the school bus stop in the morning, and the grandfather who was seen in Abhit's home. It was noticed that among these families, there was no evident restrictions to children on what they did; they stood up on the sofas, ate food wherever they wanted, and one child Ankur even locked the main-door from the outside and was also found to be throwing toys down the stairs outside his house one afternoon, creating a clatter that must have been disturbing for others. Children usually did what they felt like.

Abhit, Druv and Vera spent most of their time inside the house whereas Ankur mostly played outdoors with his group of friends. There was a brief recording of him inside the home. Ankur explored the park area, cycled, rolled on the ground without any adult supervision, and at

times also seemed a bit difficult to handle by his mother. Anusha and Gita also went for dance classes and Anusha also went swimming with her mother in the local pool. The outdoor play area was well-equipped and children spent a lot of time in the park.

3.3.3. Gandhipur.

Homes in Gandhipur had at least two bedrooms, one dining room, a kitchen, a drawing room. Most of the houses were independent, where the family was living either as a joint household with different generations on different floors, or in rented portions of the house. Nayan's house was the only exception, a flat in an apartment building. All the houses were well-furnished and well-stocked with materials related to children. Except in the case of Pratap, children's activities generally happened in the living room, bedroom and the kitchen, mostly in room nearest to the kitchen. The mothers were usually present with others members as well, as in Mini's case. Only in Pratap's home the mother was rarely seen, more on account of the fact that she appeared to be a bit shy. Pratap's home was a multiple generation household where the grandparents lived on the ground floor and the older paternal uncle and his children on the first floor and Pratap, his sister and parents on the second floor. However, the family activities were always combined. Children (all four cousins) played in the open living area in Pratap's unit which was free of furnishing; and eating and other activities happened on the first floor where the women were seen cooking together as the grandparents sat outside in the living room and the children played about upstairs, on the stairs and around the house.

No child was seen to move out of the main door or gate (as the case may be) of the house unaccompanied by an adult. There was no incident of children playing outside or exploring the outdoors. As a consequence, children also did not enter other homes unannounced or by themselves. There were also restrictions on children in leaving their own homes even in multi-storey houses (except in the case of Pratap). For instance, Chetan did not venture down the stairs until the researcher accompanied him. His mother had gone to visit the family living downstairs leaving the child with the researcher. Mini went outside the main gate only when the mother was with her, the researcher accompanied her, or the grandfather was standing outside; Sarita held the researcher's hand when she went outside to play and Nayan was always accompanied by both the parents; Pratap was not observed going outside at all, but freely ran around all over the three storey house.

There cannot be a definite conclusion regarding the toy materials as different children had access to different resources. Whereas Nayan's toys were varied and plentiful, even with games for slightly older ages (carom board, snakes and ladders), Mini had no toys to play with and made an energetic and elaborate pretend play with actual dishes that were separated for her use in the kitchen. She was seen to use slivers of cloth from her mother's stitching which was ongoing, to create an elaborate, make-believe kitchen game. In Chetan's home, the toy materials observed were – remote control car, electronic toy guitar, and several other robotic toys. Pratap's basket of toys was shared among the four cousins who were always playing together. The basket was kept on an easily accessible shelf in the kitchen, and children frequently brought out the basket of toys that had a bat, ball, aeroplane, hoopla, *damru*, blocks, ball with lights, car track, toy cars, bubble blow, hammer, and slate.

3.3.4. Shantipur.

In Shantipur, the study was conducted among families living in gated colonies, each with its own set of high-rise buildings. Most of the houses in the data observed were two or three bedroom houses, with a separate drawing room and kitchen. These houses were connected through elevators. Reserved parking space and internal facilities like parks, hobby clubs, and swimming pools, were available to the residents. These urban settings had conveniences, comfort and safety, markets and places of worship in close proximity and the main gates were always manned. All these buildings had one common entry and exit point which was secured. The large entry gates remained closed at all times and opened only on request. The entry was supervised and organised; paved roads encircled the high rise buildings. Places to play and walk about surrounded the high-rise flats. Inside the buildings, there were elevators with fire extinguishers available on every floor. Children were seen downstairs in the play area always in adult company. Mothers, grandmothers and helpers held children by their hand, or stayed close to them as they played on the outdoor play equipment, swam or simply walked around.

As in the case of Pradeep and Asha, the mothers held the children by their hands as they dropped them to the school bus in the morning. It was observed that adult supervision was constant but casual inside the premises of the colony but became vigilant as they stepped outside, by holding child's hand tight. As soon as they came onto the main road, the chaotic buzzing of traffic was evident.

The houses were found to be elaborately furnished and all homes had a range of electronic gadgets like televisions, refrigerators, mixer grinders, washing machines, air conditioners, laptops and mobile phones. Life in these multi-storey buildings was designed to be safe and comfortable. The rooms were spacious with the average size being 10 ft by 10 ft. The houses were segmented into the formal sitting area, bed rooms, dining room, dressing room and kitchen. The place for children to play was usually the bedroom or the drawing room. Tiled or marbled flooring and well-plastered walls gave the homes a neat appearance.

Many of the families were nuclear with a couple and their children, or child. Some children lived in extended families like that of Garima and Nena, both of who were cared for by the grandmothers during the day, while the mother was at work. Children had designated places to play and there was organised storage for children things, many even had a separate children's room, not an essential consideration among the families in the village and smaller towns. Despite these arrangements, children slept together with parents.

The wealthier families arranged for a variety of toys and special furniture designed for the child. Boys were found to have a number of cars, varied in their sizes and colours, while the girls had dolls and kitchen sets to play with, in addition to other toys. Sunny had a carton full of toy cars, while Sheena was seen painting with water colours in a room especially designed for her activity, with a small slide-cum-ladder and lots of other play material. Pradeep had some stuffed toys, a panda family, giraffe, tortoise, as well as alphabet puzzles of several kinds. Rita possessed a doll, while Nena had a low plastic table-chair with alphabets and number print, a pink plastic bat with a ball, toy cars and a pink ball-shooting gun. A clear preference in gendering of toys made available to the boys and girls was evident.

Adapted furniture for children in the form of low tables and chairs were available to children as seen in the videos of Sunny, Sheena and Nena. Bicycles for children were also seen as in the case of Asha. Children's school bags were found to be coloured with many stickers of cartoon characters on them. Mostly all families used steel dishes and cutlery with special dishes for children with colourful with cartoons for children.

Every house has a space for gods and goddesses, usually in a wooden case, decorated internally with lights or flowers or cloth. These wooden cabinets were the places of worship inside the home and are usually found in the bedrooms, either on the side or on a shelf

designated for the images. In Garima's, Nena's and Pradeep's homes, a wall unit was installed above eye level in which idols and pictures were arranged.

3.3.5. Nagar.

The houses in Nagar were characteristically one room, housing nuclear families. The rooms were small with cemented flooring and badly scarred walls, where the paint was cracked and peeling. An exception was Sunil's house, where the roof was well-plastered and the interiors were neat. The houses were all *pucca*, made of brick and cement. While Bunty, Mona, Chand, Kapil, Monty and Sunil have their houses in one neighbourhood, the houses of Ramesh, Sohail and Shanta were in a middle class neighbourhood in the adjoining quarters for helpers. Paras and Danesh were the only subjects in Nagar who belonged to wealthier families.

The first set of children lived in what is pejoratively called an urban slum, with row housing of single multi-functional rooms separated by thin *gullies* from the opposite row. These paths separating rows of houses were about five feet wide. All the rooms had a raised wall with a storage space on top of which a ledge outside the room was constructed where children and women sat and watched the goings on in the neighbourhood whenever they had time. Even young babies were perched, somewhat precariously, but during the several days of recording in the area, not one child was seen to fall off this ledge. There seemed to have adapted to and understood the physical task of sitting on that slab very early, and were able to sit there for hours on end. This extension was about three feet in height. Under this were stored provisions, food, utensils and other household good, and was kept locked at night. With families spacing out their belongings in the lane there was very little space to walk on the street. In all this crowding, people regularly pushed carts with food stuff and other sale items along the alleyway, since many of the families in this area made food that was sold on streets. Closely spaced buildings, one or two storeys high, overpowered the pathway, limiting the sunshine from reaching any interiors.

On an average, the one-room setup had two main functional spaces: the bedding and the kitchen. Usually a double wooden bed, covered with sheets was common. Some families even left out the bed and slept on mattresses that were rolled up during the daytime, leaving the floor space free. This was seen in the homes of Bunty and Monty. Mona's home had two single beds and Ramesh and Shanta's house had single beds. Some of the homes had some storage space, like the big cupboard found in Kapil's home. Most others kept valuables in a locked trunk under

the bed. It was common to see clothes hung or piled on bed or, like in Kapil's home, stuffed in a bag and hung on the wall. In Sunil's house a bundle of clothes covered by a sheet was lying on one side. Some houses did have a number of suitcases visible, perhaps for storing clothes and valuables. In Sunil's house a number of suitcases, cloth and steel boxes were visible on one side of the bed and on the cement extension shelf above the eye level. Similarly in Monty's house there was a cement slab, with some suitcases.

The area had a common toilet maintained by the local municipal authority, and each user paid for its use. Bathing was seen happening in the area outside the home, often just beside the central drain. Children and men were seen bathing, perhaps the women bathed more discreetly in the dark, or under some temporary cover. Bathing in public was always done with essential clothing on. Bunty was seen bathing on the doorstep of his room located on the first floor of the building, while Mona sat just outside her ground floor house on a wooden plank stool and bathed using a soap and water from a re-cycled plastic bucket and a steel vessel.

The water was made available by storage in re-cycled plastic oil-paint buckets. All the houses had a collection of these re-used pails; piled in the room and outside. The municipal tap with regular, but timed water supply was located two houses away from Chand and Mona's homes in the street that periodically turned into a throbbing queue of people, sometimes breaking into quarrels or chatting sessions as they waited their turns. Although women and children would leave their identifiable buckets and watch from their homes, the snakelike queue of the containers was always visible for the next round of water supply. In the case of Kapil and Mona, in addition to the similar recycled buckets, huge steel vessels of stored water could also be seen. First floor settings had a water tank located on the corner parapet of the building.

The rooms were multi-functional. Compact kitchens with a two-way burner, plastic jars storing spices and food, and some steel crockery were visible inside the rooms. Small size gas cylinders could also be seen in the backdrop. Mostly, the kitchen was housed on a table or a cement slab. In Shanta's house, a plastic basket with a lid under the bed had all the steel utensils in it, while in Sunil's house a plastic basket right outside the house had some steel utensils stored in it and covered with a cloth. Ramesh and Sohail's houses had a separate kitchen.

Children played anywhere, inside the rooms, on the streets, on the ledge between the room and street, or in nearby areas. Mona was seen playing outside her house in the gully crowded by passers-by with a basketball, while Monty was seen playing with another child,

outside his first floor house, with a ball. The narrow corridor on the first floor did not restrict the children from improvising ways to play with the ball by tilting a table to the side to make way for their game. In the case of Sunil, the group of children found a first floor construction site near their home, and were seen playing with bricks and sand. One older child, perhaps about eight-year-old was building an improvised *mandir* out of mortar and bricks, levelling the rubble and had a picture of *Shiva* in his hand while Sunil and the other (younger) boys were seen to be filling a plastic bag with mud and stones, using hands and at another time filling an empty soda bottle with sand using a broken cassette case as a shovel, actively assisting the oldest child who was leading this game. Mona and Monty were seen playing with balls while Ramesh has a stuffed toy, a lady bird, a teddy bear and a doll. Sohail had a bag full of toys including toys like bat, football, a number of different size cars, plastic wickets, racket, Hanuman's *gadda* and a plastic box with several toys, small, plastic models and a string with beads. Paras on the other hand, belonging to an upper class family made a heap of his toys in the living room of the house. The pile included plastic cars, a plastic helicopter, board games, number games, balls, stickers, a wooden basket and several puzzles. He was seen playing with flash cards with animal pictures and also possessed a cycle.

Every house, irrespective of the locality and socio-economic status had photographs and idols of gods. These were mostly in the form of pictures hung on the walls. Kapil's house had a wooden cabinet for deities decorated with red cloth while Monty's house had a poster of goddess *Laxmi* and *Ganesha* on the wall. Shanta's house had a photograph, perhaps a card of *Krishna*.

3.3.6. Delhi.

These homes were located in a college campus (with one exception, Sohan) where one or other of the family members worked. They had two bedrooms and a kitchen attached to one of the rooms. Grandparents were present in most homes. These rather small houses had a common area outside which was guarded by the college wall. In Sohan's home (not located on campus) outside the house, was a *gully*. The front door was not locked in any of these homes and children came in and out of the door all the time. Sohan stayed in an independent house where the grandparents lived on the ground floor and an uncle and aunt on the second floor. Both the children (Sohan and his brother) and the grandparents moved between the floors of the house freely and the doors were kept open. The main gate, however, was always closed.

In the institutional campus, children explored the outdoors freely. Mahi and Monal were seen running around outside; playing with the material lying around. Mahi played with a chair, scooter and ball, whereas, Monal moved around in a group. Mahi and Anil roamed the outdoors and played with what they found lying around. In Anil and Kanti's homes that are next door to each other, outdoor spaces were not interrupted by adults, only children of various age groups from the neighbourhood played around. In this community, everyone knew everyone else, and children felt safe to move about, sometimes even entering another person's house. In the homes of Mahi and Monal who lived next to each other, outdoor spaces were found to be used by adults. Women chatting or doing household chores could also be seen. There were some dogs in these areas, and children did not fear them. Outdoors, children were always seen moving in groups, except for one instance in Mahi's observation where she was playing with her tricycle alone, and later on with one other child. Some children (Anil, Arshi, Kanti) spent most of the day indoors where they played games on computer, studied or were seen playing with objects in the house. From Kanti's observation, it was evident that he was confident and even cheeky with other adults in the family. Kanti used to spend his day at the college campus at his grandmother's home although his parents' home was outside the campus, his mother worked there and brought him home after his preschool day and kept him with his maternal grandmother till her day was over at the Computer Centre of the college. After that they both travelled home by the metro rail.

Both Anil and Kanti had computers in their homes, and were found to be playing on them. TVs were found in all homes and were also a frequent pastime for children. All children had books and bags. Anil had several cars and Kanti played most of the time on the computer, Mahi played with a ball, Monal was seen with a number of dolls and teddy bears, and Sohan was not observed playing with any toys. Monal's dolls were pinned to the wall in the packaging out of reach for her. During the recording, Sohan's father brought home an attachment for a sink from the market. Sohan unpacked it and spent a lot of time asking the father what it is, then pretended it was a loudspeaker (its shape was a bit like one).

3.3.7. Sonapur.

These houses were all individual residences, each with a gate which was kept closed at all times. All households had at least two bedrooms, a separate kitchen, a bathroom, dining and drawing room. Atul and Yukti were living in a nuclear family setup. Ankita and Nita, Rahil,

Sonam, Mukta and Honey were living in joint families. The mother was found to be often present with children but her presence was not ubiquitous. Fathers were also observed in these settings, they were present, involved and interactive. Grandfathers and grandmothers were very involved in care of children or household chores in the homes of Sonam and Honey. In this group, children were not observed going to the park to play (except Nita and Rahil). Also, play with other children was also not seen to be happening during the observations except if they were siblings or cousins living together.

Children's activities were found to be generally happening indoors. Ankita and Atul spent a lot of time watching TV. They were also observed to be flipping through books and playing with toys along with TV viewing. Honey was seen to be using different materials in the house like a spanner and a screw driver for repairing a motorcycle that his father and grandfather had just finished working with, in the small backyard of their home. Honey also opened the main gate with some skill and tried to slip out, but the father saw him and ran after him. Nita and Rahil were observed looking at an image of a peacock in the home computer with a group of several children gathered around them. These two children lived on different floors of the same house and spent a lot of time together. There was one scene where they were taken outdoors to play by Nita's father. Mukta spent a lot of time peering out from her terrace, looking out onto the street, sometimes addressing a friend in the neighbouring home, or chatting with herself about a pig who was roaming the street. There were several adults who came and talked with her as she was looking out, standing on a chair, sometimes even looking over a bit precariously at a toy she had dropped to the ground floor.

Thus, in this cluster children spent most of their time indoors, and much more time was spent with adults. These families did not seem to have as much play material as was found in other middle and upper class homes, the focus was clearly more on adult interactions, than on play with other children and play with toys.

3.3.8. Summary.

Finally, comparing the contexts in which children were observed, it could be concluded that, in village Mandipur, children occupied the courtyard as their space for play and interaction. The open courtyards connected people with others from the community and the space had permeable boundaries for the neighbours. Not only for the children but even the adults occupied

the courtyard as their 'living' area. The role of adults in the lives of children was limited to responding to the basic needs and children were fairly independent. In Shantipur, the apartments in the multi-storeyed building with well-furnished houses as the norm and children were found to be supplied with ample play material and space within the house for play. Rare outdoor videos showed children in the company of elders at all times but playing with high quality outdoor play equipment and using the swimming pool. In Nagar, the model of houses was a one bedroom flat located in lower income row housing. Here children were found occupying the rooms or narrow streets for play. Sometimes, children managed to find abandoned spaces or portions under construction and would play there. With limited play material and paucity of space, children were usually seen playing outdoors or on the slab outside their room. In Gandhipur there were restrictions regarding the free use of space and going outdoors, therefore the children's day was spent talking with the adults and engaging in activities with them. They were not free to roam the streets with other children, but if there were others in the building like cousins or other families within the same closed compound, then children would play with them. Children here as well, spent more time with adults, especially if they were single children. In Delhi, children had free access to the outside, they were seen going in groups outside the home and exploring the environment and playing with materials outside since the families were living in a college campus which had plenty of open space. In the Bhawani group, children were observed to have very few restrictions placed on them. Children played in the park freely, even in the dark. Although this too was a gated colony, the children were more free to move in and out of the house in comparison with Shantipur. Finally, in Sonapur, children were again observed mostly indoors, children usually engaged in conversations with the adults, they lived in independent houses usually with extended families staying on different floors of the house. Children freely went from one floor to another and interacted with all the adults and children, if they were available.

3.5. Conversations with children

Conversations with children were initiated to discover, in their own words, the worlds that children inhabit. Although many of the children were not forthcoming, some could not be spoken with, most of the children did engage with the researcher to a greater or lesser extent.

During data collection, children were spoken to about regarding their daily experiences, about activities and people at home, school and neighbourhood. The format of a flexible, active interview method was used to allow children to express themselves freely. As can be understood, children at this age varied greatly in their participation in the interview. Some spoke spontaneously and willingly with the researcher, without being prompted by anyone from the family, others were hesitant and unwilling to speak. The research was familiar to all the children since she had also visited these children a year ago for another research session. Although many of them said they did not remember her (when asked), some did mention that they remember someone talking about her visits. One of the most articulate and enthusiastic sessions was the interview with Sheena. She was also one of the children who not only remembered the research from the previous session, she was also able to accurately recall one of the activities they participated in. Some children remained marginally responsive on account of the fact that they were deeply absorbed in another activity. For instance, Ankita remained glued to the TV during the interview, and most of the time she was at home. Most of the answers were actually picked up by her younger brother. An interesting, rather performative stance was taken by Atul, who tended to stroke or cup his chin and tap his cheek, look upwards, uttering sounds like “mmmm” indicating his was dwelling on a question. For each question, he made a clear attempt to give thoughtful answer. For favourite colour, for instance, he first answers ‘all’, but then looks around in the room, thinks and adds “Pink”. Unlike some of the children who need to be engaged with effort, and then too, they do not feel compelled to answer when a question is posed to them, children like Atul, Asha and several others make a reasonable success of the conversation with a relative stranger. There was a clear difference in the responses of children in the rural and urban poor cluster, who remained shy and reticent in answering. This was also true of selected children in the urban upper middle income homes, although in this instance, it was really the child’s own temperament rather than a social hesitation with the researcher that seemed to obstruct a free conversation between the researcher and child in the rural and urban poor homes. The conversation with Bunty provides a contrast where he responds that he has learnt nothing from school and likes his friend’s teacher and not his own, another child standing at the door inserts information saying that “*Yeh school nahin jaata*”. Bunty had dropped out from school earlier that year on account of a punitive teacher. A similar encounter happens with Guna (rural) who keeps quiet during the questions about school, evidently assessing that the researcher would show

disapproval, and again, it was the children standing nearby (also in this case, one of them is in school) reports the dropping out to the researcher.

Chand is one of the quietest children in the study, which was also the case in the earlier phase. She does not respond to any question of the researcher. And when she asks if there is anything she likes, the mother responds in her place, that thing that you get in the “redhi”. Kaju instantly responds about 10 times: “Roll” about Chand’s liking rolls. Here again we have an example of someone else responding for the child. Garima is quick to answer, but frequently looks at the mother for social referencing before answering, especially to questions about school, her likes and dislikes. She is also forthcoming enough to take the researcher for a round of all her wall art, and even complains about the mother having rubbed of many of her sketches.

Gita is quite silent and does not respond to any question other than who had brought her the new dress and from where. To that she says “Papa”, “Mall”. A friend soon enters the scene and the two climb on the bed and the friend tells her to “*Naach, naach*”.

In Guna’s case, the conversation is typical of the social setting. The answers are directly given (in single word answers) by her friends around her. When the researcher confirms the answer from her about dropping out of school or enjoying play, Guna nods in acceptance. An example is seen here: When asked if she likes to study, Guna nods a no. All the while there is teasing and leg-pulling at the questions and attention to her. Other children, some carrying babies, listening to her. The minute they are asked to sing their faces light up and they sing a folk song in perfect harmony, Guna and Ruchi and others join in. Ruchi, Guna’s friend gives most of the answers for her, and is also still in school. Ruchi is part of this same group of children, and nods in the affirmative when asked if she is going to school. However, just as in Guna’s instance, when Ruchi herself is confronted with the questions, she goes silent, and many children around her prompt her saying “Batade” (Tell). This feature of the conversations is so characteristic of the self-effacing.

Honey refuses to participate in the interview, he is riding a scooter at the time the researcher comes up to him and also says no when the grandmother asks him to come down and sit inside. However, when the grandmother asks a second time, he gets off the scooter and goes in, washes his feet as per the instructions and shows them to the researcher saying “*Pair dho liye maine*” (See, I have washed them).

In Kaju's case, the mother starts off prompting the child to say to the researcher "*Bol Kaju, Ma'am mere ko acche se school main bharti kara do*" (Say, Kaju, Ma'am help me get admission in a good school). The child looks up at the researcher and sort of repeats the prompt saying "*Wahan jaante hain, wahan mujhe acche school main*" (There do you know, there in a good school). Here we see an instance of the adult prompting the child to ask the researcher for an introduction to a good school, hoping that the educated woman may help find a reasonable school for the child. This desire for good school is so intense among all the parents, irrespective of economic background. Another child prompts from the surrounding group that she doesn't go to school, she goes for tuition to a "Mausi" neighbour.

In his interview, Monty, a neighbour of Bunty also has a conversation about school where a girl answers that teachers spank children, but Monty clarifies that both the girl and Bunty actually go for tuitions and not to the school, indicating that how would she know.

Age trends are quite clear in the conversations, in addition to the patterns related to social setting, the four year olds are clearly restricted in the range of answers as well as questions, even though they may be enthusiastic about the conversations. Five year olds are far more conversational and forthcoming, even taking different perspectives and engaging in talk about the past as well as preferences and school activities.

Nena is an interactive child, and although among the youngest in the sample, she is delightfully interactive and expressive about her views and keeps the researcher engaged in a dialogue throughout the interview.

Omi is not too much into the interview, he is playful and responsive, but seems more involved in something else. Paras is able to stall the interview in between when he says "Ek minute" to the researcher and runs away.

Rahul and Pia both refuse to become engaged in the conversation, and prefer to continue playing. A few questions are answered by nodding, but that is it.

Sheena has the clearest speech of all the children, she engages in a full conversation and even goes to the extent of composing a verse about the researcher.

In Sohan's case, the older brother seems to pick up all the answers, and he repeats after him, and when he is silent, then he looks towards him for a prompt. The conversation remains guided by the older brother throughout. When the researcher asks the older brother to stop answering, to the next question, Sohan says "*Sochne do*" (Let me think). And after thinking and

saying again “*Sochne do*” he gives the same response about a teacher he likes as the brother had given. It seems that he can almost not think without the brother.

In Sonam’s interview, the mother provides some intervention, for instance, prompts like when asked if she likes a teacher the name comes up, but when she asks for a teacher whom she doesn’t like, Sonam’s mother repeats “*Kali hai na, Kali hai na?*” The child simply listens to this comment and doesn’t say anything. Later when the researcher asks her why she likes one teacher, Sonam simply gets up and says she is going to get a spoon for herself, totally avoiding the question.

3.5.1. Children’s responses about school, teachers and friends at school

Most children are quite able to answer the name of the school in which they are enrolled as well as details like the class, teacher’s name and names of friends. Some of the children thought a bit before naming the teacher and friends, whereas some were prompted by an older sibling or family member. Unfortunately some of the children (one in the rural and two among the urban poor) were not going to school. Although the urban poor families still sent children for some sort of private tuition, Guna (as her neighbour and friend pointed out) had chosen to drop out from school. Other children were also offering explanations about the teacher being punitive. Guna, who was seen to be an enthusiastic participant in reading during the visit when she was a year younger remained silent on the issue of why she had quite going to school.

Children were easily able to provide names of friends at school and even offer details about where they lived. For instance, Asha says promptly about a friend “*Woh Vasundhara main hi to reheti hai*” (She lives in Vasundhara only, quickly providing a location detail to identify a friend).

Regarding subjects also, most children were able to elaborate on the subjects they read at school. For instance, Asha recals off the names of English, Math, EVS, Art, Computers and PT in class 1 in which she is placed. After replying to the question about what he does at school with “*Kaam*” (work), Atul was able to list English, Hindi and Drawing as the three ‘subjects’ he has at school. When asked what he learnt in Hindi, he listed a couple of vowels and their variations, and for English he stroked the bed and indicates shapes saying “*Pehele A, phir B*”. Then thought and added a half circle saying “*C*”. “*Aur chhoti c*” the researcher asks. He instantly traces a smaller half-circle on the bed. Then continued to trace a b and then d, speaking aloud “*Aise banti*

hai, phi raise". The wall behind the bed is full of pencil strokes, indicating that Atul is very fond of sketching out his thoughts. "And what do you do, in drawing?" the researcher asks him. Again, Atul strokes his chin in a precocious manner and says, after some thought "Drawing *main* colouring *karte hain*".

Of experiences at school, the children are also able to articulate unpleasant experiences. For instance, Asha says that she doesn't returning by the school bus because when she attempts to sit towards the back of the bus, older children tell her to "*Niklo*".

When Ankita is asked which school she goes to, she answers the complete name of the school, and when asked what she does in school, she responds with "*Wahan parkbhi hai*" (There is a park there) and answers "*Jhoole*" (Swings) when asked what she does in the park. To the question of which teacher she liked, Ankita remained firmly glued to the Bheem show she was watching.

Bunty lived in a small room in an urban poor settlement, with a community toilet and no running water. The single room served as a multifunctional space and children spent a lot of time outside the room. He seemed rather tense during the conversation but responded quickly that he studies in a "*Sarkari* school" where he does "*Padhayi*". He has a distinct lisp where the word "*Sarkari*" comes out as "*Chhalkali*" and so on. When asked which teacher he likes, he responds quickly that he likes his friend Monty's teacher and not his own. When asked why, he says about his own "*Maarti hain*". In between the two answers, the other children leaning at the door of the room kept calling Bunty away to play. This constant distraction added to the hesitation since Bunty was repeatedly focused on the group of enthusiastic friends. He ran out and then returned when the researcher called out to him and asked "What have you learnt at school" to which he quickly responds "*Kuchh nahin*". Recite something for me, she asks and he responded by say "*Kuchh nahin aata*". When the researcher asks him about whether he has heard of "*Aa se anaar*", another child prompts from the door saying "*Yeh school nahin jaata*". To this Bunty responds quickly saying "*Tuchhan jaata hoon main*" (I go for tuitions), indicating that he may have dropped out of school, but still studies. Children have a clear message across all sections visited during this study, that school is essential, and that going to school will find instant approval, and dropping out is something bad, and they tend to hide the fact when it happens. This is an important finding, and I think one that we, as educators, need to consider very seriously, especially in light of the Right to Education Act, that doesn't seem to have filtered through the

system to the child. It was clearly found that school was something which children had to endure, even under unfavourable conditions.

When asked about school, Chetan has a quick response saying he does go to school, and when he asks which teacher he likes, he gives a name, but adds "*Main ab doosri class main ho gaya hoon*" when asked why he likes her. After moving between names and also repeating the first name he gave, Chetan also adds that he likes all teachers, with a clause that "*Jo Ma'am mujhe acchi nahin lagti wo maine dekhi nahin hai. Uska naam nahin pata*" (The teacher that I do not like, I haven't yet seen. I don't know her name). This answer has an interesting implication for the rather prescient knowledge of an epistemological accomplishment that seems quite advanced for his age; that of realizing a limited perception or knowledge. He also responds that he likes to go to school where he likes "white-blue" (not clear what he means here). He adds that in school we do homework and colouring, and don't go anywhere else.

When Garima is asked about going to school, she responds by quickly looking at the mother for approval. The mother for her part asks Garima which school she goes to. "Haan" replies Garima to the researcher, choosing for the moment, to pass the mother's question. Then to the researcher's questions, she answers correctly, the name of her school and class she is in "Prep B". She likes "*Koi bhi*" (Any) and then says "*Sabhi*" (All) teachers, she says, when asked again. "Any one"? The researcher asks and she says "Principal Ma'am" and adds her name as well. To the question why do you like her she explains that "*Kyonki wo daantti nahin hain*" (Because she doesn't scold). Then when she is asked, which teachers she doesn't like, she reverses her earlier statement thus. "*Sabhi acchi nahin lagti, bas XX Ma'am aur Principal Ma'am acchi lagti hain*" (Don't like all, just like X Ma'am and Principal Ma'am). When asked again if she likes only two people, she quickly responds "*Do nahin, teen*". Then picking at her fingers counting she says "*Meri class main do Ma'am, aur Principal Ma'am*"

Guni responds with "Primary school" when she is asked what school she goes to. Again when she is asked the name, she says "Modern Public School". Regarding the question about her favourite teacher, she quickly responds with a name and the reason "*Kyoonki wo mujhe pehele bhi pyar karti thi aur abh bhi pyar karti hai*" (Because she used to love me earlier and she still loves me). Further, when asked if there is any teacher she doesn't like in school, she hesitates and then self-consciously responds with a name with the reason that she (the teacher) "*Daatti reheti hain*" (Keeps scolding).

Guna keeps quiet and looks down rather sheepishly, perhaps with some guilt about having dropped out and not wanting to speak it aloud for fear of censure. It was the children around her who report to the researcher that she has dropped out and offer an explanation saying that the teacher hits. Why does the teacher hit, the researcher asks the children, and they say she hits with a stick if you don't do your work. That is why Guna has got her name "*katvaliya*" (cancelled). Guna confirms this with a nod when the researcher asks her. Ruchi, who is part of this group becomes rather tongue-tied when her turn comes. When asked if she goes to school she nods in affirmative. "*KG main*", she answers when the researcher asks her which class she is in. And when she is asked what she studies in school, she responds with "*Ek do teen*", all children around join in, including Guna who has dropped out of school, but whereas the others stop along the way, Ruchi goes up to 24! About teachers, she says she likes one Ma'am but "*Badi Ma'am*" (Principal) she does not like because she hits children with a stick. Every day and without reason, Ruchi says when asked why.

Honey is asked if he likes school and instantly, he looks up from assembling the toys and says with a smack of his lips "*Haan*" (yes). He has recently changed schools, so the researcher asks him if he likes the old school or new one. "*Naya*" (New) is the prompt response. The researcher now makes him sit and talk about what he has learnt in school to which he responds "Drawing", and what else? And he answers: "*Aurr.... (thinking).... aur... .. maths*". "What have you learnt in Maths, the researcher asks, he answers: "Counting maths", and what else, she asks and he respond again, "Counting maths", and nods an affirmative when she asks if he can count. "*Kaise karte ho aap?*" (How do you count?), the research persists and he responds: He says "*Bahut achhi si*" (Very nicely). When asked to say it out loud, he starts from 1 to 10 and then says "one one eleven" etc. skipping a few numbers in between and repeating some. After "one eight 18", he goes straight to "three zero thirty", sticks out his tongue and says "*Aisehi*" (Like this only). "Very good", the researcher says. About teacher preference, he gives the name without hesitation. Why he likes her is "*Aisehi, bina baat ke*" (Just like that, for no reason), and then adds "*Two maam hain*" (There are two teachers) and gives their names but still says the first one is the best. The researcher persists to ask why he thinks she is better and again he answers "*Aisehi*". (Just like that), and yet again says no, when she repeats the question. The researcher is trying pin him down to a reason for the preference and he answers, rather

humorously, repeating her first phrase “Tell me baby *nahin hai*; *Thodi si* tell me *bhi hain*” he says nodding wisely at his rather incomprehensible answer that he has drawn from her statement.

Mini easily answers about school and her class, even the section, when asked. She leaves the questions about teacher preference unanswered and simply looks down or nods her head. After much repeating she says she likes to play. She does mention a teacher she likes and also says that in school, she studies “*Padhte hain*”. Mini’s interview is short.

Minu promptly answers questions related to school with the name of the school, and is able to name her class (Nursery) as well as her favourite teacher. Since there is no exact translation of favourite teacher, the question, when asked in Hindi is which teacher do you like! Minu says she likes this as well as other teachers. The reason for like one the best is “*Kyonki wo mujhe eclairs deti hain*” (because she gives me eclairs). From her answers, it is clear that Minu enjoys going to school and playing. She clearly mentions going to school as something she likes doing. When asked what she does there, she mentions “1 2 3 4 *likhti hoon main*” (I write 1 2 3 4).

Monty, who is Bunty’s neighbour, says he studies in “Sarkari school” and also has a lisp (Chhalkali is how it comes out). When he is asked about whether he likes school, although he says yes, he starts talking about how Bunty also hits him. The researcher brings him back to the school discussion and asks him which teacher he likes and he says “Bali Madam” (Badi or big indicating the Principal, perhaps), but says he doesn’t know her name, when he is asked. When the researcher asks if he is scared or punished at school, he repeatedly says no, but a girls standing nearby says “*Marti hain*” (Hits). But Monty is clear that there is no hitting, and then points out that the girl and Bunty, both got for private tuition and not to the school. When the researcher asks what he does in school, he mentions writing numbers and Hindi alphabets and specifically *matras* (vowels). He recites some: “*Ae se anar, ae se imli, chhota u se ullu, bada u se oon, ae se aenak, a se xxx, says ka, ga....*”(reciting vowels and words, some names not clear). When he goes too fast, the mother asks him to slow down and speak clearly. There are some comments from children sitting behind him, but he continues, with partial clarity. Although he is quite distracted with all the other children chattering around him, he completes a – z with only one error, when he is asked what else he learns at school.

Mukta answers questions about which school she goes to and which class she is in, and is easily able to identify the name of a teacher whom she likes. About why she likes her, she is

unable to answer, looks here and there and also appears self-conscious. Also, when asked who she doesn't like in school, she is clear in refusing that, saying "*Koi bhi nahin*" (No one).

Nena is sketching on the wall that is full of her drawings when the researcher asks about her school. She gives the name of the school and continues to draw. She adds that she likes her school as well as her teacher. A bit later as she is sketching, she changes her stance about school and says "*Mujhe school bilkul accha nahin lagta*" when asked the reason she says "*“Play area bhi bilkul, bilkul nahin hai”*" "*Play area to cross kar diya*".

Omi instantly responds that he doesn't like school and although he does not mention which teacher he likes or does not like, he explains "*Kyonki woh mujhe colouring karne ke liye rokti nahin hai*" (because she doesn't stop me from colouring). The mother repeats all the questions to Omi and sometimes also his answers.

When Pawan is asked what he does at school, he responds "*Kaam*" (Work). What work, he is asked, and he responds by saying he doesn't know. He is able to identify a teacher he likes with a name, and says he likes her "*Kyonki woh homework deti hain*" (Because she gives homework). Why he doesn't like another teacher that he names, he says that is because "*Woh marti hain*" (Because she spansks). The clear absence of understanding about the reasons for spanking again emerges in this conversation about the teacher whom he does not like. After naming the teacher, he says, about why she spansks (*Thhappad* or slap) "*Kyoonki main shrarte nahin karta*" (Because I am not naughty) when the researcher asks for a clarification, he repeats the sentence, and then adds "*Main ganda homework karta hoon to*" (because I do bad homework). He recites from 1 – 10 and then 20 (misses 21) when the researcher asks him, and runs to the mother and hugs her when she enters through the door.

Paras gives the name of the school and his class (KG) when asked. He gives the name of the teacher he likes and then adds, on his own, there is another one, and gives her name as well. When asked why he likes them he simply says because he likes them. But Why, the researcher asks. "*Lagti hain to lagti hain, bas*" (I like them, like them, this is all). He does not declare the name of a teacher he doesn't like, saying he doesn't know. When asked what he does in school, he says: "*Padhai*" (Study). And what else? And he answers "Colouring" but says he doesn't know when asked what he colours.

Rita names her school and class eagerly and says she likes going to school when she is asked and lists several things Padhai, drawing, reading as things she enjoys at school. In fact, she

goes on to say “*Sabh kuch pasand hai*” (I like everything). When she is asked which subject she likes, Rita says she liked “Annual Day” “*Mujhe wahan pe dance karna accha lagta hai*” (I like to dance there, she says, smiling and throwing her head back. In response to a question about which dance she performed, she says “*Aaj wala to dance main bhool gayi. Doosra dance dikha sakti hoon main*” (I have forgotten today’s dance, but I can teach you another one). Rita says she likes one particular teacher because “*Wo hamara khayal rakhti hain*” (she takes care of us), but is unable to give the reason for disliking a teacher whom she names, saying “*Yeh mujhe nahin pata*” (This I don’t know).

Sarita is able to identify a teacher and an assistant teacher whom she likes because “*Wo mujhe pyar kari hain*” (She loves me). She has two best friends in school and says when one of them doesn’t come, she also doesn’t go to school. She says she has learnt “*Bada B aur chhota b*” (Big B and small b). Why she likes going to school is because her friends come. And what do you do there, she is asked, “*Padhayi*” (Study). “*Project bhi hota hai*”, (There are projects also) “*Jaise balloon banao*” (Like making balloons) and “*Padhayi hoti hai Chota b aur bada B*”. (And studies are like small b and big b).

Shanta gives clearly the name of her school and class. She says she studies “*Abcd*” and thinks and adds “*Aur Hindi bhi padhti hoon; Ae se anaar*” (And I also study Hindi; A for *anaar*). She names a teacher whom she likes, and after the question is repeated three times, she responds “*Acchi lagti hai, marti nahin hai*” (I like her, she does not spank). She does not respond to the question of which teacher she doesn’t like, and then says that she does “*Kaam, English ka kaam*” in school. She doesn’t like Math she says but “*Hindi ka kaam bhi accha lagta hai*”. She looks longingly at the children around and wants to run away to play.

Sheena is happy at school, she says she likes her class teacher, just likes her, but there is no teacher whom she does not like. Sheena tells the researcher that her handwriting is very good and that she gets stars in everything and has also received a certificate for her work. The mother then prompts the researcher to give a word to Sheena and see her capacity to form sentences. The researcher says Camera, and Sheena rattles off about 10 sentences with camera. She then makes a verse on the researcher and does it with actions and makes up a full song. Something like, the researcher came, used to teach her and then she went away and then she came again. She also has specs, I also have specs, she does recordings and also came to my school! She picks up a book (Panchatantra) and reads fluently from that. When one of the books falls, she touches it to her

forehead. The researcher asks why she did that action and Sheena says “*Sab cheezon main god hota hai na, isi liye touch karna padta hai*” (Because there is god in everything, we have to do it). She says that her cousin taught her this.

Sohan is intensely connected to his older brother in the conversations, and asks for time to think when the researcher requests the brother to let Sohan answer. He is able to give the name of a teacher whom he likes (same as what the brother had says). Why do you like her, the researcher asks and he says “*Wo padhati hai, nahin wo park main lejati hai*” (She teaches me, no she takes me to the park). And is there a teacher you don’t like? The researcher asks him. He is quick to come up with a name and a reason “*Kyonki wo roz mujhe daantti hai*” (Because she keeps scolding). What does she say to you, the researcher asks. “*Unse mujhe dar lagta hai*” (I feel scared of her) Sohan says. “*Wo bahut...wo rakshas ki tare hain*” (She is....she’s like a demon). Why do you say that, the researcher asks. “*Kyonki unse dar lagta hai*” (because I am scared of her, he says. What does she say to you “*Daanti hai wo*” (Scolds me). And do you know why she scolds you, the researcher asks? “*Pata nahin*”, Sohan says in response. Then adds “*Bacche kehete hain, yeh mujhe mar rha hai, wo mujhe mar rha hai*” (The children keep complaining, this one is hitting me, that one is hitting me). He is able to say that he studies “abcd” in school. When asked what more, he adds “gf”.

Sunny responds with “*Aaj chhuti thhi*” when the researcher asks him if he goes to school. Otherwise, she says. When asks if he likes going to school, he first answers a Yes and then quickly corrects himself and says No. What do you like doing? The researcher asks, “*Jhoola*”, he says. He doesn’t like any teacher in school he says because they keep scolding all the time “*Ek merefriend ko, ek mere ko. Padhaiyi karvati hai. To hum kabhi bhi paas nahin bethte hain. Wo us time idhar baitha hua thha, main udhar baitha hua thha. Aur phir hum, aise bhi baaten kar rhe thhe paas ja ke. Aur Maam hume bolti hain ‘Sit down’ Main baith jata hoon bhag ke*”. (one my friend, and one I, she keeps making us study and that is why we don’t sit next to each other. When we sit here and there, and then we talk and then she scolds us and then I run and sit down). He says he studies Hindi, Math and English and likes doing computers, but doesn’t like either of his teachers.

Sonam tends to avoid answering some of the question sometimes, or else tends to travel to other answers. For instance, when she is asked about what she studies in school, she adds to her “counting”, that she likes eating choccos. What do you like doing at school and she responds

with a nod and then a clear nod affirmative when the question is repeated. Also adds “*Jab Ma’am ne colouring karvayi thhi*” (When Ma’am made them do colouring).

Tanvi, Which class “Fishth” she says. How old are you “Six” Tanvi says. What all do you study. “Math English grammar, Computer, aur.....(scratches her head) Hindi, Hindi vyakaran” Then nods and twists her hand indicating this is all. So many things, R says, and what do you enjoy doing? “Khelna” She says. What play? “Khilone se” she answers, a bit self conscious in the ways she is responding, some facial movements and hands twisting. Favourite teacher, thinks a bit and says “Vinita”. R confirms and she nods a yes. Why do you like her. “Kyonki who hame maarti nahin hai”. And who is the gandi Maam. C says “Kyonki who marti hai” How does she hit? R asks. “Danda she” C says. Why does she hit? “Nahin maloom” C answers. R asks again. Again same answer. Does she have a think or thin stick, “Patala” C says. Does she spank some or all? R asks. “Sab” C answers with a smile. Asks C is she has been hit first she nods a no and then when asked again, she nods a yes, to yes once.

To the question about whether she goes to school, Gita says “*Haaaaan*” (Yes) as if it is a silly question to ask, and has an obvious answer. She gives the name of the school with the same prosody, and also the names of the liked teachers. She likes one teacher because “*Wo jhoola jhulati hai*” (Helps me swing). Do you like to study? She nids a yes with HmMMM and then R asks what she studies. Sounds like “Plus one...plus one....” Not clear. R asks “Abcd bhi aata hai.....aur kya” she nids and says hMMMM to this.

Yukti gives the name of her school and class promptly, then adds that she is going to soon move to Prep 3. Do you like going to school early morning? Do you cry? C nods yes to the first no to the second. She nods firmly and says “Main kabhi nahi roti school jate”. Which teacher do you like. “Nisha maam” comes the prompt response. Why? R asks. “Sunita maam dantti hain” Aur Nisha maam, R asks? “Nisha maam padhayi karvati hain”. And Sunita maam” R asks. “Sunita maam?” C asks....”hmmm” R says. “Dantti hai” C responds. Which maam don’t you like? R asks. “acchhi nahin lagti?” R says hmm, C says “Sunita Maam”. R clarifies, “Marti bhi hain”? C says “Marti nahin hain” nods each time. What do you do in school “Padhai” C answers “lunch time, fruits time”, nodding happily. R repeats her answer to confirm. What padhai? R asks. “Hum, maam kabhi yeh karati hain, kabhi who karati hain. Koisi bhi book main, Koi copy main”. What do you like the most? R asks “Mujhe banana achha lagta hai da damru wala” R repeats. R asks what do you like in food. “Khane main? Bharta” she responds. What do

you like doing? “Karna? Colouring” she nods. R repeats to confirm and then asks what do you like to colour, and C says “Sab cheezon main”.

3.5.2. Likes and dislikes

One of the questions related to what children liked and what they did not. This was done to estimate whether they could identify their own choices as independent and optional, selected from several others. Again, the responses to this question were quite varied. Whereas some children like Abhit were tongue tied, and when the question was repeated, he simply denied using a sideways head-nod. Others were much clearer about their choices, for instance, Asha quickly responds that she likes “Pizza”, and the colour “Pink”, and doesn’t like riding in the school bus since other children push her out of the back of the bus where she likes to sit!

Ankur has a long discussion about likes and dislikes with the researcher. When she asks him which teacher he likes, he gives her full name and adds that he likes her because she gives toffees. “Would you still like her if she didn’t give toffees” he is asked by the researcher to which he responds “No”. When asked which teacher he does not like, he evades the answer quite subtly saying that there are many teachers in the school, but is instantly transformed into a smile when asked if he likes to play. This was asked to ensure that Ankur was listening to the researcher. Other preferences he is not able to articulate, simply saying “*Pata nahin*” (Don’t know). In his typical, thoughtful manner, Atul says he likes doing “*Kaam*” when asked what he likes. When asked what he likes to eat, Atul has a rather unusual answer. He says he likes to eat “*Chawalke saath sauce sab se accha lagta hai*” and when the researcher asks about vegetables, he responds that he will start eating them in class 1. “*Maine to Mummyko bola thha*” he adds when asked who told him this. “Why”? He is asked, and says that he doesn’t like them (vegetables) and looks askance at the mother. When he is asked what he likes to do with his friend, he responds “Hum pitai karte hain”, although does not explain what he means by that when asked. He has a clear and quick response to who his best friend is “Angel” he responds.

When asked what he likes, Bunt, somewhat distracted by his playmates, says simply “*Daal aur bhaat*”, and runs away to play.

Chetan, who had an interesting response about the teacher that he liked, saying that he has not yet met the teacher that he does not (like) states his preferences very clearly when asked what he likes “*Mujhe khelna accha lagta hai aur cartoon deekha achha lagta hai*”. When

Chetan is asked who his best friend is, he says “Naman, *jo neechhe nahin kada thha?*” Whom I just met, the researcher clarifies, and he responds with a yes. Chetan clearly has a reasonable clear understanding of perspectives here.

Garima is very articulate about her preferences, and also provides clarifications, corrections and details. When the researcher asks her what she likes doing she says “*Mujhe khelna, homework karna aur koodna*” (I like to play, do homework and jump). Knowing that she also goes for dance classes, the researcher asks if she likes dance “Dance class *nahin* Kathak class *aur* drawing class” (Not dance class, Kathak and drawing class). When she is asked if she likes doing Kathak, she says “*Pasand hai*” also nods. And drawing? “*Woh bhi pasand hai*” (That also I like). Then she is asked “*Aap ki bestfriend kaun hai*” (Who is your best friend?), she says “*Main apne school main se bataoongi*” (I will tell you from my school) playing with her straps and thinking, “*Ek hai Desha....aur ek hai Shana, baju main he hai*” (One is Deesha and one is Shana, she lives next door) pointing to the window. “Why do you like Disha”, the researcher asks her to which she responds thus, “*Kyoon ki wo, mere liye kuchh, jaise presents, kuch kuchh laati reheti hai*” (Because she brings me presents and things). Do you also take presents for her, the researcher asks, and Garima replies instantly: “*Main nahin le ke jaati, Mama nahin deti*” (I don’t take any; Mama doesn’t give me), she says pointing to the mother, smiling and looking at her. Sheena, another subject in the study is also in the same room (they are neighbours and good friends) and the mother and researcher both ask Garima about friends in the neighbourhood and she instantly responds “Sheena”. But what about Sheena, who Garima had mentioned earlier and she (Garima) says, “*Lekin woh maarti bahut hai*” (But she hit a lot).

When Guni is asked whether she likes something, she responds with an affirmative. “*Sona*” (Sleeping) is her response to what it is that she does like. The mother supports that with a comment saying she only wakes up at 9 am. Guni is also able to identify a “best friend” in her neighbourhood, as well as two others whom she likes best at school.

Just like the rest of her interview, Guna’s preferences are also responded to by the bunch of friends around her. Responding to what she likes doing, one of the children say “*Khelna*”. When Ruchi, part of the same group of children is asked what she likes doing, she says “*Padhayi*” (Studying) and “*Khelna*”?the researcher asks, and Ruchi responds “*Khelna bandh*” (Play stopped). When asked again what she likes to play she responds with “*Pitthu*” and “*Pala*” games that children play in the street.

The researcher hears about Kaju that she really enjoys spending time with her Mosi (Mother's sister) who lives in a room upstairs. She is asked where she prefers to stay, and the prompt answer is "*Upar bhi accha lagta hai, aur neeche bhi accha lagta hai*" (I like upstairs also and downstairs also). She also says she likes to eat "*Chiji*", like what, the researcher asks "Chocolate" she answers. Kaju is also asked if she would like to go to school, and she does not respond to that. Regarding children, she mentions her younger sister and says she likes "Kuku" and also takes care of her, "Akele rakhti hun" (Keep her alone). And what other work do you do, the researcher asks. At this point she promptly answers "*Bartan saaf*" (Washing dishes) and is then distracted by the other children around. A bit later also adds "*Bistar saaf, baksa saaf*". (Clean the bed, clean the box).

Minu answers her preferences in single words, she says she likes to eat "Roti", and "Cake" the colour "Pink", likes to watch cartoons, particularly "Bheem" and "Doremon" when she is asked which ones she likes.

The answers to preferences are seriously limited for children from poorer homes, as would be expected. Monty says he likes *Bhindi* and likes to study and play as well. Soon after, the other children around him are far too much of a distraction and he runs away to be with them.

Mukta is asked about teachers and she says she likes all, but when she is asked what she likes to eat, she thinks, looks around and then says: "*Mummy ki koi bhi cheez acchi nahin lagti, main kya baton*". Quite amused, the researcher persists in this line of questioning and asks, then whose do you like. Mukta says "Didi ki" (Didi's), and when asked to clarify which didi, she says "*Upar reheti hain woh*" (The one who lives upstairs). And what do you like that she makes, the researcher asks Mukta. "Roti" she starts with and then says "Sari cheez" (Everything). When Mukta is asked what colour she likes, she looks around, points to the wall and says, this one. The researcher then takes an unusual jump and asks what she would like to become when she grows up, and Mukta looks down, a little bit self-conscious and then answers completely unrelated "Aapko bataoon aaj school main kya hua thha?" (Should I tell you what happened at school today) and she adds "Santa Claus"

When Nena is asked what she likes, she responds confidently "TV, *mujhe bahut pasand hai*" (I really like it) and adds the names of several programmes, Bheem, Doremon, Tom and Jerry and adding again "*Main bahut TV dekhti hoon, raat ko bhi*" (I watch a lot of TV at night also). Regarding who is her best friend, Nena names her quickly and corrects the researcher who

pronounces the name slightly differently (Ashvi nahin Yashvi) and then asks the researcher “*Aap mile ho meri best friend se?*” Have you met my best friend). Regarding her favourite people, Nena answers that she doesn’t like her father because he doesn’t let her watch TV, “*Humesha apna lagate hain*” (Always puts his own [TV channel]), all the while running around, skipping and sketching, singing a song. The mother laughs when she says this. What would you like to be when you grow up, the researcher asks Nena. “*Kuchh bhi*” (Anything), and then elaborates, Doctor, pilot and then adds “*Ya phir taxi wale bhaiya*” (or else a taxi driver). Can you become a taxi driver? The researcher asks (Taxi wale bhaiya) and she responds by saying “*Haan ban sakti hoon, mere baal ladke jaise hain*” she adds, ruffling her own short cropped hair. What does a pilot do, the researcher asks her and she responds “*Plane chalata hai*” and waves her hands around like a plane.

Regarding what he likes doing, Omi mentions colouring. But he doesn’t like his Hindi teacher, he says. But that is also the teacher you said you like, the researcher questions him. Then he gives another name and starts running around. The mother explains that the teacher has complained to her as well that Omi is into gadgets too early and maybe that is why he doesn’t like her.

Pawan is asked what he likes doing and he responds “*Khelna*” and what about school, he is asked, does he like going to school and he responds in the affirmative, but backs it up with a rather typical answer for this stage of thinking “*Kyonki Ma’am bolti hain*” (Because Ma’am says so). Pawan says he does not like “*Kaam karna nahi pasand hai*” What work, the researcher asks. “*English ka, Hindi ka*”. Because, “*Kyoonki mere ko homework bilkul ganda lagta hai*”. “*Mere ko math ka pasand hai*” rubbing his eyes. And says that in Hindi, he studies “*Aa se anaar*”. When asked what he likes to eat, he thinks and says “*roti*” “*Khata hoon*”, and “*Maggi*” to other foods he likes. What do you like the most, he says “*Car*” and what about food, the researcher repeats her question, and he replies a simple “*Lunch*”.

Paras says he likes to play and also likes to do his homework. Regarding her favourite colour, Righima lists “*Red, blue, aur pink, purple aur saath main orange*”. She says she likes playing, but, the researcher says to her, she isn’t playing with the toys she (the researcher) has brought for her to play with. “*Abhi mera man nahin hai na, isliye*” (I don’t feel like right now, that is why). She says she likes to eat “*Paneer*” and “*Rajmah*”.

When she is asked what colours she likes, Sarita says she likes “Butterflies”. Shanta says she likes “Aaloo, Aaloo ki sabzi” and the colour “Pink” when she is asked.

Sohan has an elaborate response when he is asked what he likes: “*Mujhe gand karna pasand hai, toys khelna pasand hai. Aur xxx pe koodna pasand hai, aur toys se khelna pasand hai, aur football khelna pasand hai* (moves his foot alongside) *aur football* (again moves foot) *aur chashma pehenna, aisa...* (then moves foot again) *.....aise khelna bhi accha hota hai, aur fold his hands karna accha lagta hai* (and makes a Krishna pose) *aise bhi karna acchha lagta hai. Govinda banna accha lagta hai. Aur aunty ko dikhana bhi accha lagta hai*”. (I like making a mess, playing football, jumping, I like playing and folding my hands, and I like doing this and that and I like becoming Govinda and I like showing Aunty). What don’t you like doing, the researcher asks, and he says something about I can’t dance like this and like that. The researcher repeats the question, and this time he starts off “*Exercise karna nahin accha lagta. Aur baithna bhi accha nahin lagta* (squats in demonstration). *Kahne main kya accha lagta hai “Barfi acchi lagti hai, alloo matar accha lagta hai. Aur.....icecream acchi lagti hai aur.....”*. The brother prompts him by saying “*Kulfi*” and he adds “*Kulfi*”. (I like exercise, I like to sit, I like sweets, potato peas curry, ice cream, and *Kulfi*).

Sunny is playing with his dog and the researcher asks what he likes to do, he says “Secret *hai*” (it’s a secret). When asks what he likes doing, he says “Jhoola” and also likes watching TV, he says. Golden, silver and orange. When asked what he likes to eat, twice he says nothing, but then says “*Bus burger, maggi aur pizza*”. (Only burger, maggi and pizza). The researcher starts to ask the next question when suddenly he jumps up while watching TV and says “*Aur ice cream*” (And ice cream, he likes).

Sonam says she likes to eat Aloo and also Rajmah Chawal. Made by the mother or grandmother, the researcher asks, and she responds mother!

When asked what you like doing, Gita answers with “*Khelna, Ball se*”. (Play, with the ball).

Yuktiis asked about her best friend, and interestingly, she repeats the question to confirm whether she has heard correctly. The reason she gives for linking this friend is “*Wo mujhe kuchh nahin kehti aur isliye wo mujhe acchi lagti hai aur main bhi use acchi lagti hoon, aur wo meri friend ban gayi*”. When asked what she doesn’t like, Yuti says bluntly that she doesn’t like doing “this”, “*Nahin pasand.....?*” she thinks and then puts her head down and says

“Mujhe yeh karna nahin pasand hai”. When Yukti is asked what colours she likes, she shows a preference for shiny ones. “Colour???Pink and purple.*Aur ek light colour. Jo chamakta hai*” What do you like about your mother? “Mummy ki?*Mummy ki gusse wali*”.*Pyar wali*? Nice ones, the researcher says. “*Sari baat pasand hai.Mama ke kapde, main mumma ko keheto hoon ki acche kapde peheno, who pehente nahin hoon*”.

3.5.3. Perspective taking

In many of the conversations, it was found that children were quite immersed in their own perspectives, which is quite typical of this age. For instance, when Ankur was asked which class he is in, he responded “*Woh waali class main*” (In that class). Quite unable to estimate that the other person would not know what he was referring to. Chetan has a clear articulation of perspective taking in his answers, about school, about friends and also about his preferences. He is able to identify things that he knows about as well as things that the researcher would know, for instance he says that my best friend, was the one that the researcher had just met downstairs. He emerged at being very keen on perspective taking.

An interesting intermediate discussion about the chair and its size relative to herself takes place with Guni. When first asked whether she can sit on the small chair, she immediately says “no”, but answers with the somewhat unclear “*Chhoti chair hai*” (Small is the chair). When asked which is bigger, she responds, this time clearer “*Chair chhoti hai*”. A clear difficulty with scale errors and perspective-taking takes place with the answer to the question about whether her younger brother can sit in the chair, and she says (twice) that he can.

Honey initially refuses the researcher when she asks him to come inside the house for a conversation, but when the grandmother asks a second time he gets off and comes in. He shows and tells the researcher that he has washed his feet even though she was right there. Also, when the researcher remarks that the grandfather is sleeping (in the living room), Honey says to the researcher, “*Mere room main baith jao, ao*” (Come into my room). When the researcher says she has brought some toys, he says “*Main bhi laya hoon*” (I also have brought some) and the two sets of toys are arranged where he clearly identifies them one by one as “*Aapka, aapka*” (Yours, yours). When he tries to put one block into the researcher’s pile, she corrects him saying it isn’t hers, he responds thus, “*Yeh aapka hai*” (This is yours). When the researcher says the same “*Yeh aapka hai*” (This is yours), he repeats “No Ma’am, No Ma’am”. The researcher recalled to him

how naughty he was the last time she came and asks him “*Aap itne seedhe kaise ho gaye?*” (How did you become so straight) to which he responds without hesitation “*Aise hi*” (Just like that). Honey is throughout engaged in the task of sorting out the play materials so that they are not mixed, his and the researcher’s. So even when the researcher asks about the school, he has the constant concentration on the task. For instance: When the researcher asks him what he does in school, Honey is deeply engrossed in putting away the researcher’s toy materials looks up and asks “*Do do gudiyaen hain?* (Two, two dolls, there are?) “*Yeh rakh doon phir batata hoon*”. (Let me put this away, then I will tell you). Then says “*Sare rakhne hain*” (Have to put all away), and puts more toys back. Honey then asks the researcher, holding the full bag upright, “*Isko kahan pe rakhoon?*” after which she takes the bag and asks him to check if there are any left. He promptly gets to the task, saying “*Dekhata hoon*”. He is looking at and the researcher says, “*Yeh to aap ka hai*”, he is quite clear that it isn’t and responds, “*Nahin hai*” (is not).

Mukta answers questions about school and then when the researcher asks her how old she is, she responds saying “*Mummy se pooch lo. Mujhe pata nahin,*” (Ask mother, I don’t know).

When Mukta is discussing her preferences with the researcher, she refers to the person (Didi) who lives upstairs from them. When the researcher asks for more details about who this didi is, Mukta gives a clear detail about the fact that she lives upstairs.

Pawan is sitting and playing when the researcher arrives and speaks with him. He looks up and instantly tells the researcher that his mother is not at home, she has gone to a neighbour’s place. When asked why he is rubbing his eyes so much he responds by saying “*Machhar kaat gaya*” (Mosquito has bitten).

Shanta has a younger sister and the researcher asks her if she teaches the little one. Shanta clearly says that she doesn’t learn and keeps playing “*Nahin who seekhti hi nahin hai*” (No, she doesn’t learn) “*Wo khelti reheti hai*” (She keeps playing).

Sheena, as mentioned earlier, was one of the most articulate children in the study. For instance, the opening question to her is about school which she answers, and then the researcher asks her who her best friend is. This is what follows: says “*Mahi.* (about why she is the best friend) *Kyoonki na, first time Asmita main aur Mahi na saathh main baithe thhe. Phir kya hua, hum log best friends ban gaye. Phir kya hua, main phir hamesha Mahi ke saath hi baithne lagi. Asmita ke saath kutty ho gayi thhi Mahi ki phir mujhe keheti thhi ki use baat mat kar. Main aisa nahin kar sakti hoon jab Mahi absent thhi tab smita nain bola mere se tum meri friend bano ge.*

Phir main eek idea banaya ki jab Mahi nahin hogi, tab hum log saathh main baten karenge. Jab Mahi hogi tab nahin” (Mahi. Because the first time, Mahi and Asmita sat together then what happened, we all became best friends. Then what happened, I started sitting next to Mahi only. And I stopped talking to Asmita. Then Mahi used to say to me, don’t talk to her. I couldn’t do that then when Mahi was absent and Asmita said will you become my friend. Then I got an idea, that when Mahi is absent I will sit with you and when she is present I will sit with her). This was your idea, the researcher asked her. “*Haan, phir kya hua ki Mahi ko bata diya, phir Asmita nain bahut din baad school chhod diya*”. (Yes then Mahi got to know and after many days Asmita left the school). Here she demonstrates a very advanced perspective-taking in her conversation. Sheena then takes the researcher and rattles off the names of about 50 dolls she has in her room, many with names.

When the researcher asks Sunny to recite something, he refuses, and is firmly holding onto the pillow and his refusal. When he is asked if there is a “cars song” he knows, he says repeatedly that he knows it but it is a secret, “*Main nahin batane wala. Secret hai mera*” (I am not going to tell you, that is my secret). When the researcher makes another attempt to ask, he repeats his refusal and says “Shhh...no no no”. When the researcher asks how do you manage your dog, he is so much bigger than you, he says “*Paer hain, main shoes pehen ke jaoonga aise karloonga, poora dhhoan nikle gaa*” (I have feet, and then I will wear my shoes, and will be able to go through fully). Can I take muffin, the dog, the researcher asks and he shouts “*Nahin*” (No).

When Sonam is asked what her favourite colour is, she looks at a fork (toy) and says “Fork” again, “Fork” and then later “Gdeen” (Green).

3.5.4. Siblings and others

Whenever there were older siblings around, especially with a small age difference, the older brother or sister was fairly active in the interview. For instance, in the case of Abhit, it was found that the minute the camera was switched on, he flitted around the younger brother, urgently asking questions like: “*Papa ka naam batao*” (Say your father’s name). He is quickly told by the grandmother that it is Abhit who is being asked. Equally quickly, Abhit is also able to answer the researcher about the school name. In another intervention when Abhit is being asked why he likes one particular teacher, the brother says “*Kyoonki daantti nahin hai*” (Because she does not scold). Siblings are also quick to respond to the child’s reactions. In this same

interview, when Abhit is asked whether he likes going to school, he quickly (much faster than other responses) says “No”. Both brother and grandmother have a hearty laugh over this response. In Ankur’s interview, the younger brother constantly mumbles his gibberish in-between the interview of his older brother to which Ankur remains a keen listener.

In Guna’s case, it was not a sibling but the child next door, whom she spent a lot of time with who accurately informs the researcher that Guna has dropped out of school. Guna, estimating that such an action would probably generate disapproval from the researcher, kept silent when she was asked this.

For Ankita, the younger brother emerges as far more forthcoming in the interview and answers several questions on her behalf, like what programme are you watching on TV. The next question posed to her was about which her favourite programme was and again, the younger brother responded by saying “*Usko Bheem pasand hai*” (She likes Bheem).

Sibling interactions can be seen distinctly also in the case of Sohan and Devyansh. The sparring and interaction between the brothers did not seem to interfere with Sohan’s responses once Devyansh was requested not to answer on his behalf.

3.5.5. Can you recite something from school?

Displaying a child’s knowledge of poems is a very enthusiastic task from the perspective of the family. Even when not prompted, parents would ask the child to perform. For this reason, this question was added in the interview with children, and parents were usually very happy about this. Several children refused the demand, but Atul was particularly enthusiastic. As soon as he was asked, it was like a switch had been turned on. After a Christmas song, he sang Chandama and then something about Santa again, to enthusiastic prompts from the mother and older sister who were present during the interview. When asked if he knows another, he recites one with enthusiasm about water conservation. Says the teacher taught him and then quickly adds that he knows many more. This sort of enthusiasm was quite exceptional.

Guni says yes to a recitation and does a verse about a beautiful school, beautiful flowers and pretty children to the end.

Minu recites ABCD in a sing-song tone when asked if she knows any song or poem. Mukta speaks about Santa Claus and a dance that was happening in school but refuses to dance or sing a song or recite anything from school, says she doesn’t know any.

Pawan is told by the researcher that the last time she came, he recited a very nice poem, to which he says "*Lekin ab nahin aati*" (But I don't know any now). "*Hindi waali bhi nahin aati*" When the researcher asks for one in Hindi, then English and he says not "Twinkle, but Ring-a-roses", but still does not recite.

When asked to recall something to recite, he runs into his bedroom, lays face down on the bed with his bottoms up. When the researcher asks again he responds, muffled "*Mujhko yaad karne do*" (Let me recall). A song, maybe the researcher says, after which he comes up with a film song, still face down "*Main jat yamala pagala diwana*" and stops and says "*Mere ko sharam aa rahi hai*" (I am feeling shy). When the researcher closes her eyes, he gets up does a few lines and dances to them and then runs away face down on the bed and hides his face.

Rita recites a full poem from school that her mother prompts her to do, and she complies, reciting: "*Hum phool hain vatan ke. Vatan ke phool hain hum. Hum khush hain, khushal hain.....*" and so on, about children as flowers of the country.

When asked to recite a poem, Sohan starts with a story and goes on thus: "*Ek jangal thha, haina? Us main devansh reheat thha. Phir devansh aise....*" (he lies on top of the brother who is on a chair. Devyansh pulls him back and they spar) "*Poem sunao*" the researcher asks, and he starts "*Poem? Acchha. Ek jangal thha,* (Mother also prompts, poem, poem, but Sohan carries on) *Usme ek haathhi thha. Mota wala, haina? Bahut mota thha* (makes a gesture of fat, older brother speaks in between)" "*But this is a story*" the researcher asks, but Sohan is undeterred. "*Phir kya hua, who mujhe, apple de rha thha. Bol rha thha, oye Sher? Sare apple khao ge kya? Kehta mujhe aur mota hone hai. Mujhe sare appleko gya phir mujhe aur mote hona hai. Phir who jada mota ho gya*". All this while, the older brother has a parallel narrative going on and Sohan becomes fast and frenzied, "*Pata hai kya kha rha thha who, kela kha rha thha, mota ho gya. Sher bhi mota thha, hai ram* (acts swollen now and moves around) *wo keh rha thha sher mujhe fruit pasand nahi hain. Main kela nahin kha roo*" Devyansh jumps onto him and Sohan pushes him, the boys are getting restless. "*Uske baad, uske baad, uske baad, khale ke mota ho gya. Uske baad chal pade ghar, chal pade ghar. Uske baad, dher saare apple kahan se aa gaye? Bandaron ne phenk diya thha. Phir saare kha gaye*" (makes chomp chomp chomp actions). "*Phir kha liya thha, phir aur mota ho gya* (hands widen further) *pet aur mota ho gya. To.....Uske baad, wo..*" What happened in the end, the researcher asks, and he responds by asking "*Tent main?*" "*End main*", the researcher repeats. "*Phir uske baad uski bahut sari hat hogi bhaut.....*" (something

about) *ladayi, ladayi, bahut...ladai ladai, bhag* (runs on the spot) *ladayi 'yeh us ne mara thha' 'usne maara thh'a'* he continues on with the story. "*Ladai shuru ho gayi, phir sand aa gya, dono sand aa gaye. Sare sand ki xxx aa gayi. Saand gusse ho rhe thhe, haathi ke paas, kood gaye, mar gaye.*" Researcher says very good story and claps. And Sohan asks, "*Ab kya sunao*" (What should I recite now?). (The story is about a lion who wants to eat all the apples and there is a lot of fighting and someone brings him fruit and he gets very fat, and then after the fighting someone says run, run. And then a bull comes, and so on).

Although Sonam's responses are brief in most of the questions, she is enthusiastic about the recitation starts "*Kauva baitha thha jug main pani kauve ne dala pathar, pani aya oopar*" (Crow sat on top of the water and placed pebbles in the water and the level rose). Anything more the researcher asks. She nods a yes and says "*Kauve nain kha liya*" (Crow had taken it), the mother corrects "*Peeliya*" (Drunk). An English one? Both mother and researcher request and she nods a "no". Mother says she knows many, and when she hears the word clouds from her mother, she starts off "Clouds in the sky" not clear, but approximation of the poem. M asks her to say two she says "*Nahin*" and then says she will say "Johnny Johnny...." And says it fully. Then says "*Pussy cat wali*" and says that and the mother also recites it along with her.

The researcher asks Tanvi to recite a poem. With a finger on her cheek tapping, she thinks and nods a yes. Then thinks more and then starts "*Machhli jal ki rani hai....*" But adds a line "*Cooker main dalo pak jayegi*" that was not heard before. Younger brother and Anu are standing by.

When Gita is asked to recite a poem, she starts "*Jab main chhota bachha thha, toffee khoob chabata thha. Ek din papa nain uthaya khoob pyar se bataya* (With actions). *Toffee khana aadat kharab, ho jayenge daant kharaab*" In the same prosody. Everyone around claps and she adds, "*Aur stories bhi aati hain*" she says. "*Haathhi raja bahut bade. Soond utha kar gaon chale.* (all with actions) *mere ghar bhi aao na. Halwa puri khao na. Ao baitho kursi par. Kursi boli chatar patar*".

When Yukti is asked for a story, poem, she asks the researcher back, "Konsi" (which one). Then asks again, "Koisi bhi?" (she repeats when the researcher says 'any'). Then Yukti thinks and asks "*Rabbit wali sunaon?*" She puts her hands on the sides of her head and starts "Rabbit, rabbit, 1 2 3. Why do you come and play with me. Camel, camel 1 2 3. Why do you hum a hump like this. Monkeys monkeys 7 8 9 why do you teach me how to climb. Now

counting up to 10, the elephant said, now start again. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10.”This was all done with actions.

3.5.6. Can you sit in this small chair?

In order to make an estimate of the children’s understanding of their own size, a common line of questioning in the tradition of investigating scale errors, a preliminary exploration was done to question children about whether they think they can sit in a doll’s chair that the researcher had as part of her toy kit. Interesting responses were received to this question. Some of the children tried to sit in the chair, whereas as others dismissed it as too small. As an example, Ankur responded by averting his answer to report that “Block *bithaya hai maine*” (I have made a block sit [on the chair]). This response generates laughter in the room and the researcher repeats the question to which he responds “*Main gir jaoonga*” (I will fall) and then adds when probed, that he is small, that is why he can’t sit on it. The mother promptly asks him if he is small or the chair. To this he says, somewhat sheepishly “*Main bada*” (I am big).

Garima is shown the chair and then asked if she can sit in it, and she answers “Nahin” (No). “Why”? The research queries and she says “Yeh chhoti hai” (This is small). Guni says something very similar, she quickly responds with a “no” to the question of whether she can sit in the chair with the reason that “Chhoti chair hai” (Chair is small). In order to confirm if the response is clear, the researcher asks again, who is bigger, her or the chair, this time she answers, more precisely “Chair chhoti hai” (The chair is small). When asked if there is anyone who can sit in the chair, she says “Mannu” (younger brother’s name), and repeats when the researcher asks if he could fit in it, Guni says Yes!

Mini repeatedly says she can sit in the small chair when she is asked by the researcher, and even asks “Dhikhaoon?” (Shall I show you?) when the researcher asks her for the third time. Mini is one of the youngest in the group, at four years of age.

When Nena is asked about the chair, her comment comes out as a question “Itni chhoti si?” (Such a small one) she asks. Then pointing to the sofa, she says “*Main baith sakti hoon is par, is par, is par*” (I can sit on this cone, this one, this one), pointing to the sofas around them. The conversation continues thus, Nena says “*Badi cheezon pe baithti hoon, chhoti cheezon pe nahi beth sakti*”. (I sit on big things and not small things). Why, the researcher asks, “*Mera bum bada hai isliye nahin aa sakti*” (touching her bottom My bottom is big that is why I can’t fit) The

researcher asks if she could try and Nena replies earnestly, “*Koshish bhi nahin kar paoongi*” (Can’t even try). How do you know, you haven’t even sat on it, the researcher asks her and she says after placing it on her stomach, “*Iska size dekh liya maine aur jagah chhoti hai main badi hoon*” (I have seen its size and the space is too little). And then asks if she should demonstrate to the researcher.

When Omi is asked if he can sit on the small chair, he says No, and adds because it is a toy “*Woh khilona hai*”. The mother uses this as a cue to ask him what we do with toys and he responds “*Khelte hain*” (We play).

When Sarita is asked if she can sit in the small chair, she responds by saying “*Wo Barbies’ ki hai*” (That belongs to the Barbies). Can you sit on it, the researcher asks her and she clearly says “No”, with the reason that it is too small.

About being able to fit in the small chair, Gita says “*Yeh toot jaati hai*” (This breaks) looking at the yellow chair. Can you sit in it, the researcher asks her. “*Nahin*” (No) Gita says. “*Yeh toot jaati hai, us pe*”. Then she is asked if she has sat on it. “*Nahin*” she says. But then how do you know it will break?, the researcher probes. “*Chatar patar hota hai*” she looks down and says like in the poem. When asked again, Gita says again “*Yeh toot jayegi isliye*” and places her foot on the chair.

3.5.7. Do you recognize me from the last visit?

In each case, the researcher, who had visited the children when they were a year or so younger, asked them if they had recognized her, and if they remember her. This is a common question in the local network and a lot of value is placed by the family on remembering people who have met the child before. The children’s responses ranged from clear denial to accurate remembering, with Sheena again standing out as the most accurate response. Asha, for instance, says that she has seen the videos (that the researcher had left with the family after the last visit, but adds that she cannot see her face very clearly in the video since she (the researcher is facing away from the camera!

Atul has an interesting performative response to the question. With his chin in his palm, he strikes a thoughtful pose articulating “mmmmm” and looks around and then asks when this was “*Jab aap pehle mere ghar aye the?*” He asks with a slight lisp, framing an indication that he does remember in the question.

Chetan had a rather interesting response to the question about recognition. He said “*Pehechannta hoon par pata nahin*” (I recognize you but don’t know), perhaps indicating a faint recollection of the visit from a year ago.

Garima clearly says “No” when asked if she remembers the researcher from the last visit. After this question, she takes the researcher on a tour of all her sketches and colouring, books as well as wall art and shows her butterflies and flowers. Describing one picture on the wall, she explains that the robot had given a flower to the girl and suddenly says, “*Mama ne sara mita diya*” and then asks the mother “*Kyon mita dete ho apap*”. So you can make new sketches, the researcher says. To this she responds, “*Yeh mere paas saari jageh hai, mama ne poora mita diya*” (I have this entire place, and Mama has rubbed it all out).

When Guni responds with a No to the researcher’s question about whether she remembers her, the mother instantly reminds her that just a few days before, she was asking about the researcher. Guna on the other hand says she recognizes her clearly and calls her “Mausi” (Kin term for mother’s sister).

When Honey is asked whether he remembers the researcher, he answers sharply “Nahin”. When she asks again as she ends the interview if he remembers her, he says “Nahin Ma’am” (No Ma’am) promptly. The researcher tries to toggle his memory reminding him about the toys, the bag that she had also brought a year ago and he says, “Hmmmm.....” nods the affirmative. Now when she asks if he remembers, he says clearly “*Haan*” (Yes). She asks him “*Yaad aa raha hai?*” (Can you recall) and he says “*Haan thhoda thhoda*” (Yes a little bit). Then adds “*Par main aapka naam bhool gya*” (But I have forgotten your name). Then she tells her name. When she says “Thank you Honey”, he quickly responds “Welcome”.

Kaju quickly accepts that she recognizes the researcher, saying that she is “Didi”, although which Didi she shyly refrains from responding to. A bit later, she responds to the repeated question, saying that “*Kal dekha thha aap ko*” (I saw you yesterday).

Minu recalls that she had seen the researcher in “Gurgaon” when she is asked if she remembers her (the researcher). Mukta nods a tentative yes when the researcher asks her if she remembers, but then withdraws when she is asked more saying “*Naam to pata nahin*” (Don’t know your name), although she did accept that she had recognized her. Nena also has a similar reaction, but is a bit more dramatic in saying “*Oo main to naam bhool gayi*” (Oh, I forgot the name) when she could not recall the name, but does say that she recognized the researcher.

Omi bluntly tells the researcher he does not recognize her. Pawan, on the other hand, says a yes to knowing the researcher, but No to “Do you recognize me” question. And quickly adds that his mother has at present gone to a neighbour’s home.

When Rita is asked if she remembers the researcher, she says “*Haan*” (Yes) but is unable to say where or who she is, adding “*Thhoda thhoda*” (little little). Later clarifying that “*Abhi nahin yaad aa raha*” (I cannot remember right now).

When Rahul is asked if he recognizes her, he answers in the affirmative. When did you see me, she asks, and he responds with “*Abhi*” (Just now).

Although Shanta says she recognizes the researcher, she nods a no shyly when she is asked who she is.

Sheena says on her own that she knows the researcher, says “*Aap mujhe padhate thhe*” (You used to teach me). You remember the researcher asks and she responds with a yes!

When Sohan is asked if he recognizes the researcher, he says “yes” and the older brother responds “*Didi*” when she (the researcher) asks who she is. Sohan repeats what his brother says. Have you seen me before, the researcher asks, and he responds with “*Haan, parson dekha thha*” (Yes, I had seen you day before yesterday).

Sunny seems to have a very clear memory of the last visit. The researcher asks if he recognized her, he says “*Pehchanliya*” and nods, playing with the car and also watching TV off and on. How do you know me, the researcher asks. “*Aap meri aunty ho*” (You are my aunty), he says. But how did you recognize me, she asks and he says loudly “*Arre, kitni baar bataoon? Us time aye thhe, us time aye thhe, us time aye thhe*” (Oh how many times tdo I have to tell you, we met there, we met there) moving his arms about. What was done at that time, the researcher asks and he pouts his mouth and “*Toys diya thha aur toffee khilaya thha*” (You gave me toys and toffees) and scratches his head and says “*Auurrrr....aur nahin pata*” (More I don’t know) and smiles. He points to the sofa and says “*Aap idhar bethe thhe aur main idhar,*” pointing to the door (You were sitting there and I was sitting here) Okay R says. Haan? R, Haan, the child says.

Sonam is quite clear that she has not recognized the researcher from the last visit. Tanvi on the other hand nods a yes, and adds “*Video banae aye thhe*” (You came to make a video). Gita nods a yes, saying she knows the researcher.

3.5.8. Do you want to ask me anything

The last question the researcher usually liked to ask was “Do you want to ask me anything?” Most children responded with a “No” to this one, although there were some interesting responses. This question was really meant to see how much the child was able to engage with the researcher in a dyadic conversation as interested partners, and not indicate that this was only a series of questions from the researcher to the child. Very few children responded to this. Chetan, who came across as very quick to change perspectives in the conversations, was also asked if he wants to ask the researcher anything to which he replied “Yes”. “What”? The researcher asks and he responds by saying “*Mujhe woh nahin pata*” (I don’t know that).

Honey engages with the researcher in a dialogue. When she asks if he wants to ask her a question, he says “Yes; *Ek poochhna hai khali*” (Only one I want to ask), Honey then says, “*Batadoon, aap batado phir*” (Tell you tell then), and the researcher responds with “Question to *poochho aap?*” and he puts his finger on his mouth and says “mmmmm” and thinks. “*Woh wala*” (That one) and taps his cheek. And says something like “*Glass wala*” and then she says asks the question and then says “No Ma’am” after saying “mmmm”. Here we can see the desire to engage in a dialogue, but the question did not emerge, even though the conversation was in place.

When Minu is asked if she wants to ask the researcher anything, she promptly says “Haan”, but the question is not so forthcoming. When again probed, she makes up a question: “*Woh ma’am ne na, homework diya thha, phir ma’am ne na, copy nahin di thhi*” (That M’am gave homework and then she didn’t give a copy), unable to come up with a related question.

When Nena is asked what she would like to question the researcher about, she simply says “*TV dekhna hai*” (To watch TV), this was her favourite activity, and one that she had declared at the outset, so she used this opportunity to also end the conversation with the researcher. Rita is quite clear she doesn’t want to ask the researcher anything.

The researcher asks Gita if she would like to ask anything and the question comes back to her, asking “*Kya?*” (What). Again, when the question is repeated she also repeats her question and then adds “*Abcd to aata hai*” (I know abcd), and starts to recite abcd....musically. She was not able to grasp that she was given the opportunity to ask a question. Then she extends the alphabet to “XYZ sugar in the bed, come to me early in the morning I will teach you abc”, then asks if she should also recite 1234, and starts off musically without waiting for an answer. Goes upto 17 with a few errors.

Tanvi also, like most other children, says she does not want to ask the researcher anything.

3.5.9. Children's conversations with the researcher, an overview

The conversations with the children provide an intense and detailed insight into their understanding of the worlds in which they live. School was an important topic, not just for the researcher's perspective about the children, but for the families and children as well. It was found that it was a frequent question, and children were practiced at some of the regular queries like which school do you go to and which class you study in. A more off-beat question related to the teachers, and children were found to be quite forthcoming about who they liked and who they did not, although reasons were available for fewer cases, since some children said they liked their teacher, but could not say why they liked her. Dislike was harder to pin point, but the reasons were often quite clear. Mostly it was because a teacher was perceived as harsh, punitive, or appeared so. Although this was identified, the reasons why teachers would be punitive were not very clear to children and they often said they did not know why the teacher scolds or spansks them. Some felt that it was on account of not doing homework, doing it poorly or talking in class, but many were clueless about why the teacher would do that. One child felt that the teacher whom he didn't like looked like a demon, and that was why he did not like her. Appearances went a long way in both likes and dislikes, and some children remarked about that. In one instance, the mother prompted her daughter to remind her that she didn't like the teacher because she is "dark", although the child did not repeat the statement and chose to say that she did not know, evidently the mother's comments did seem to confuse her during the conversation.

Some children were found to be happy and comfortable with school. Sheena, for instance, did not mention anything negative about school, and also reported that she was getting stars and certificates for her work. This child was also very encouraged to do reading, colouring and other activities at home, she had a fantastic facility with language, was comfortable and self-aware and in general, seemed like a very favourable and forthcoming temperament as far as school was concerned. Similarly, there were other children who were also comfortable with school as was indicated in their conversations. However, this needs to be the situation for all children, if we follow the Right to Education Act. All children have a right to a positive experience at school, and there should be no reason why such a large number of children face negativity at school, to

the extent that some of them drop out, as in Guni's case. During the first phase of the research, she was found to be enthusiastic and hard working, sadly that did not sustain, and she was spanked out of the class and also the school. This is a serious matter facing our children, and hopefully the legislation will make a difference.

The rampant use of private tutors because of the lack of access to schooling in the urban poor community was another significant phenomenon. Why are these families choosing to send their children to paid tuitions when there are schools nearby? From the findings of this study, it was clear that if the child was regular, good in studies and worked regularly, only then could he or she be sure that the system would accept them. Children had a clear feeling of being rejected by the public school system, and wanted very eagerly to send their children to school. There were just not enough schools. One of the mothers in study even prompted the child to ask the researcher to help to acquire admission in a good school.

Regarding preferences, there seemed to be some indication of age trends as well as conversational ability. Some children were quick to describe what they liked or didn't and even gave elaborate explanations, while others remained rather subdued. The choices of food and colour etc. were not only hard and even heart-breaking to ask some of the very poor families, the answers were also very realistic and bare. The fast, expensive food choices and preferences for activities and other engagements demonstrated the clear divide between the children of the poor and others. Among activities, 'play' emerges as a common answer, as expected. Some children also said they enjoyed drawing and doing homework.

The conversations showed interesting results regarding perspective taking. Again there were marked differences among the children regarding whether they were able to consider the point of view of another person or were in the process of doing so. Although all below 6 years of age, some of the examples gave an interesting insight into the way children consider the other perspective.

Sibling interactions and involvement in the conversations was dramatic as and when they were present. The presence of a younger sibling seemed to facilitate a child's assignment of the small chair to him or her, whereas an older sibling provided a great deal of guidance. Playful interactions predominated the sessions and older siblings seemed keen that their younger brother or sister should participate actively in the session. They offered solutions, gave prompts, suggested songs and made corrections to what the children said.

Recitation was a frequent and popular task, and was included since it happened so often as a demand in the regular course of events. Children varied in the recall skills, but most enjoyed the activity, and some simply refused to comply.

Regarding scale errors, most children had achieved the understanding that they could not fit in the chair or else it would break, but the reasons attributed to their answers were somewhat divergent. Where as some of the children simply assigned the chair to someone smaller, a child or doll, Others said they were too big, or that the chair was too small, or that it would break. By and large, all children had arrived at a clear understanding that the chair was not appropriate for them, whatever the reason.

Most children said they knew the researcher, but clearly recognised that they did not remember her. The video recordings from the last session a year ago did provide some with the necessary prop to remember her with, but Sheena had the most enthusiastic response to the question. Very few children went so far as to ask the researcher a question, many remained silent and some did not understand the question.

Regarding self and ownership, children show quite a clear understanding of ownership, but that is far more evident in urban, middle-income homes on account of the structure of their life-style. Honey's repeated attempts at arranging and classifying the toys so as not to mix the researcher's play materials and his own was a case in point. Children like Chetan and Sheena had a good estimation not only of what they knew or did not, they were also able to estimate and account for what the researcher may not know, and gave details like, "The child whom you met", or "The one who lives upstairs". Not only did they have a rather precocious sense of self, they were also quite clear about the perspective of the other. Honey demonstrates his care for the grandfather who is asleep in the living room by inviting the researcher to his own room so as not to disturb him, and leads her by the hand.

Regarding the conversations themselves, it was found that some children were distracted away from the conversation by external factors, like clamouring others, some were concentrating on their own engagements like watching TV or other activity, even saying to the researcher when she asks what they don't like, answering that "This (the interview) is what they don't like", whereas around six children were very sociable and happy to interact with the researcher, engaging in full blown dialogues of themselves and their experiences and relationships. Similarly, several children were very eager to comply with the commonplace request of

displaying their memory through singing a song or reciting a verse. Adults in the family mostly included this task anyway, so it became a question in the conversations as well. Many children complied and carried on, while others were shy, and some refused outright. In some circumstances of dense groups, the request was not even possible to make, but a popular substitute (in the village) was to prompt them to dance! And this was enthusiastically met and complied with, especially by the girls.

As is expected, there was a high variation in the display of the self. It would be overstretching to imagine that this corroborated with a parallel sense of self, but certainly one could conclude that the fundamental role the 'others' play in even the articulation of self-knowledge is quite exceptional. Where there is a social support for articulating opinion and preferences, we find the children more willing and able to engage in a dialogue with the researcher who was clearly from a different social setting from most of the subjects. In fact, the greater the social and economic distance between the two teams (research and participant) the lower the articulation, and the greater the difficulty in exchanging ideas. Thus, the social proximity was found to be the minimum but not necessary condition for conversation. Beyond that, it was the individual disposition, present preoccupation and other situational and personal factors that determined whether a child would engage actively in a conversation. For the rural and urban poor settings, it was always difficult to draw the child in on account of the density and active participation of other people, and isolating the child for this purpose did not seem fair, and may have been too artificial to get reasonable answers from the child. Thus what we gather about the child's self and identity through the conversations seems linked first with the situation and social setting, and only when this is comfortable and conducive, then the child's preferences and other opinions could be accessed to any reasonable degree. To assume that the conversations always reflected personal disposition would be a serious error in judgment.

3.6. Adults' opinions about children: Mothers' Interview Analysis

Interviews with caregivers (mostly mothers) were conducted with mothers of the children who were part of the study. Due to the longitudinal nature of the study, the same group of people was also interviewed when these children were around 4 years old, a similar kind of interview session had been conducted with the mother or primary caregiver. Some of the dominant themes

which were explored in the first round of interviews opinions about childhood, socialization and developmental goals, and concerns related to children.

The second round of interviews was more focused on the child as an individual, since this portion of the research was targeted to understand self and identity issues of young children. The areas explored changes in children since the previous visit, parents' orientation towards these changes, independence of children, children's likes and dislikes, impact of schooling, teachers' opinions about the child, relationship with siblings and any other noteworthy topic.

Regarding the conversations, there were clear patterns related to context. The children who were growing up in many adults many children homes, were happier to speak when someone else was the focus of the conversation, and went into silent mode when they were being discussed. Regarding school, particularly, there was a clear signal that they had received about the beliefs about schooling. Stepping out or pulling out of school only happened among the rural and urban poor. A total of four children had dropped out of school (actually before even entering school since they were all 6 years old or under). This was not an eventuality among middle and upper income urban homes since the structure and dynamics of the home and community sustained schooling very strongly, even when the child was not comfortable. The alternate presence of private tutours in the urban setting was a default system which children attended when they were pushed. These services were not necessarily child-friendly or focussed, but were frequently used by families where there was frequent migration to the home town, unpredictable hours of work, or child-care responsibilities. These tutours were told to be providing flexible and low-cost services. But wven when children were sent to these, they preferred to withhold this information and not say anything about not going to school. This information was always given by another child, usually a neighbour/friend; that ubiquitous cluster of age-mates around a child in the multiple setting homes.

3.6.1. The setting

All interviews were conducted within or around the homes of the families. During interviews, children were usually seen playing around the mother, with other children or by themselves. Most of the conversations were comfortable and open since the researcher was already known to the family from the previous visit. Although the children had mostly forgotten about the researcher, all the adults were welcoming.

Interviews in urban homes tended to be more private and secluded in comparison with the rural homes. Sometimes, the younger women stayed silent, letting the older women of the family respond to the researcher's questioning. Further, it was also observed that usually, the rural interviews were conducted while the women were going about their work, whereas urban mothers tended to give exclusive attention to the discussion.

3.6.2. The method

The aim of conducting these interviews with mothers or other caregivers was to assemble in depth understanding of developmental changes which their children have experienced in last 1-2 years. A schedule was prepared which addressed the above in the simple manner. The interviews were video recorded and transcribed. The core domains explored were:

- Recent changes in children
- Autonomy and independence
- Formal school and children's attitude
- Sibling and other relationships
- Child's preferences

Within the prescribed format, several probing questions were also prepared for. Occasionally in response to a few questions, some respondents had taken the liberty to speak at length, in an attempt to share more information about their child. These episodes were deep-rooted in their day-to-day experiences with family members, children and their activities. The conversations often strayed well beyond the topics planned for, and the researcher remained welcoming and also forthcoming during these conversations.

3.6.3. Overview of opinions

A wide range of opinions emerged from the interview questions. Despite the diversity within the sample, several convergences were discovered in the responses of the adults. The responses were analysed under the following core categories:

- Growing up
- Knowledge of self among children
- Language and conversation
- School experiences

- Becoming self-reliant
- Desirable and undesirable changes in children
- Sibling relationships
- Use of pacifiers

3.6.3.1. Growing up

For young children the changes occurring every day are crucial to the developing person. They undergo physical changes like increase in height, change in body weight and improved motor skills. They also express several behavioural changes which are important to understand. The child's world is also gradually expanding from the immediate family to the neighbourhood and later the school. The sequence and substance of circumstances will be different for different children, but the expansion is normative and universal, unless there is some difficulty.

Many of the mothers mentioned something like “My child has grown up now”, looking mostly at the accomplishments of the previous years, rather than all the things that the child is still unable to accomplish.

In order to exemplify the changes happening, expressions like *samajhdar* (understands), *hoshiyar* (clever), *sayani* (wise), *akal aa gayi* (become sensible), *bada ho gaya haim* (has become big), were used to refer to the changed child. Adi's grandmother noted that he had “*Ab pehle se samajhdar ho gaya hai*” (now he has become more sensible than before), since Adi was quite disruptive and aggressive to the younger brother in the earlier sessions a year ago. She made a reference to those sessions when she noted this perceived improvement in him. Rita's mother and Minu's grandmother used the expression, “*yeh cheezon ko samajhne lagi hai*” (She has started understanding things). Some mothers also mentioned that their children have become more responsible. Nena's mother shared that when she (the mother) was not around the child would adjust with others in the house by being better behaved and more independent. Additionally, the mother also said that as she had gotten older, her crankiness and crying had reduced significantly.

The use of the word *samajhdar* is used for a person with the capacity to understand things and was used here to represent several perceived changes among children, it was found. If a child is considered to be *samajhdar*, there is a likely assumption that he or she is well behaved, sensitive to others, understanding, in control, knows what is right or wrong, obedient, adjusting

and responsible. Mahi's mother sounds so elated while sharing changes in her child. She said *"yeh itni achchi ho gayi hai ki main bata nahi sakti. Ab roti nahi hai, bas apne aap padti rehti hai"* (She has become so nice, I am unable to describe. Now she does not cry, just keeps studying on her own). Kaju's mother said *"bahut samajhdar ho gayi. Jab main kaam par chali jati hoon to yeh ghar ka thoda kaam kar degi. Jaise yeh bistar utha degi, itna badiya se safai kar degi"* (She has become very responsible. When I go to work, then she does some household work. Like, she will make the bed, do the cleaning nicely). Bunt's aunt made a reference to the changes in his manner of speaking, and said that *"sahi se baat karta hai, buri bat nahi karta. Ab to gali bhi nahi deta"* (He talks properly, now he does not abuse others). In a reply to the question about the changes occurring in Paras, his mother said, "He has become more mature. Understands things better. If I am with the little baby (she now has a younger child), he will not disturb me at all"; indicating that she found him to have gained maturity and also inhibitory control.

In contrast, two mothers mentioned that their children, Pia and Shanta, were unchanged since the last visit of the researcher: *"badlav to kuch bhi nahi hai, bas umar badh gayi hai"* (There are no changes, only the age has increased).

Many parents made a comment that their children had recently started asking many questions and were perpetually curious. The questions were reported to cause much amusement in the home, and sometimes also took the adults by surprise at how much the children knew, some parents noted. When parents said that children asked too many questions, they also mentioned that the children expected answers from them. Questions were found to be never ending since children were reported to be ready with a counter question in an instant. Some adults felt a sense of wonder, accompanied by occasional fatigue at the questioning and expectations for answers. Sunny's mother commented that "He has started arguing, questions too much. Certain questions which we don't have an answer to, but he will go on and on, and he expects an answer from us. So he will nag you till the time you give him an answer. 'Yeh kyu, woh kyu, aisa hai to aisa kyu' (Why this, why that, if like this then why so)". She was also amazed that at this age, children could come up with questions about stars, planets or even other celestial activities. "Do other children also ask questions like this?" she wanted to know. Omi's mother, very specifically told the researcher about his attitude of enquiry. She said *"iska na logical questioning wala part na thoda aur improve ho gaya hai"* (His logical questioning part

has improved a little more). Like for every question or problem he has got so many questions to ask". These examples are simple evidence of children's growing curiosity about the world around them as well as the caregiver's recognition of these changes.

3.6.3.2. Knowledge of self among children

Research has shown that children start developing a mental notion of self around 18-19 months of age. A lot of mothers mentioned that their children had developed a sense about themselves, especially about their physical appearance. They were reported to be more conscious about their overall appearance like clothing, matching footwear, latest designs etc. Nearly all the children were reported to be choosing their clothes independently, which was a change from the findings a year earlier. It was also mentioned that, at times, they did become too assertive about a particular dress and about the correct way of wearing it. Sohan's father shared "*yeh apne kapdon ko leke bahut choosy hai. Apne aap pasand karega, almari se nikalega, fir joote bhi match karne chahiye*" (He is very choosy about his clothes. He will select on his own, will take out from cupboard and then matching shoes are also needed). Sunny, Omi, Nena and Mini's mothers also shared similar views about their children. Sunny's mother further added "If I am making him wear socks, and it has a slight fold, or a little stretched, he will keep saying *aapne theek nahi pehnaya, yeh fold ho gaya*" (You have not put it on properly, it has a fold). Some of the parents mentioned that their children were so particular about their dress and shoes that they often become too adamant. Children sometimes also raised a comment at their parents or others to show their disapproval of what the other person or child was wearing, some mothers reported. Such behaviour was discouraged by the parents, but there seemed to be a hint of pride in their reporting as well. It bears mention here that such observations came from a selected group of families that were among the wealthiest within the sample.

An important theme in the interviews related to the self-realization of the children, of doing things on their own. They were reported to have become very conscious about their school related matters, home-work and their own belongings. Several caregivers reported that homework was completed by the children on their own, and they were found to be very particular about it themselves. Sheena's mother provided an example of this. She said "*apni studies ko lekar ek responsibility aayi hai uske andar. Subah jane se pehle apna bag poora check karegi ki sab kuch hai na isme. Is time par bahut conscious rehti hai ki sab kuch up to date hona*

chahiye” (She has become more responsible regarding her studies. Before going to school in the morning she checks her bag to see if everything is in place. At this point of time she is very conscious that everything has to be up to date). Ankita’s mother shared that *“iski padai ka mujhe bilkul bhi burden nahi hai. Agar main iske paas na bhi baithu to bhi apne aap sara kaam kar leti hai”* (I have no burden related to her studies. If I do not sit with her, even then she does all the work on her own). Sahil’s mother also places importance on academic learning at this early age: *“Teachers keh rahi thi bahut accha hai studies mein, behaviour, help bahut karta hai”* (Teachers were saying he is very good in studies, in behaviour, and helps a lot).

These expressions address an important aspect of maturation, the emerging realization of doing things on their own without adult intervention, whether it relates to selecting clothes or formal learning. This is a very specific application of the term independence which will be discussed later. In a narrow sense of a culturally desirable list of expectations, some tasks when accomplished independently receive a lot of social sanction and positive regard, whereas others may not. Regarding this issue, there are also differences within the participants based on individual, interpersonal and social differences.

Another significant component of self-development is confidence. It was often encountered that young children are labelled as shy, reserved, hesitant and nervous if they do not interact with others easily. Regarding recent changes in children, several adults mentioned that their children were shy earlier, but had now started talking with others and even to strangers occasionally. Atul’s mother commented that *“pehle yeh kisi se baat nahi karta tha. Ab thoda sa khul gaya hai, ab unknown person se bhi yeh baat kar leta hai”* (Earlier he never used to talk to others. Now he has opened up a little, and can even talk to the strangers). Kavyansh’s aunt said: *“pehle yeh doosre bachchon se bhi baat nahi karta tha, lekin ab to school van mein bhi baat karni hai, jawab bhi dena hai, jo ki use pehle nahi aata tha”* (Earlier he did not even talk to the other children, but now he talks in the school van, answers also, which he did not know before). Ankur’s mother: *“aap baatein karo isse, sab cheez ka jawab deg aapko. Isko sab pata hai”* (You talk to him, will answer you for everything, he knows everything). In the same vein, Asha’s mother said: *“She has become very confident, lekin wo confidence bhi alag alag jagah par alag alag hai. Abhi usme verbal confidence jyada hai”* (She has become more confident but that confidence varies according to the context. Right now she has more of verbal confidence). A few of the children were still reported to be shy in front of others, especially unknown persons.

3.6.3.3. *Language and conversation*

There was frequent mention of a dramatic increase in communication skills in children by nearly all the adults. As discussed above many parents felt that their children who were comparatively shy or avoided conversation with others had started interacting. Some examples “*jaise jaise yeh bade ho rahe hain, baat bade acche tarike se karne lage hain*” (As they are growing, they have started talking very nicely). Chaitanya’s mother linked his social comfort in talking to others with her child’s ability to form sentences and new words: “*bolne mein improvement hua hai. Har cheez ko achhe se bolne ki koshish karta hai. Sentence banana laga hai thode thode, matlab chhote. Word alag alag use karta hai*” (His speaking has improved. He tries to talk properly about everything. He has started making sentences, I mean small sentences. Uses different words). Similarly Sheena’s mother also explained her daughter’s retracted behaviour in school earlier was due to her inability to speak in English as it was the compulsory language in her school. She shared that Sheena used to say “*mumma main ma’am se baat nahi karti hoon kyunki mujhe English mein bolna nahi aata*” (Mama, I do not talk to the teachers as I do not know how to speak in English). Sohan’s father showed his amazement regarding his child’s vocabulary and knowledge of concepts. “*aise aise shabd hain jo pata nahi kahan se seekh liye isne. Itni nayi nayi baatein jo believe nahi karte ki is bachche ko pata hoga*” (He uses such words which we don’t know from where he has learnt them from. So many new things that we cannot believe that a child would be aware of). Gita’s mother described her daughter as a talkative child. Referring to her constant chatter, she said “*Poora din bolti rehti hai non-stop. Jabardasti chup karani padti hai ki chup ho ja, bas kar*” (She keeps talking the whole day, non-stop. We have to forcibly stop her sometimes by telling her to be quiet).

These examples from parents enable us to see the tacit understanding that adults have of the features of language acquisition as they are developing, from the increase in vocabulary to the use of multiple languages. The parents in the study also referred to the interplay of age of the child and exposure to other factors like schooling and interactions with other children for the immense accomplishment in language and conversational skills. Kavyansh’s aunt specifically mentioned that since the time he had joined school he was in situations where he was compelled to speak with others, something that he would avoid earlier, even though he could speak clearly. She also raised a concern regarding a parallel introduction of the use of abusive language after he

had started interacting more with other children. Paras's mother voiced a similar observation about her son. Looking at the positive influence of school, Sahil's mother said: "*school jane laga hai to yeh acche se bolne laga hai, sari poem vagarah bhi acche se bolne laga hai*" (Since he has started going to the school, he has started talking nicely. He has started reciting poems and all quite well). Abhit and Adi's parents also mentioned of changes in their child's communication because of exposure to school. It was strongly believed that the demands for communication at school had had a significant impact on these children's language expressions. Parents seemed fascinated, particularly with the ability of children to pick up and recite verses that they had learnt in school. They would frequently use this moment in the interview to instruct the (usually reluctant) child to perform for the researcher to revisit this magic of the developing memory of children. From these responses, it appears that the credit was automatically attributed to the 'other', the outside influence, rather than family interactions or just developmental changes. These may have been simply taken for granted or left unacknowledged.

3.6.3.4. School experiences

It is interesting to notice that nearly all the children were reported to be good in studies. Performance of the child whether it is a school setting or any other informal setting where he or she is being appraised by others, was a significant experience for the parents, as could be gathered from their responses. With the exception of a few, adults reported that their children were "doing well" at school, using expressions like "excellent", "intelligent", "all-rounder", "very good", "*hoshiyar*", "good learning power", "excellent memory" and so on, to describe their child's school accomplishments. Parents emphasized that there had been dramatic changes since the child had joined a school. Along with good academic performance most of the children were also noticed to have started conversing effectively. Earlier many of them were reported to have been shy, hesitant, and reticent with strangers. However, increased sociability and confidence was marked in almost all responses. The motivation to take initiative and participate in school events was particularly articulated. Gita's grandmother's and Moni's mother used children's actual words to display how much they had advanced in these areas, sometimes peppered with abuse words as well. These narratives again bring us to the discourse on the perceived impact of environmental factors on development. Here, schooling would emerge hands-down as the most powerful factor according to the parents.

Adults also verbalized that the routine of schooling had inculcated a sense of rhythm and responsibility in children. Children were reported to be particular about their work completion, their articles for school and daily routines, like getting to the school bus on time. Some parents reported that their children would not sleep at night till they completed their designated work. The interest that some children took contrasted with the reports of some mothers who said their children were not really interested in school-related work. Guni's mother said "*school ke kaam ke liye ise maine dekha nahi, kabhi hath pakad ke nahi likhwaya. Ma'am kehti hai sab cheez mein acchi hai, best hai class mein. Koi tension nahi. Khud hi karti hai homework*" (I have never been involved regarding her school work, I have never assisted her in work by holding hand. Her teachers say that she is good in everything, she is best in the class. There is no tension, Does her homework on her own). Here we can see that there is a special mention of the fact that the mother does not have to sit with the child for task completion. Since that is an important preoccupation of parents in urban homes, this remark gains even more significance. Abhit's grandmother said, "*bahut badiya padta hai yeh. Padne mein bahut hoshiyar hai*" (He studies really well. He is very intelligent in studies). Bunty's aunt indicated that "*School mein bhi achhe se padta hai. Ghar mein bhi copy kitab le ke padta rehta hai*" (He studies well in school and at home also he takes his notebook and keeps studying). In contrast, Shanta's mother said that she was not at all happy with her performance in comparison with other children in school, saying that "*School mein to yeh bilkul peeche hai number mein. Khel ke alawa ise kuch dikhai nahi deta. Madam bhi roz shikayat karti hai padne mein kchhi hai*" (In school she is last in the ranking. She does not like anything apart from playing. Her teachers also complain that she is not good in studies). Sohan's father observed that, "*Padai napasand hai. Padne ko kahoge to nahi padega*" (He does not like studying. If you ask him to study, he will not study). There were some mentions of a concern for the fact that the child had not yet begun to speak English fluently. Sometimes attributed to the language at home, adults saw this as an important advancement that the child should have. In the case of Chetan, the mother mentioned that even the teacher had remarked that although he was an all-rounder, he hesitates to speak in English. In response to this comment, the mother remarked to the researcher that she is concerned about this, and since she herself is not fluent in English speaking, she worries about it, and does not want to teach him wrong pronunciations.

By and large all the children liked going to school. Only a few children were reported to be afraid of school as in the instance of Guna who was scared of being beaten by her teacher.

Guna's mother mentioned that although the child was ready to go to school but she was scared of her teacher. It must be noted here that a year ago, Guna was an enthusiastic learner who was seen to return home and quickly complete her reading and writing for the next day as other children played around her. Hers is a typical case of being pushed out of school despite support and motivation. Guna's mother said "*yeh yun kehve ki main to jaon hi na, madam mare hai school mein*" (She says that I will not go at all, madam beats in the school). She further shared that she had tried talking to the teacher to be more affectionate with Guna since she was keen on school, but that had no impact on the teacher. She said "*Madamkehti hai pankha se latka doongi, ab bachcha to itna se hi darr jae*" (The teacher says that she will 'hang her' from the fan. Children definitely get scared of this). These complaints were more common among rural and urban poor families, it seemed, since none of the wealthier parents reported any such incidents or even fear. In contrast to this scenario, urban middle and upper class children were reported to carry affection and admiration for their teachers. Monika's mother, also from a relatively poorer home in central Delhi reported indifference in the Government school, "*Padai mein abhi jyada nahi hai. Pehle nagar nigam ke school mein jaati thi na to wahan to kuch nahi karate thhe. Bas khana khila ke ghar bhej dete the*" (She is not very good in studies. Earlier she was attending a municipal corporation school. There they were not doing any activities with them. They only used to give them mid- day meals and children were sent back home).

These incidents display a prevailing attitude of disinterest and even detriment of some teachers, especially found among communities which are slightly backward, economically. Punitive and discouraging teachers were only reported in a few instances among rural and urban poor children on account of which school was either tolerated or dropped out from. No such instance was reported among middle and upper class children who often reported being very fond of their teachers. The only reason for not wanting to attend school in the initial phases among wealthier homes was the unwillingness to wake up early, as reported by the parents. This phase of initial discomfort was reported to be short-lived. Sonam, Asha, Paras, Pawan, and Sunny's mothers were some of the respondents who witnessed these occasional tantrums of children regarding waking-up. Only three children from the whole sample, Guna, Moni and Kaju, were not attending any school or child care center. Although Guna was a drop-out, the other two were receiving private tuitions from a neighbour.

3.6.3.5. *Becoming self-reliant*

Mothers were specifically asked if their child had started doing his or her personal chores like bathing, dressing up and eating food, independently. From the responses, it was found that all the children were reported to have become quite independent in doing their own tasks with the exception of three or four children. Food was being eaten independently, and only for some clothes did children require assistance with dressing-up. Jeans were specifically mentioned as difficult for children to wear on their own. If the clothes were lying inside-out, children were also reported to have difficulty in wearing them. Further, shoes with laces still posed a problem for children. Some mothers also mentioned that they helped the children in wearing school uniforms. Mahi's mother mentioned that "*Dress wagherah main pehnati hoon, lekin normal kapde khud pehen leti hai*" (I help her with her dress, other, normal clothes she wears on her own). Atul's mother said that winter clothes were more difficult for children to wear and she was concerned that he should remain adequately dressed in the winter, which was why she would take greater care to dress him up in winter months. Muskan and Rita were the only children who were still reported to be dependent on their mothers for wearing their clothes. Chaitanya's mother said "*Khana wana khud kha leta hai. upar wale to pehen leta hai, par jeans nahi pehen pata. Sandal dal leta hai lekin shoes nahi dal pata*" (He eats his food on his own. He can wear his upper body clothes independently, but cannot wear jeans. Sandals he can manage, but not shoes). Mentioning another angle of moods, Sonam's mother said, "*Vaise to pehen leti hai lekin agar mood nahi hai ya kapda ulta hai to nahi pehen pati*" (Usually she wears [her clothes] on her own but if she is not in mood or if the clothes are folded inside out, then she is unable). Regarding eating, Ankur's mother shared that "*yeh to pehle ki tarah hi chhota bheem dekh ke khana khata hai. Bas TV chala do fir isko kuch bhi khila do. TV chalna chahiye*" (Like before he takes his meals while watching *Chhota Bheem*. If the TV set is on he can eat anything. TV should remain on).

3.6.3.6. *Behavioural changes*

Attributing many of the changes to the influence of school and related experiences, adults were also asked to reflect on other behavioural changes in their children. In the parents' views, socially appropriate behaviour, which is highly valued, culturally, was a significant domain for discussion. Children's advancement in this regard was discussed with pride. Most of the

children were reported to have become more sociable along with displaying more socially appropriate behaviour as well. Parents also reported that children they took pride in doing things independently and also in asserting themselves with others while playing or doing small tasks at home. Often they wanted to take control of the situation in their hands and were reported to have become more strategic in their approach. Several examples of these could be found in the interview data. Sunny's mother reported that he had recently started arguing a lot and held strong opinions. Asha's mother said "*mujhe lagta hai ki she is dominating. Wo apni baat rakhti hai, full force se rakhti hai*" (I think that she is dominating. She presents her view point and does it with full force). One of the most recurrent examples given by parents was related to children choosing the clothes they would wear. Undoubtedly, this was in homes where they did have several dresses. It emerged as a universal negotiation between parents and children. Children were reported to be very particular in choosing clothes of their own choice, even in everyday dressing. They were reported to be adamant about their choices, and would not give in. At times parents sounded very troubled while reflecting on this issue. Rita's mother said that "*agar kapde mein nikal ke rakh doongi to wo nahi, apne doosre nikal ke pehene hain*" (If I take out clothes for her then she will refuse. She will take out other pair and then wear it). In a similar refrain, Nena's mother said "*apne kapde khud choose karti hai. That is the most critical situation you know that I have to deal with. Like ki isme cartoons nahi hai, kuch likha nahi hai, isme pockets nahi hai, so those tantrums are there*" (She chooses clothes for herself independently. That is the most critical situation you know that I have to deal with. She would remark that this does not have cartoons [drawn], nothing is written on it, this doesn't have pockets, so those tantrums are there).

Children's assertiveness appeared to be a contentious issue at this stage. Although mostly admired and discussed, assertiveness was also associated with being "*ziddi*" (stubborn) by some adults. There is a fine balance indicated between being confident and being stubborn as per the discussions during interviews, and some adults did take on this discussion. Some parents said they were unhappy about these changes as the child had become quite stubborn, and these changes were considered difficult to handle in comparison with the same child at a slightly younger age. When assertiveness referred to confidence and expressiveness, there was a clear positive sentiment attached to it. Some adults mentioned that children had become more aggressive, "*shaitan*", rigid, moody and less disciplined than before. Moodiness was another trait mentioned by some mothers. It was stated that the behaviour and its manageability depended on

the child's mood. If they were in good mood they did all the things nicely, behaved well, obeyed properly and did not fight. But on the other hand the same children were difficult to handle when they were in a "bad mood", the caregivers reported. Asha, Chinky, Guna, Guni, Honey, Mini, Muskan and Sonam were some of the children who were reported to be moody by their family members. More or less all the parents were disgruntled because of their child's "*shaitani*" (naughty/ mischievous). Adi's grandmother said: "*yeh bas shaitan bahut hai. Koi cheej dekh lega to bas zid karega ki yehi chahiye*" (He is very naughty. If he sees something he likes, then he will persist in asking for it). Atul's mother echoed a similar sentiment about her son, "*shararti bahut jyada ho gaya hai ab yeh. Kehna nahi suntan bilkul bhi. Ab marne mein bhi bahut jyada hai. Ek doosre se ladai, chot lag jati hai to hamein hi darr lagta hai*" (Now he has become more naughty. Does not obey at all. He has started hitting as well. They fight with each other [siblings]. Then they get hurt and we also get scared). Honey's mother reports that "*shararte bahut jyada karta hai. Ab to aur bhi bad gayi hai. Kehna nahi manta. Cheezon ko todna, fekna*" (He has become very naughty. This has increased. He does not listen. He throws things around and breaks things). Muskan's mother mentions "*Ab mere ko bhi marne peetne lagi hai, shararti ho rahi hai bas bahut jyada. Isko kai baar itna gussa aata hai ki mere upar bhi hath utha deti hai*" (Now she has started hitting me also, she is becoming very naughty day by day. At times she gets so angry, that she hits me). Shanta's mother, in a similar vein said that: "*jaise jaise umar bad rahi hai aur shaitan hoti ja rahi hai*" (As she is growing, she is becoming more and more naughty). Sohan's father mentioned that "*Shatani iski jyada bad gayi hai. Pehle se bahut jyada shaitan ho gaya hai. Aur anger bahut ho gaya hai isme. Kabhi koi cheez chahiye to chahiye hi chahiye. Rone lag jaega, zid karne lag jaega. Zameen pe let jaega*" (His mischiefs have increased. He has become a lot naughtier than before. If he needs something then he insists. He will start crying, become adamant, lie down on the floor). With these unacceptable behaviours, there were some constructive changes in the conduct of children which adults said they approved of. The same parents acknowledged that the child had become more understanding, "*samajhdar*", caring and considerate as well.

Regarding behaviour at school, on the other hand there was mostly a comment that children are much better behaved at school, more in control and more manageable. Rita's mother reported that "*School mein to sab badiya hai. Koi aise complaints nahi hai*" (In school everything is good. There are no such complaints). Abhit's grandmother mentioned that "*iski*

school mein koi sikayat na hai” (There are no complaints from his school). Responses related to behaviour at school seemed much more positive regarding manageability and discipline mostly derived from the fact that no complaints were received from school. No complaints was considered a favourable situation when the parents considered the child at school. Adults were usually proud to mention that school was a no trouble zone for them, children were good in studies, completed their work, obeyed teachers and very rarely did “*shaitani*”. This was true even when the child was considered to be unmanageable at home. It is difficult to distinguish whether the children took greater liberty to ‘misbehave’ at home, or that the same behaviours received more strict sanction at home in comparison to school or whether children actually internalized and altered their conduct depending upon the environment. School may have been perceived as a place where greater control is exercised on children’s action, and therefore, children remain more controlled in their actions.

Gender patterns were visible in children’s general behaviour. It was reported that girls were more involved in the house and occasionally helped the mothers as well. They were more often reported to be organized and concerned about their little things like hair accessories, toys, and school related things. In the instance of Guni, it was noted that she was particularly fond of the clothes and other belongings of her elder sisters. She often imitated them by wearing their *duppatta* and *lehengas*. She also liked putting on make-up. Her mother said that “make up *ka shauk hai, wo to ho gaya bahut zabardast. Lehenga dilwa do, suit dilwa do, sara din dance karne ke liye.*” (She likes applying make up a lot. She would want the *lehenega* and *suits* so that she can dance around the whole day). Girls were also reported to be helping the mothers in doing household chores sometimes. Ankita’s mother mentioned that “help *karvati hai ghar pe. Apni cheezen samet ke rakhti hai. Samajhdar ho gayi hai bas yehi hai*” (She helps me at home. She keeps her thing properly organized. Has become more sensible, that’s it).Kaju’s mother was very enthusiastic while sharing her daughter’s understanding attitude towards her. From looking through the interviews, it seemed that girls were also reported to be particularly self-conscious. Mahi’s mother shared “*Yeh apne aap hi padti rehti hai bina bole. Mujhe tension nahi hoti. Jaise Ashish aur Shanu ko bolna padta hai pad pad pad. Isko aisa nahi hai, padti hi rehti hai likhti hi rehti hai*” (She studies on her own without much talk [about it]. I don’t have any tension about her as I do with her brothers [names] who I have to constantly remind to study. With her it is not like that. She just keeps reading and writing). Nena’s mother reported that “She has become

more responsible, very caring towards me. She understands me *ki kab mumma ka mood kharab hai kab theek hai* (...that when mama's mood is bad and when good). That temperament she has built in herself'.

Further on gender, mothers' responses suggested that girls liked playing with kitchen set, doll houses, doll sets, parlour set, doctor set and dolls (specific mention of Barbie dolls was made by some). Pretend play was also reported to be common amongst girls. It was mentioned by some mothers that they assigned characters to the other children and enacted whole story which was usually prepared on the spot or had reflections from their real life experiences. The characters which were dramatized often were teacher and students, mummy-papa, uncle-aunty and others. Singing, dancing, painting, drawing and other creative activities were some of the other commonly mentioned preferences of girls. While at play boys reportedly played more with cars, phones, video games, I-pads, TV, puzzles, bike-riding and more of outdoor play, the adults reported. Sohan, Chaitanya and Paras's parents specifically said that their children liked spending time outdoors. Gita's mother also mentioned that her daughter enjoyed outdoors, but she was often concerned regarding safety of the child. She said that they were allowed to play close to the house and she kept supervising them.

3.6.3.7. Desirable and undesirable changes

During the interviews, adults were asked about the changes they observed in their children and whether there were any changes that were undesirable. Discussions were also advanced about desirable changes. After some thought about the questions, there was an unequivocal sense of affection for the child as these issues were being discussed. The first reaction tended to be positive to say that there was nothing undesirable about the child, although further probing always extracted some detailed discussions. Nearly all of them welcomed the "*samjhadari*" (understanding) which their children had started displaying in day to day interactions. Development of the language and communication was also appreciated. Several parents were pleased that the shyness had reduced and children were more confident now. They believed that children become more social with growing age, and that was seen as a positive development. They were reported to have started respecting others, caring for siblings, understanding others, responsibility towards themselves and others too, adjust within circumstances. Some parents, especially in instances where the children displayed this behaviour,

also liked the independence of children in doing the school work and personal activities. Parents felt that they were now comparatively tension free, that they were now a bit more “free” in comparison with earlier (Ankita’s mother).

There were certain other behaviours which these parents did not appreciate. It could be analysed that this element was in fact just another facet of the autonomy that children were expressing. When the assertiveness is at odds with the family dynamics, in some way does not fit in with the image of an obedient and compliant child, the same dimension of assertiveness and confidence was taken as undesirable. Most of the parents indulgently mentioned that their child was very naughty (*shararti*). In some instances, a sense of helplessness and mild exasperation was also discernible regarding handling the children who were perceived as unmanageable on occasion. Some other undesirable behaviours mentioned were stubbornness, sticking to the mother, anger and aggression, fights among siblings and children not obeying them. When the parents were narrating incidents, a relation could be seen between children becoming more assertive and also stubborn and perceived as “not listening” to parents or adults around. Several mothers mentioned something like “*yeh meri baat nahi sunti/sunta*” (She does not listen to me). Guni’s mother said: “*bas zid wali pasand nahi aa rahi mujhe. Zid bhi jarurat se jyada karti hai*” (Only her stubbornness is something which I don’t like. She becomes too demanding often). There were some children who did not like ‘studying’. Tanvi, Sohan, Sonam and Shanta were some of the children whose parents said that their child liked other thing more than studies, and that was a cause for some concern. They liked watching TV, playing or doing something else but not studies. Food was another main concern of a few parents, saying the child does not eat very well. Paras and Sunny’s mothers were not contented with the way their children were not greeting others when they met them. They said these children had to learn to be more soft or polite at least in wishing or meeting others. Nena’s mother was concerned for her child’s over-consciousness regarding the dress, shoes and overall appearance. Paras and Kavyansh’s parents did not like their boys picking up abusive language.

3.6.3.8. Sibling relationships

Several of the children had siblings or cousins living in the same household. An attempt was made to explore adults’ perceptions of children’s relationships with other children. Mothers reiterated that on the whole the children had become more responsible and caring towards

younger siblings. They were reported to be affectionate, responsive and protective. Asha's mother: *"agar koi Prisha ko kuch keh de to yeh us se ladai kar leti hai"* (If someone hits Prisha, younger sister, she fights with them). Children were playing together, involving the younger ones in their own friends' group and at times helped them to complete tasks. They also expected others to be more caring and careful towards the younger one. Sharing of things had increased between them. If fact if they had received some gift or candies, they would ask for the siblings share s well. They also showed concerns for the safety of the sibling, being more watchful, keeping the parents informed about their whereabouts. Garima's mother shared that *"she sang a lullaby to her sister and by the time I came back the little one had already slept"*. Omi's mother felt that although he was somewhat dominating with the younger one, he had become very responsible. He used to accompany his brother for his tuition classes, it was reported. Ankur's mother complained about the fights between the brothers, but also mentioned that they were inseparable. Shanta's mother shared that *"bahen ka bhi dhyan rakhti hain. Pehna deti hai kapde vapde, khana khila deti hai, khel khila leti hai"* (She takes care of the sister. She puts her clothes on, feeds her meals, and keeps her occupied/playing). Sohan's father talked about his son *"yeh to kai baar kehta hai ki main bada bhai hoon. Share kar leta hai cheezen"* (He often says that I am the elder brother. He shares things). Sheena and Rita's mothers said that they were very caring for their elder brothers, also dominating them occasionally. Gita and Guni's mothers mentioned that they seemed much more obedient when their older sisters instructed them in comparison with the mother. Both these girls were reported to be constantly following their older sister, admiring their things and trying on their dresses.

With a strong bond of love, care and admiration, fighting amongst sibling was quite commonly reported. Many parents said that they were astonished and upset with children's fights. These instances of arguments and even physical fights were reported more by mothers of boys, where both siblings were male. Adi, Ankur, Abhit, Ashu, Atul and Sohan were some of the children whose parents said they were often upset with the fights occurring between the brothers. In the case of Guni who had a younger brother, the mother reported that *"agar iske bhaiya ko hug kar liya aur isko nahi kiya to yeh chid jaegi ki aap isi ko pyar karte ho"* (If you hug the brother and not her, she will be upset and say you love him only). In the case of one girl and her elder brother, Rita's mother shared that after Rita's brother had gone to the hostel, she had started missing him a lot, but also fights with him when he comes home for the holidays. Thus

we can see that birth order, gender and temperament, along with several other factors, plays an important role in the explanations that parents give to sibling relationships. Whereas protectiveness and affection dominate the discussion of children's relationships with younger children, admiration and followership was marked for the children with older siblings. Clear gender patterns in reporting were observed and by and large more frequent discussions of difficulty were reported in sibling relationships between brothers.

3.6.3.8. Use of pacifiers

Parents' opinions regarding pacifiers were explored during the interviews. Their opinions were explored to gain insights of its usage and perceived benefits. It was reported that pacifiers were being used when the child cried a lot and mothers had incomplete work around the home. At times these were used to put children at ease when they were too restless or disturbed, or wanted to sleep. Adi's grandmother shared that he had recently stopped using the feeder bottle and the pacifier. Although in Adi's case, the pacifier had been used extensively, but his grandmother argued that it should not be used as it weakens the child internally. This was a decision that the mother had taken since she had a younger child soon after, and Adi remained in the care of his maternal grandmother. Along with the internal weakness, she also pointed out that it weakens the "*tal*" (palate), and modifies the shape of children's lips. Mahi's mother added that she believed that it affects the shape of the teeth, and would not support its use saying that doctors also disapprove of the same. Further children get habitual to it as they think that they are getting breast feed and then they do not leave it easily. Adi's grandmother said "*yeh aajkal ki ladkiyan hain na yeh laga deti hain, kyunki sab akeli rehti hain, bachche rote hain, kam nahi karne dete*" (Today's new generation girls use it more, because they live alone. And when children cry they do not let them do the work). Sohan's father that now his son has started taking milk from the glass and he said "*main ab bada ho gaya hoon*" (I have grown up now).

3.6.3.8. Some comments

There was some evidence to suggest that the changes taking place in children were far more frequently acknowledged among the urban middle and upper class adults. Within the rural model (which includes both villages and urban poor) tended to dismiss the question. As a matter of fact one can go further to say that the interview questions themselves had to be sort of

reframed to fit in with the way the adults were answering them. For instance, Abhit's mother, when she was asked what were the changes in him that she really liked, she looked away and said rather shyly, "*Accha hi lage hai*" (Feels nice only). At this point, she looks intently at her son as if searching for an answer in him "*Kaam bhi bade acche kare hai yo*" (He does really nice things also), and then scrunches her face at him. It often seemed that the questions that we were coming up with were sort of discordant for the mothers, ones that they would rather not answer. Repeatedly, this technique of looking intently at the child while searching for an answer, was also observed in these families. To being asked whether there have been changes in her daughter over the last year, Guna's mother replies "*Kuch bhi naa hai, main to kuchh nhi jaanti*" (None there are none. I don't know anything) with a smile. Others around her titter with laughter. When asked why this was the case, she responds that she leaves the house to work in the fields in the morning and returns late. The researcher persists by asking her if she notices any other changes. At this point, Guna's mother looks down at her and with a ready smile she says "*Aur koi badlav kya hai, bas yeh hai ki haath thoda maarle hai, bas aur koi badlav naa hai*" (There is no other change, only that she has started using her hands a little bit more. That's it, no other change) and looks down at her. Then again asking if there is a change she doesn't like, she passes it off with a smile saying "*Ab badlav to.....baccha hai to badlav.....to hoga hi...ab ke bataaon?*" (Now, change.....a child will change.....it will be there.....now what should I say?) Of course when she is asked if she can wear clothes by herself, the mother is quick to say yes! Eats on her own is asked and the mother instantly nods and says yes! Repeatedly, they tended to focus on continuity, until of course the question was broken down for them. For instance, "*kuch bhi badlav na hai. Ye to aisi/aisa hi hai*". On some probing they did describe a little about the child in general. When the question on changes liked in the child they tended to again give a sort of global answer, rather than taking separate incidents or examples, "*yeh to sab kaam achha hi kare hai*" (He/She does everything nicely/nice things). (Gita, Abhit, Neha and Pia). Regarding what changes they do not like in the child, there was a clear dismissal of the any negative thing in their child. They replied something like, "*kuch bhi na. bartav sab sahi hai hamare bachhon ke*" (Nothing at all. The behaviour is all fine of our children). Perhaps some of this could relate to the ecology of rural lives where women are actively involved in farm and domestic work, finding little time to sit and watch changes in their child. Secondly, this sort of careful observation was also found to be unfamiliar to them. Some restlessness was also observed during the interviews,

they always wanted to get on with their work in many instances. Perhaps Ruchi's mother's response says it all, "*dhyan hi na diyo kabhi. Kaam hi itna hota hai*".

3.6.4. Conclusion

There was a clear divide among the village adults and urban middle and upper class adults in their approach to the interview questions, revealing a clear difference in the ways in which changes in childhood are understood. It was only when specific details were questioned (about eating or dressing) that the mothers/grandmothers commented that their children were surely doing all these things. In another distinction, there was also no particular behaviour that they seemed to categorize as undesirable in rural families. Perhaps accompanied with lesser sanction on children, there was also greater acceptance of a range of behaviours, at least at this age. In Guna's case for instance, when the mother was asked about her having dropped out from school, she quickly responded that she had tried a couple of times to go to the school and ask the teacher to be kinder to her, but had dropped the issue. Perhaps there is also a greater acceptance of circumstances as well. This attitude can clearly be an adaptation to the setting where there is far less opportunity and time for taking control of the situation related to school. Mothers are usually occupied all day in chores around the house and farmland, leaving little time for supervision and structuring children's lives.

Among the urban families, much more supervision and management of children had indeed resulted in greater discussions and higher vigil, also leading to much longer interviews with minute details and enthusiastic responses. The child was a favoured topic for discussions. They were delighted to report most of the changes which their children were expressing. In some instances, assertiveness became a nuisance, when it didn't fit in with the idea of appropriate children's conduct, like talking back or being stubborn, the parents reported. Episodes of aggression were also looked at with some disapproval, sometimes with a sense of defeat at being unable to handle the child's conduct. There was a range of tolerance after remarking something like, "children being children after all". Some of the behaviours that were marked included greater confidence, ownership, maturity and concern in relationships with others. They were reported to be more sensible, understanding, in control of the self, sensitive towards others, adjusts in difficult contexts and expressive in their views. Their communication skills were seen as having developed dramatically in terms of vocabulary, sentence formation, expression and

confidence while talking to others. Most parents associated this spurt in language acquisition to the exposure to formal school. Parents reported that their children were now more confident, participative, interactive and sociable. The speed and efficiency with which children could pick up new information was also noted by several adults admiringly. Most of the children were reported to have liked going to school and they were also doing well in studies. Regarding reluctance to go to school noticed in some children, parents said that they were loath to wake up during cold mornings in the winter. Whereas school was mostly seen in a positive light regarding the effects on children, the interactions with other children sometimes led to the picking up of unfavourable habits, like foul language, some adults reported. The most frequently mentioned positive change was that children were comparatively more “*samajhdar*” (sensible). They said that they (the children) had become lot more caring towards siblings, parents or even other adults. The capacity to do many tasks on their own was noted (by urban adults) as freeing parents from constant supervision. No such sentiment was expressed in families in the village or urban poor.

Regarding what children enjoyed doing, urban parents made more detailed disclosures about their children, also saying that they (the children) did not like being ignored. Children liked playing a lot, both indoor and outdoor games. Gender differences were remarkably visible in the adults’ responses. Where girls preferred playing with make-belief toys or games boys were more involved in toys like cars, video games and action cartoons. All the children loved TV viewing, the parents reported. A few of them chose to eat their meals in front of the TV with their choice of program. Some children were fussy eaters while some said that their children did not like vegetables and milk. Rural respondents were dismissive of any negative changes in their children. When parents were given a chance to ask anything from the researchers, only very few of them actually asked questions. Their main concern was to understand researcher’s opinion on their child’s development. One of the mothers wanted to know what she could do to reduce her child’s anger.

On the whole parents seemed to welcome the development changes taking place in their children. Some of the changes had already been internalized completely by children and some skills, behaviours they were still learning. At some places it was felt that in research setting where the respondents were not familiar with questioning, they had problems in understanding the meaning of question, however probing helped to some extent. It must be noted that these same families had been visited a year earlier, and were very comfortable with the researcher.

Thus it could be re-affirmed that the questions, in fact the approach to looking minutely at developmental changes, did not fit the frame of childhood familiar to the rural model of family life.

3.7.Children's play activities

3.7.1. Overview of play

The play setting can be described as semi-structured. The researcher provided a standard set of objects to children in both the settings asking them to play, 'as they would like to'. Other people were neither encouraged, not prohibited from entering the situation, although the instructions to play were given only to the child in the study. Children were observed closely for a period of 15 minutes. Their play was video-recorded and later analysed. The current section will elaborate on the examples from the play with materials, which provide an insight into children's world of play.

3.7.2. Ecology of play setting:

3.7.2.1.Presence of adults

Adults were not required to be present during children's play, yet some decide to sit and watch, some interact, some continue with their chores in separate rooms while in some cases they are not to be seen at all. In all situations the main focus was to observe children's play with the set of toys that the researcher brought along with her. However, it was interesting to see what adults chose to do while children got themselves treated with the toys. Here is a rough classification of the ways in which different adults chose to interpret their role in the session. It must be noted here that all the families were familiar with the researcher since she had visited them a year or so ago, and at that time, had also done a very similar session with the children.

No Adult Present

An adult not being around is clearly illustrated from the examples of many children. Observing the sequence of play by Kaju illustrates that none of the adults are seen in the vicinity, although one of the mother's sisters is seen later, doing some household chores. Kaju along with her cousins and friends plays with the toys and is mostly sitting aside watching her siblings and neighbours play with the toys, occasionally taking part actively in the sequence. With so many

children around the adults tended to leave the children with their own activities. It was also the way they tended to interpret the demands of the research session. Besides, it must be also reported here that the everyday household responsibilities of storing water, making a living and managing within the small spaces that these families had (Kaju and her neighbours), it became very difficult to simply sit and watch. The women were hard-pressed for time, and the men were usually away, earning a living off the street, in casual labour or private employment. In the later part of the video a child does come up with a complaint and addresses her aunt to intervene when something is not going as desired.

Sarita, a confident and a very vocal child plays confidently without having any adult around. She engages in an active dialogue with the researcher compelling the researcher to answer her questions. The researcher for her part tries to engage in a neutral way without leading or guiding the child's activities in any way.

Shanta chose to play with the toys in the park near her house. This was the only instance when a child had stepped outside the house, going beyond the courtyard to play. She settled on a bench with the bag of toys and kept herself busy for the entire duration without looking for or calling out to an adult. Perhaps this exclusive session with play materials was not something she wanted to share or be supervised for, and this was her way of maximising the session.

There were several instances where the adult seems to be around in the beginning but as child becomes comfortable with the toys they leave not to be seen or heard at all. In Adi's case, the grandmother was present when the researcher instructed him and initiated the play with toys. The grandmother (maternal) also reinforced the instructions for the session and guided the child to play by suggesting how he should use the toys. Soon, she left to complete some household work and the child continued to play on his own.

Atul was hesitant to face the camera in the beginning and refused to play with the toys, but a gentle reassurance from the mother made him comfortable and he initiated play after which the mother left to continue with her tasks, out of the view of the play situation, leaving the child.

Present but not visible

Many adults chose to continue their chores while the child was engaged in the play. For instance, Guni played along with two other children not noticing the presence or absence of the

adults. In this home, the children were playing in the living room of the house- a central area adults can conveniently and non-intrusively watch over the children.

Pia and Rahul, both neighbours in a rural setting, were observed together by the researcher. They played together along with many other children with the toys materials. The toys were spread on a cot placed in a courtyard and children selected, shared, and played with the different materials, sometimes moving a bit to the side to maintain some exclusive attention, and sometimes moved in closer to the others. Not even once in the 15 minutes period was a single adult enter the scene of play, although they were sitting around in the courtyard. In this setting, particularly, children's play was not seen as something that needed either adult intervention or their attention. Children play, and that is it. Intervention was seen as partly obligatory more in the domain of study, and that too more for either advice or instruction rather than involvement. Play preferences, learning and engagement with materials was seen as something quite temperamental and dependent on individual proclivity rather than requiring supervision or guidance.

Present and watchful

Although according to the instructions, adult presence was not obligatory, many adults chose to watch the children's activities fairly closely. For instance, Asha's mother expressed her curiosity about the session and her daughter's engagement with the materials and chose to stay and watch and also comment. The child, for her part, found her mother's presence to be significant by repeatedly smiling and involving the mother by showing her something or saying something to her. Sometime later, the grandmother also joined the scene and watched, first checking with the researcher if it was okay for her to be there. Such an encounter would have never happened in a rural setting since the way spaces and activities are defined in villages precludes any such appropriation, either by the family or by the researcher. In fact, any attempts at seclusion are fundamentally suspect, and such sessions have to be conducted in full view of the family and community. Attempts at segregation are incomprehensible and inappropriate. Asha's grandmother's explanation, "*Dekhna chah rahi hun main bhi*" (I also wanted to see), and enjoyment of her granddaughter's complex pretend play as a 'mummy', with the kitchen utensils and cooking activity were thoroughly enjoyed by her (the grandmother).

Similarly Abhit's grandmother sat watching the children play. His grandfather came in between and checked with children asking "*Haan bhai kya chal rha hai*" (Hey, what's going on here), without expecting a response from the children. However, the grandmother did intervene gently to ensure an effective video recording by adjusting some of the children's positions as they played. It seemed as if they didn't even notice her, so engrossed they were in their activities.

Outside their village home, in the courtyard, Guna and Ruchi played along with 10 other children. Occasionally some quarrels ensued over one object or another, but these were resolved among the children. There was such a clamour around the play material, that one of the women did raise her voice to say something to the children who got into a physical argument, but it went completely unheeded.

Watchful and interactive

There were some settings where adults chose to actively interact with the children while they were playing. In the case of Kanti, the adult, an aunt spends time with the child regularly, after he comes from school since his mother was at work. She was constructing several make-believe play situations. In one instance during the play session, she herself wore the stethoscope and checked Kanti's chest and asked him "*Apne dekha hai nadoctor uncle ko who kaise set karte hain kaise pehnate hai na? Ab aap pehno or check karo kisko check karoge, isko check karo*(puts the doll in front of him)." (You have seen the doctor use this? Now you wear this and check this). In addition to being constructive she related his play to several experiences to make connections and also keep the child engaged. In another example, she said "*Yeh woh wali gadi hai na jisse race lagate hain.*"(This is the sort of car with which they do car-racing), while taking out different cars from the bag.

Pawan has his mother sitting with him while he plays. Rather than observing, she chooses to interact and build the play sequences constructively, "*Chai banao, isko lo aur chai banao. Kaise banati hai mummy.*" (Make tea, take this and make tea. How does your mother make tea?)Pawandisplayed comfort and confidence with the mother's involvement and company.

In many of the play sessions, the main purpose of the adult was to fulfil the researcher's task of having the child play when the situation demanded it. For instance,Paras's mother initiated the play by introducing several interesting activities that she knew her son would become absorbed in since he was initially standing a bit away from the materials, "*Wow,dekho yeh kya*

hai, oh yeh to gas hai. Omi chai banata hai na, chai banayega mummy ke liye. Yeh lo ek cup mummy ke liye banao ek aunty ke liye". (Wow, look at this, what is this? Of this is a gas? You will make tea? You will make tea for mummy and aunty?). When the mother encouraged him this way, he wanted to bring water from the kitchen which the mother told him to run and get. This was followed by a robust cooking session with the play materials.

3.7.2.2. Number of adults

In several observations many adults were present when only one child was playing with the toys, also there were children playing without adult supervision or involvement, as well as intense participation as discussed in the earlier section. As described in Asha's case, the grandmother came to sit in along with the mother while she was busy pretending with the toys. Nayan was busy playing with his grandfather sitting near, silently and intensely watching him as well as the grandmother walking in and out of the video frame. Nayan was intensely absorbed in his activities with full concentration. Sohail's play observation was conducted with the mother sitting with the child with the gradual entry of curious neighbours and cousins resulting many adults looking over one child at play, discussing him, sometimes teasing, but he persisted in doing his own thing.

3.7.2.3. Presence of children

Another common set up was having one adult with many children; this was a common setting in semi urban and rural setups. Sometimes it was difficult to identify the child being observed in the circle of many children. In urban households it was mostly 2 children playing alongside, with one adult. The children playing with the child under observation was mostly a sibling, a cousin or a neighbourhood friend.

Presence of another child sometimes facilitated free play by the child and many a times it also overshadowed the play of the child to be observed. Mahi while playing with her two cousins/siblings enacted several make believe situations involving the two cousins. She used the stethoscope to check the little one and also gave an injection to her pretending herself to be a doctor.

Guna and Ruchi, were not only observed playing together with the same set of toys there were at least 10 more children (of different age groups) present around them actively playing

with the same set of toys. This not only made the two girls insecure but also most of their time was spent in fighting with other children to get the toys. But the setting beautifully brought out the natural setting that children live everyday making the play observation a truly natural one.

Similarly Bunty and Monty also played together and were observed simultaneously. But in their case there were not many children who accompanied them. Only one child was seen playing with Bunty and Monty. This helped them play much more comfortable as compared to Guna and Ruchi. Their play demonstrated more symbolic play with single and multiple objects.

3.7.2.4. Play setting

The play task was mainly conducted in the child's home, or courtyard outside the house. Sometimes if the children were video recorded together (GunaRuchi, Monty, and Bunty), the natural setting, where children spent time together with each other, was taken to have the play session. The task was mostly situated in the living room, and dining room in the urban households. Sometimes, children were more comfortable playing in parent's bedroom on the large bed along with an adult sitting nearby.

While in urban poor and rural households, children mostly played in an open courtyard or area outside the home, this location gave them more space and freedom to play and actively move around with toys like ball and car. However, the pretend play activities were also conducted by the children in all settings, indoor and outdoor. Only Shanta was seen playing in the park near her house. She chose to carry the toys to a bench and sat comfortably exploring the materials and constructing some make-believe play away from other adults and children.

3.7.3. Structure of play

In the observations, it was evident that play comes naturally to children. Whether in wealthier homes or rural courtyards, city streets or small rooms, children were innovative and interactive with the materials. Only a few children were inhibited during the session. Some of the ways in which children played with the toys were analysed regarding the symbolic level of play as well as complexity. The following section presents a description of this classification with examples.

3.7.3.1. Simply manipulating the objects

Children were found to be curious about the bag of play materials, some of course more than others. In order to familiarise themselves with the toys, children were observed to be spending some initial time exploring and manipulating the objects. Most often, the bag would be overturned and then the objects would simply be manipulated to explore what all was included. They sometimes picked specific toys, looked at them and returned them to the pile. Object manipulation frequently involved labelling them aloud, "*Arre wah yeh gadi itni sari?*" (Wow, so many cars?). Toys that appeared to have ambiguous function received attention as well, and children tended to ask questions about these, sometimes also asking the nearby adults (researcher, mother, other) questions like, "*Yeh hanky kiska hai?*" (Whose hanky is this?). When the researcher was addressed, she usually responded with, "*Aap batao kiska hai?*" (You tell me whose it is) or "*yeh toys ka hi hai*" (This belongs to the toys only).

The two hand-made dolls captured children's curiosity very intensely, "*Yeh kya hai?*" (What is this?), "*Kaun hai yeh?*" (Who is this?) were frequent questions from children. They usually spent a lot of time with these dolls and also fought over them when there was a demand from other children to play with them. There were also some comments about the clothes or hair of the dolls since these were custom-made and did not seem familiar to the children like the other. Comments did come about regarding their clothes wear and hair. It was also found that object manipulations by children mainly preceded symbolic play and pretend play, although when the group of children was very large, sessions were often interrupted by other children demanding the same objects, and play could not go into more complex forms, it was observed. It seemed that in order to reach complexity and symbolic play with multiple objects, children needed some exclusive time with objects. Episodes of this kind were reduced with larger numbers of children not on account of capacity, since some events were observed, but on account of the situation. Thus, exclusive and longer sessions were the necessary but not sufficient conditions for complex activity. Older children also went into more complex forms of play, as was expected. The younger children spent much more time in manipulation and observation of the toys, as was observed in the play sessions one year before.

3.7.3.2.Symbolic play- Single object

Children were using the toys creatively to play. The medical equipment of stethoscope and injection from the doctor's set were ubiquitous in their appeal. They were used exclusively and with other toys, like using the injection on a doll. Mostly children picked up the stethoscope and placed it in their ears to check something, or someone else sitting nearby. The items were recognized and used in all settings, rural and urban. Using them with dolls was a common activity. There seemed to be no specific pattern related to gender, with both boys and girls being equally intrigued by these. Adults also, when present, were amused by children's engagements with these materials, and actively encouraged and even participated in the pretend play, often acting as clients at a clinic, but that is an example of more complex activity and will be discussed in the next section..

Some other examples of this sort of play were observed when Sarita involved herself in arranging and identifying the different kinds of cars. Paras on the other hand played intensely with kitchen utensils, not just using them singularly (putting the lids on pan) but also combining his acts into a pretend play situation of making tea, which would also be characterised by more complex engagement than manipulation, and entered into the realm of obvious symbolic use of objects.

Symbolic play brought out children's familiarity and comfort with the materials as well as the setting, and was found to be a very frequent form of engagement with the objects. Garima's conversation with the researcher illustrates an instance of creative expressions of children. Looking at the doll Garima asks the researcher what it is. The researcher returns the question gently to explore the child's perception and Garima promptly responds "Uncle". Quite taken up with the two dolls, Garima continues to describe to the researcher that the doll's hands look like a bird. "Can it be a bird?" the researcher asks her, "You tell me what you think this is" Garima answers, "This looks like a joker since it's wearing so many colours." Finding the material so intensely exciting, Garima was able to capture three images in the conversation, an uncle, to bird to the joker! Perhaps many more had crossed her mind as she was manipulating it for a while before the dialogue. In another situation Sunny considers the gas-cylinder, part of the kitchen-set as a box to place a car in. He discovered that the toy cylinder could be broken from the centre to open it up and join it back again. He opens it, slips in the car and joins back the cylinder.

Apart from the imaginative use of the materials, children also engaged in using objects for the functions which they represented, as miniature cups, pans, coombs and blocks. They sipped tea, cooked imaginary meals in pans, covering the lid, pretended to eat with forks and spoons, and used the comb on their hair, and also stacked blocks and moved cars about a great deal. There did not appear to be any gender-based patterns to the play preferences of children in this research.

The black pouch in the set of toys was put to interesting usage by the children. They were seen to be used for putting cars, utensils and sometimes as a purse for the comb as well. The handkerchief was mostly preferred as a covering sheet for the dolls or was folded and kept aside in simulation of a housekeeping task as shown by Sarita in her play. Intense and active cooking and living room scenes were enacted by Sheena in her use of the sofa and gas stove, to switch it on and off, to heat up water in a pan and prepare tea. Although the last activity would go under multiple objects symbolic play, it was hard to separate the different levels since they were frequently intermingled. The separation is created here simply to mention that these were the different ways in which children played, and not to create any notion of separation, or even sequencing, since the age-range was very narrow and also, developmental assessment in the conventional sense was not an aim of this study. It is believed here, that multiple levels of activity are always ongoing in children as they progress from simple to more complex levels of activity, hence there is no realistic purpose in separating, evaluating and categorising. The purpose of this study was simply to document children's play.

3.7.3.3.Symbolic Play- Multiple objects

Children often combined multiple toys together in elaborate pretend play. One of the most interesting combinations of toys involved the use of dolls along with other objects. For instance, the small chair(the same one that was used to explore scale errors (talked about in the previous section) and other kitchen utensils. Honey and Sohan, like many other children, picked up the doll and placed it on the chair while offering them tea or making the doll sit along with the first one. The dolls and chair seemed to frequently be combined in play, as was the doctor's set and the dolls.

Apart from these there were many interesting combinations of play materials that the children expressed. While playing, Garima used the ball as a fruit and a vegetable and pretended

to use a spoon as a peeler, peeling the ball for the preparation of a meal. She acknowledged her friend who joined her in the play and continued to peel the ball, placing it in a plate, acting as if to cut it and then placing it in a pan to cook over the gas stove. There were many such examples, which were illustrated by children displaying their detailed examination and understanding of adults worlds and tasks that were being done around them. Rita just played for a few minutes but demonstrated an advanced use of the toys. In her play, it was the doll that was expressed as executing the actions. She made the doll use the cup and sip tea, holding the doll with one hand and making the doll hold a teacup with the other hand taking the teacup to her mouth (with the doll's hand in between). Many children also used cars to put together their play acting. Racing cars together and smashing the cars to simulate an accident scene was also seen.

3.7.3.4. Complex play

There was a fine difference between the symbolic play using multiple objects and complex play. Complex play involved children attaching some kind of narrative along with the play sequence while playing with multiple objects. This was noted when children combined several objects together to put together an act. Complex play of children involved shifting of episodes yet having continuity as a created, ongoing narrative. As an example, Nena first wears the stethoscope herself and says, "*Main banugi doctor*" (I will become the doctor). After wearing it she picks up the doll and makes it sit on the chair and then examines her with the stethoscope. In this episode we see her moving from one sequence to the other simultaneously constructing and narrating a story. Nena illustrates many episodes of complex play, while picking up and pretending to fill the injection she asks the doll, "*Injection lagwana hai?*" (Do you want an injection?) and makes the doll nod and says aloud, "*Isko injection lagwana hai*" (She wants an injection) and follows it up with the act of injecting the doll as 'desired'.

Complex play was also observed with cars. While playing with the cars, Monty pretends to do a car race with another child, holds two cars in his hands and makes them race with the other child's cars, repeating the intense sequence of car-racing with a narrative.

Nayan goes one step ahead and brings in his own toys into the scene. He has two super hero models which he uses to play and construct a complex sequence, enacting a fight between the super hero models, picking up the one he had placed on the chair and one lying on the side to engage them in a fight, then throws away one saying aloud that it had died, picks up another and

then brings it into another fight sequence. Then he makes the one who is supposed to be winning topple several cars as a victorious hero. Some of the men are then placed on top of cars and then pretends to break them up. Kanti uses the dolls and enacts a fight sequence, using them to somersault around and fall, hitting the dolls with a ball and making them fight again, accompanying the sequence with a narrative explaining the rather gory narrative that “*Iski garden kat gayi*”, pretending one of them is dead.

3.7.4. Narratives

Apart from using toys to depict their complex thought processes, children sometimes expressed detailed narratives while playing. Most children spoke little and were busy exploring the toys while a few of them engaged in narrating detailed stories. In her play session, Sarita talked a lot about what she was doing, intently involved in her imaginary world with the given objects. She also talked to the researcher asking her to help her set up the blocks and also displayed her thoughts while figuring how to attach the blocks in the best possible way.

There were some narrations while children enacted complex play with the toys. “*Kuch log hote hain unhe kahin baithna hota hai. To unhe yeh gas na ek bench lagti hai.*” (Some people have to sit and for them there is this button that the gas (Stove) has), Sheena says, pointing towards the button. Then adds, “*Unhe lagta hai ki is button se na bench badi hoti hai. Hnnn woh badi to ho rahi thi par pata hai kya hua us par jab baithe to bumsy pe aag lag gayi.*” (They feel that from the button, a bench will be bigger, but what happened was that when they sat down, their bottom got burnt). The above narration is one of the many stories that Sheena created in a span of 15 minutes throughout which a constant and complex narrative was ongoing. The toys were like props for her, which fuelled her imagination to construct the wonderful stories.

3.7.5. Summing up the play

From the episodes of play, the world of children seemed more accessible, and the standard set of materials provided a productive medium for these expressions. Children who were expressive and interactive in the interview sessions were also the ones who were most intense and forthcoming in the play sessions as well. Sheena, Nayan, Asha, Netra, Shrey and Chetan were among the most interactive and expressed complex forms of play punctuated frequently by intense narratives. As discussed earlier, the urban, middle income families where

parents and grandparents were focussed on children's play sessions facilitated the sessions such that play could progress beyond the introductoryfamiliarising, manipulation and labelling. For the multiple children situations, there is no denying the fact that exchanges and engagements with other children and adults allowed the children to conduct complex activity if the other was a partner in play, but when the cometeing for desired objects got too intense, that is when there were several children vying for the same materials, complex play was frequently interrupted and episodes tended to be shorter.

Adults varied in their engagement with the child, sometimes staying out of sight, on the margins, watchful or intensely interactive. Children seemed to be quite able to play under all circumstances.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1. Childhood settings

The primary aim of this research is to document children's self of self and their developing identity. From the different methods of this study, it was possible to compile several important impressions regarding this important domain of development. Children were found to be aware of themselves and their social setting, and expressed their opinions regarding their experiences as well as proceeded with an active engagement with objects when these were provided to them.

Through the interviews with adults, it was found that many of them were deeply impressed with the recent advances in conversation and ability that children had shown, their curiosity and endless questions were a source of delight for many parents as they displayed in their responses in interviews. Although the child's life and circumstances were differently interpreted in different settings, the presence and pleasure with children in the lives of the families was clearly evident in all settings, even when the family members were hard-pressed for resources and services for the care of the children and sustenance of family life.

It was possible to analyse and consolidate certain significant patterns based on the emerging model of family like and the care of children that has become discernible in these data. It was possible to construct a 2X2 model of family structure based on the number of adults and children in any setting (Chaudhary, 2013a). Figure 9 presents the proposed intersection:

Number	One Child	More than one child
One Adult	<u>Model 1</u> : Upper-middle income, upwardly mobile educated, few children family	<u>Model 2</u> : Many children usually single adult, recent migrant, lower income, often not educated, poor
More than one adult	<u>Model 3</u> : Relatively traditional, urban, educated, but multi-generation family with first child	<u>Model 4</u> : Mostly rural, also some urban, not highly educated, traditional, community living, traditional occupation, varied income

Figure 9: A 2X2 model based on number of children and adults

This model is a tentative introduction and also imposition on the data and a slight modification from the proposed model in Chaudhary (2013a); however, there were strong impressions to suggest that this separation was observed as bearing significant impact upon the ways in which children were growing up, and the dynamics of family relations, as well as children's adjustments and adaptations. The need to express this intersection between adults and children was also seen as a compulsion to critique the existing predominance of the single child, single adult as the norm for developmental psychology. In fact, this was observed as prevailing only in 10 of the 44 play sessions and even fewer families if all methods of study and all periods of a child's day were to be counted. It must also be reported here that the single adult single child model does not appear even in the idealised version of a child's life. In fact, a child who is too closely attached to one person is believed to be more vulnerable in the lay understanding of childhood. Further research with this model is needed to see how well it fits into the ideological scheme of society.

Indian social settings across income groups and ecological settings tend to be of the kind found in Model 4: More than one child and more than one adult. However, the other two, single child with more than one adult and many children with one adult were also found and also seemed to bear influence on the care and conduct of the child. It must also be reported here that these are not neat categories, and some overlap is inevitable since reality rarely, if ever, follows the “neat categories created by scientists’ astute minds” (Chaudhary, 2004).

By and large all four models of family life were found to prevail, and along with that, the adaptations to the situation, the beliefs about family and children as well as the expressions and activities of children were also found to be influenced.

4.1.1. Model 1: One child one adult

In some families, during the research session, a child was often alone with one adult, the mother. These were always urban educated, middle income families living in separate homes, usually apartments in high-rise buildings, where the traditional structure of family life has become transformed except in the instances where multiple generation families are living together or near each other. Children’s lives are conducted in safe spaces, early schooling, high access to services, health-care, entertainment, disposable income and literate environment. Usually, these gated communities allow a lot of activities for the children under closely monitored circumstances. Children join school early, and active involvement and intense participation of parents in schooling was observed. Although several other adults and children are encountered on a daily basis, the child and his or her parents (mostly one parents at a time) are closely connected and constantly together. The mothers (and a few fathers) were found to follow children closely regarding their activities, participation in school, food they eat, clothes they wear, their homework as well as entertainment.

Children in these homes were found to be expressive, interactive and easily drawn into dialogue. They expressed confidence and openness with the researcher and showed enthusiastic involvement in play and other activities. Interviews with the children were interactive and engaging. Interviews with adults demonstrated and supported the claim of keeping a close watch on children. The adults tended to believe that childhood is an outcome of close supervision and although individual destiny and temperament was acknowledged, mothers often expressed the importance of keeping a close relationship with and guidance of the child in learning, eating,

dressing and conversations. Children were found to be easy to engage with others and also expressed opinions about friendships with other children and adults with ease. They seemed high on confidence and were able to hold their own position and perspective.

4.1.2. Model 2: More than one children one adult

This model was seen in instances where an urban educated family had more than one child, but in this instance, the model that remains significant is Model 1. However, the presence and participation of another child actively alters the environment for the child, altering the social setting significantly. In the instance of Shrey and his older brother, it was found that initially, all the questions addressed to the younger brother were abducted by the older one who gave enthusiastic and alert responses on behalf of his brother. After being urged to let the younger one speak, for a few moments, Shrey looked eagerly at his brother to fill in, but soon gained his voice, and spoke fervently in response to the questions posed to him about choices and reasons for these choices. Through the session the two brothers remained in close interaction, sometimes sparring and sometimes chatting with each other. It seemed that left to themselves, they were a team, but were also able to hold their ground independently. There were several such families in the sample, and in the play situation, XX were observed in this setting. Some overlap with Model 4 was seen, when there was co-residence of these families with the grandparent generation, then it became many children with many adults.

4.1.3. Model 3: One child more than one adult

The instance of one child with many adults was usually seen in relatively traditional homes, where three generations were co-residing, whether on different floors or in the same home. Typically, the child was the centre of attention, moving from one person to another, actively supervised and constantly engaged. Children were seen to be the centre of the family dynamics. There was a great deal of variation in children's engagement with the researcher, in Nena's instance, she was interactive, talkative and forthcoming and was the centre of attention of the grandparents as well as the parents. Some children, like Paras, were quite involved in their own thing and did not spend much time with the researcher. These children were happy to spend time with grandparents who seemed to have important responsibilities like picking up and

dropping the children to and from school. Grandparents showed keen interest in children's lives and stayed near the researcher during the sessions.

4.1.4. Model 4: More than one child, more than one adult

The last model, that of more than one child and more than one adult (or many children, many adults) was the most frequent model of family life, where children grew up as one of many, cared by one of many. Although primarily emerging from a rural model of family life, where children grow up in each other's company, loosely supervised by a collection of concerned adults, often left to their own resources very soon after they can start walking, the context they live in remains largely focused on social activity rather than school or learning, or even entertainment. The family and community is the main focus of activity, and children learn to spend time with and get along with each other. In instances where they migrate from these communities to the city, especially under circumstances of poverty, children become quite vulnerable to living on the street, or in slums. The model of existence is one that is adapted for a rural community living, but the urban poor settings are far from safe and children fall prey to exploitation, school drop-out and harsh circumstances that they would certainly have been protected from in the secure group of the village. Parents of young children also carry the model in their minds and tend to depend heavily on others, probably more if they are from the same region or ethnic background, but this dependency can lead to distressing outcomes on account of the pressures of community living in poverty. Dependability on others is essential for survival, but people are not often dependable on account of exigencies in their own lives or anti-social preoccupations.

Among wealthier families that move to the city, a similar pattern is observed, and children may not do very well in school, but the protection of a home and social group is ensured, and children are less vulnerable. Yet, the children depend heavily on each other, may not be very successful in school on account of language issues and may face regular challenges.

The rural community, that lives this way, is well-adapted to collective living, active dependence as well as relatively safe surroundings that actually allow children to move freely and autonomously or in the company of other children (no adults) very early in life. Often school performance is low, and children find it hard to sustain active interest in schools that are not favourable to either the people or the culture of these communities. Schools still train for urban

circumstances, and children often experience harsh punishment and active rejection. Guna was a child who fell out of school, or more appropriately, was pushed out of school under similar circumstances.

Thus these settings, when super-imposed with income, make for specific affordances for children's lives, creating protective factors when there is wealth, and resulting in specific vulnerabilities where there is none.

Although the settings were not possible to contain into water-tight categories since settings were shifting, the overall impression was drawn from the field visits, looking also at the total number of people living together in one household.

Table X - Distribution of the sample with adult-child distribution

Number	One child	More than one child	Total
One adult	7	7	14
More than one adult	10	20	30
Total	17	27	44

4.2. Models and the care of children

Regarding the context and care of children in these different models of childhood and family life, some patterns were discernible.

The findings of the study support the view that the care of children is inextricably linked with and adapted to the physical, social and psychological context in which children live. Further, it was found that regarding contexts of care, exclusive dyadic interactions with mothers were in a minority, with the largest number of children being brought up in the context of Many by Many (Many children by many adults). We find that the conventional assumption of adult-child relationships during early childhood as dyadic and based on individuality and independence

are also questioned by the results of this study as Rogoff et al. (1993) found among the families in San Pedro.

Children spent most of their time with other children, under moderate supervision of adults of the family. Further, children were found to be accommodating and adaptive in their interactions with other children especially when they were at some distance from adults. This finding resonates well with Nsamenang's work in Sub-Saharan African communities (1992). Play with adults was not frequent during the field observation, although it was reported in several interviews especially among the upper income group. Adults were found to usually let children play with each other, or by themselves, and entered the scene when children had to be fed, bathed, clothed or encouraged to sleep. The level of supervision for the different domains of children's care indicated towards a variable amount of regulation and different caregiving strategies in different domains of activity. In her study of parent beliefs, Tuli chose to label this asymmetry elective interdependence since interpersonal distance and guidance for different tasks varied significantly. Mothers reported being very vigilant about children's food intake and social relationships, choosing to let them be on several other issues (Tuli, & Chaudhary, 2010).

The involvement of other people in children's care was universal, to be found even among nuclear families with visits from and openness to 'others' like neighbours and relatives who come and go. Grandmothers, siblings, cousins, and aunts were all involved with the care of children, whereas the men seemed to be a bit reticent, perhaps on account of the camera, except in a few instances where they were seen to participate in every dimension of children's care. All four families in which the care was seen to be equally shared were couples living as nuclear units. This finding supports the claims of Roopnaraine and his colleagues regarding the enhanced participation of fathers among nuclear families (Roopnaraine et al., 1992; Roopnaraine, & Suppal, 2003). However, the impression during this study was that several of the men stepped away from the camera and research procedure, not because they did not interact with children, but because they thought this was socially appropriate to do so.

In the analysis of care of children, it was possible to distinguish three interconnected dimensions: context of care, attention to the child and focus of the adult. First was the **context of care**, regarding the adult to child ratio of the care arrangement: One by one, Many by one, One by Many or Many by Many. Further, although this sounds counter-intuitive, the care provided BY the adult and the care the child received could be separated, particularly on account of

multiple mothering. **Attention to the child** could be discussed between the two modes: *Distributed attention* and *Concentrated attention*. As the terms imply, the two ends of the continuum emerged as care that was distributed (between children, when there was more than one child) or concentrated (singular attention to a single child). Thirdly, the **focus of adults** could also be examined and classified by the polar categories of *Concurrent focus* and *Convergent focus*, wherein the former implies that the adult under question cares for the child along with other work and the other, convergent focus was intense and exclusive. Although these three dimensions (context, attention received and focus on) matched perfectly in the case of single children and their mothers, it was found that in the other three contexts (many by one, one by many and many by many), there was a need to examine them separately. The emerging models of care must be visualised as magnified presentations of reality that will always remain far more complex than this.

Rural families were characterised by multiple caregivers, distributed attention and concurrent focus. Urban educated families middle and upper income families mostly expressed concentrated attention, to and convergent focus on the child among nuclear families, but with multiple caregivers there was found to be some variation. Particularly those families who had recently migrated from villages, still persisted within the rural model of multiple caregiver, distributed attention and concurrent focus. This is the reason why children of the urban poor were found to be at a clear disadvantage. Most of the families among the urban poor lived in nuclear families, recently moved from villages and in constant contact through visits. Many of their beliefs were similar to that of the rural families. For the care of children, the arrangement they were most comfortable with, was also the rural model. However, within the context of this neighbourhood, the presence of other adults is available, but often unreliable. The care of children is sometimes left to other children, who are only slightly older, on account of the need for both parents to earn a living. The physical setting, the model of caregiving, and the non-availability of reliable others to care for them exposed these children to difficulties.

There is also a need to scrutinise the dynamics of creating categories for discussing phenomena. As a discipline, “psychology has a habit of separating functions that are mutually linked”, and then, through the process of ‘entification’, acting as if these rather dynamic processes have become unified entities in themselves (Valsiner, 2012, p. 190). However, it was precisely the mutual feeding into each other that makes any given psychological function

possible. These categories of focus and attention are not meant as separate identifiable traits in a person, rather, they are meant to exemplify a range of activities between adults and children. While understanding this classification, this particular clause must be kept in mind.

4.2.1. One child by one adult.

The context of the care of one child by one adult is well known. However, let us look at the attention and focus issues. In this context, we find that of the four theoretically possible combinations: Distributed attention with Concurrent focus, Distributed attention with Convergent focus, Concentrated attention with Concurrent focus and Concentrated attention with Convergent focus; only two are possible, as the figure shows.





		<u>One Child by One Adult</u>	
		CONVERGENT FOCUS	CONCURRENT FOCUS
CONCENTRATED ATTENTION		 CONVERGENT FOCUS AND CONCENTRATED ATTENTION	 CONCURRENT FOCUS AND CONCENTRATED ATTENTION
		 CONVERGENT FOCUS AND DISTRIBUTED ATTENTION	 CONCURRENT FOCUS AND DISTRIBUTED ATTENTION
		CONCENTRATED ATTENTION	DISTRIBUTED ATTENTION

Figure 10: Attention to child and Focus of adult in One by One context

When one child is being cared for by one adult, the focus of the adult is the same as the attention to the child since there is only one interface. Thus, concurrent focus by the adult will always be accompanied by its complement for the child, distributed attention. Our assumptions about the care of children are derived primarily by this model of the interface between Context, Focus and Attention. Yet in this study, it was found that this model of children's care was in a minority.

4.2.2. *Many children by one adult.*

This model was found in homes where there was a single caregiver and more than one child. In this context we find that there is an additional option when we compare it with the One by One model. In this instance, the two possibilities above stand, that when focus is convergent, the child received concentrated attention, if the child being cared for is the considered. Also, when there is concurrent focus, that the child will receive distributed attention is evident. However, an additional possibility is seen when the child being focused on is not the child in question. This example is seen among families where on the arrival of a second child, a single adult finds herself in a situation where attention to the older child would be distributed; even if she may have convergent focus, but towards the younger child. Evidence of this was found in the study in instances of the mother as the primary caregiver and additional children, as in the extreme case of Anil where the child was sent to live with the maternal grandmother after the mother found she could not cope with the situation after trying for a while. However, if the focus of the mother is concurrent, the attention to the child cannot be concentrated; this is only possible when there are multiple caregivers as we will see in the following models. The figure is an attempt to outline this situation.





<u>Many Children One Adult</u>		
	CONVERGENT FOCUS	CONCURRENT FOCUS
CONCENTRATED ATTENTION	 CONVERGENT FOCUS AND CONCENTRATED ATTENTION	 CONCURRENT FOCUS AND CONCENTRATED ATTENTION
DISTRIBUTED ATTENTION	 CONVERGENT FOCUS AND DISTRIBUTED ATTENTION	 CONCURRENT FOCUS AND DISTRIBUTED ATTENTION

Figure 11: Adult focus and Attention to Child in the context of Many by One

4.2.3. *One child and many adults.*

When there are many adults to one child, we see a different set of possibilities, as has emerged from the study. Adults may be differently oriented in the focus towards the child, and there are multiple possibilities. However, the situation of the child receiving distributed attention under conditions of convergent focus is not there since there is only one child to concentrate on, and he or she will receive that attention in concentrated and not distributed form. The figure follows:





<u>One Child Many Adults</u>		
	CONVERGENT FOCUS	CONCURRENT FOCUS
CONCENTRATED ATTENTION	 CONVERGENT FOCUS AND CONCENTRATED ATTENTION	 CONCURRENT FOCUS AND CONCENTRATED ATTENTION
DISTRIBUTED ATTENTION	 CONVERGENT FOCUS AND DISTRIBUTED ATTENTION	 CONCURRENT FOCUS AND DISTRIBUTED ATTENTION

Figure 12: Focus of adults and attention to child in the context of One by Many

4.2.4. *Many children by many adults.*

Finally, we arrive at the context of care that was most prevalent in this study, the care of many children by many adults. In this arrangement of care, we find that all possibilities of care are possible. In the rural areas we have concurrent focus and distributed attention; in urban upper income homes there was evidence of convergent focus and concentrated attention to the child by caregiver/s, there was also the possibility of convergent focus and distributed attention where a child may experience convergence from one adult, and concurrence from another. Further, it was also encountered that when one adult may provide concurrent care, a child still may receive convergent focus from another adult, thus providing children with many possibilities of care arrangements. Thus this model was found to be the most popular, the care in the village had

distributed attention to children by all adults who were always doing other things alongside. There was no evidence of convergent focus in villages except sporadically. In urban homes, there were some families who manifested a more ‘rural’ style of care and many adults distributed their attention to many children while all of them were carrying on their daily tasks. However, children also received convergent focus and concentrated attention by one or more adults as well as the possibility of having distributed attention, with convergent focus, since an adult may be focusing on another child, or adults may have different orientations. The figure below represents this model.

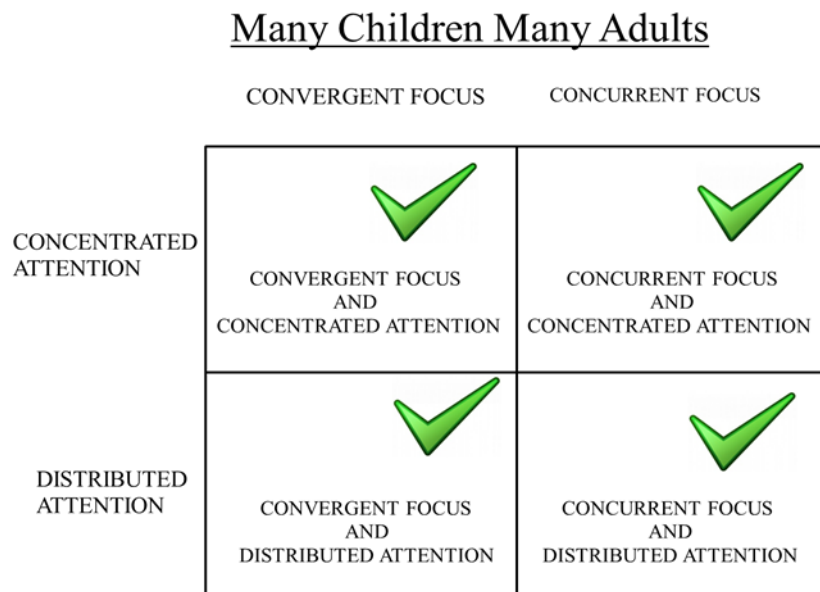


Figure 13: Attention to children and focus of adults in the context of Many by Many

Concurrent focus finds mention by Saraswathi (1994), although labelled as co-occurring care; she identifies this style of caregiving as one in which attention is divided among several different tasks. The classification developed in this study finds inspiration from this crucial contribution. Although these three dimensions (context, attention received and focus on) matched perfectly in the case of single children and their mothers, it was found that in the other three contexts (Many by one, one by many and many by many), there was a need to examine them separately.

Regarding fathers, the findings were not very conclusive. Although four fathers were found to have taken on all tasks of children's care and the household, the observations and interviews with the families did not indicate towards the involvement that Roopnaraine and Suppal (2003) found among urban Indian fathers. The reports in the interviews suggested much greater participation and it is possible that the hesitation may have been on account of the presence of the researcher.

There was an enduring sense of a vertical (hierarchical) rather than a horizontal (democratic) orientation to relationships as indicated in the research of Shweder, Mahapatra and Miller (1988), where social conventions regarding social relationships were found to be unquestioned and even designated to be 'natural'. Despite the fact that there was some easing of the barriers between generations in comparison with earlier research studies on the Indian family, vertical arrangements were still a prevailing framework for interactions between children and adults as well as among children.

4.2.5. Child care and the environment.

Some important aspects of the care need to be highlighted here in the context of globally shrinking resources and high costs of the care of children reported in the media and found in popular opinion. It bears repeating that this sample did not include wealthy Indians living in expensive localities, not because they were not believed to be a part of the culture, but because they were found to be very hard to access. This study represents the middle range of families within a circumscribed geo-political region, and the findings must be viewed within that perspective. It is only when these conclusions find resonance with other research and writing about Indians that their applicability across the spectrum can be accepted.

Children's care was seen to be transacted within fairly limited expenditures and the high conservation of resources in most homes. In this section, we will look at the use of water, money and food, and play materials where the efforts and resources were very carefully managed to provide 'appropriate' care.

Children were seen to be highly conscious of, and constantly reminded to use water carefully. Taps were monitored, water was re-used and many children were seen to have internalised this principle from their family members. Care of children was accomplished with the use of minimal water during the observations. Only in the village on two occasions, children

were seen playing with running water that was allowed to flow. In the Nagar homes, every drop of water had to be carried from the tap, and stored for use, and children participated in the storing and saving and minimal usage of the stored water. None of the children were wearing diapers during the field visits, some were reminded to go to the toilet periodically, but most of the children were seen to rush after announcing to the adults on the scene. There was no mention of toilet accidents by the adults, although this is not taken as proof of it not happening, just that it did not come up as an issue of concern. It was almost as if the context was toilet trained, with regular reminders, tolerance of accidents and frequent absence of clothing and carpeting. Stone, tiled and mud floors were much easier to clean and keep dry.

Children were seen to be conscious of not wasting electricity; lights and fans were either turned off spontaneously, or else on instruction. There was no evidence of running air-conditioners in vacant rooms even among the families who were well-off, and even during the hot summers. No home had central heating through the cold winters where room temperatures tended to dip very low on account of the concrete constructions. Warm clothes were used to keep children protected. Localised use of room heaters was occasionally seen during the winter, but only for local use with young children or older people.

Further, food-stuff was very strictly supervised. There was no evidence of any wastage of food. Mothers watched every speck from the preparation to the moment at which it goes into someone's mouth. In some families, leftovers and water was offered to birds and animals, some families also put aside small bits for birds regularly. Adults peered into tiffin-boxes, examined bowls and plates carefully, and repeatedly told children to 'finish' what they were eating. I will use this phenomenon to explain the ubiquitous scene of feeding mothers in urban Indian homes, not only as obsessive 'feeding mothers' but also as people who work towards minimum wastage. This perspective has not found mention in academic circles since most of the paradigms emerge from countries where food is abundant and hunger unheard of. It is thus the importance of food and perhaps not its obsession alone that characterised the families. Wastage was not seen even in rural homes where the conditions for eating were more flexible and children were allowed to serve themselves. These children took small amounts, ate together and went for more if they wanted. Never was the full amount to be eaten taken in one go. The next serving was taken when the first one was finished. Plates and bowls were wiped clean by the last bite of a *roti*.

In urban homes, adults constantly complained that children did not eat, and that they ate too little, perhaps in comparison to the amounts estimated by parents, this was true. As a result of this belief, children were fed. Adults were seen distracting, following, cajoling, tricking, bribing and threatening children to eat. The scenes were dramatic. Milk was believed to be a good opening food for the day and many children drank just milk before their day began. With glass in hand, the adults made sure the milk was downed by pouring the last drops under supervision to make sure. Village families were much more relaxed about food consumption, and also about quantities of food cooked. Many times, adults were seen feeding the left-over *rotis* to animals and birds the next day, but food was never thrown away, only distributed. These were also families who produced their own grain. Small bits left over were consumed by the adult, or put away, or fed to a brother or sister. By following the practice of taking small amounts in each serving, one *roti* at a time, one bowl of vegetable curry at a time, wastage was seen too be minimised.

Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to say that the activity of food had the highest supervision, as Tuli (2008) found, and that the adults often acted as ‘food police’, becoming much less tolerant of their children’s playfulness that was tolerated in many other domains. This policing may have been on account of the fact that food was considered a precious resource, and the consumption of the food prepared was highly valued for a child’s well-being, since pre-cooked food was not only seen to be rarely consumed by children during the observations. Its consumption was not seen to be policed either!

4.3. Children, self and identity

One of the primary impressions regarding children’s self and identity was the extent of ‘otherness’ or orientation towards other people that was discernible, both in the children’s expressions as well as the interactions with others. This was evident in play activities as well as conversations. As an example, in the interviews with children it was discovered how deeply the child’s sense of self was expressed through others. There is a range of reactions to the interview session by these 5 – 6 year olds. Some remain quite silent while others persist in long narratives, creating stories and verses as they engage with the researcher. In all instances, prompts from the people sitting around are a persistent reality, ranging between speaking on behalf of the child, repeating what the child says (amused or simply to reinforce), nodding, smiling, prompting or

even repeating a question. Also commonplace were the requests for children to present themselves before the researcher, ranging from dance, child dance (in the rural setting where voices would be lost in the clamour of groups of children gathered around the researcher), to poems and songs learnt in school, to even created verses (Sheena) and stories (Shrey).

Taking the example of Pia, a child who remained almost completely silent with the researcher, answering only when she asked her if she was wearing a new dress (dressed up for the session), who had bought it for her and from where, Pia said “Papa” and “Mall”. The setting was a village adjacent to a town where the father would go purchasing things. As the group of children surrounded Pia they pressed on Golu is quite silent and does not respond to any question other than who had brought her the new dress and from where. A friend soon comes closer, the two climb on the cot lying in the courtyard and the friend tells her to “*Naach, naach*” as other children watch and clap, urging the two on. Some of this performance may be related to the fact that the most familiar sight of a video camera was during weddings and particularly the dancing sessions of family members in celebration mode.

The instances of having other (children and adults) happened in all settings, but far more in the rural and urban poor clusters. It was noticed that particularly when children felt that something they say or do would not find approval from the researcher, they would either go along by nodding in agreement, or simply imply passive acceptance. This mostly happened for questions related to school and especially school drop-out. In the cases of Bunty (urban lower income) and Guna (rural, middle income), initially they chose to go along describing what they are learning and responding in single words about the teacher, somewhat reluctantly. Perhaps the child did not feel like sharing the exact situation with the researcher who may have been perceived as part of the system. How the researcher got to know in either case is thus. Another child, standing in the group of clamouring neighbours and cousins, one of the children chose to report the facts, that the child had indeed dropped out of school. This revelation caused instant embarrassment to the child in question, but soon, the same group of children also comes forward to provide the support by talking about other things, or taking the child away, engaging him or her in something else. Others piped in and spoke about the reason why Guna had quit school, that the teacher had spanked her and that is why she stopped going after which her name was cancelled from the register. The teacher was reported to be punitive for a reason what was not

clear, at least to Guna, whereas the others also said they did not know why, but one child added that the teachers punished children who did not complete their homework!

Comments, completions and interjections from slightly older siblings was very common. In the instance of Shrey, the brother answers every single question that is addressed to the child. When asked what class he is in, the older brother whispers in his ear (quite loudly) “Nursery”, the child repeats. When asked about a teacher whom he is fond of, again, the brother pipes in and offers a name. This time the researcher requests the brother to restrain himself so Shrey can respond. For a while Shrey kept saying things like “Let me think”, and the conversation proceeds thus: “*Sochne do*” (Let me think), when the researcher asks him again, he says “Sangeeta ma’am” and then adds quickly “*Nahin, mmmmmmm sochne do mmmmmmmmm Chamcham ma’am*” Why? Because “*Wo roz mujhe daantti hain. Unse mujhe dar lagta hai. Wo bahut...wo rakshas ki tare hain*”. Although initially hesitant at the loss of a spokesperson, the child gains his voice and speaks up and later also creates a story, all the while grappling and sparring with the older brother.

Among the homes where the children are with younger children, there is an involvement of the younger child, especially in the scale errors question about whether the child can sit in a toy chair. Easily, the child passes it on as a chair meant for the younger child. When he says to the chair, that he would not fit on it because the “he is small” about himself, the mother checks and asks “Are you small or the chair” and he responds by saying “chair is small”. In this manner, adults provided some props to the children to solve a perspective when they knew what the child wanted to say, but came out differently. This sort of intervention did not happen very often and tended to be seen only where there was concentrated attention by the mother or other adult. The mothers who chose to sit closely, watch, listen in and also provide prompts were mostly found among the upper middle income group educated mothers. In the case of Kaju, the mother, who works at home preparing food that her husband sells in a stall in a nearby street, prompts the child repeatedly to say “Ask Didi (the researcher) to get you an admission in a good school, ask her?” “Tell her you want to go to a good school, she would be knowing”. To this, the child simply looks up at the researcher, as if mutely echoing the mother’s words, sometimes uttering a single word in between, like “School”.

Arpita, on the other hand, was glued to a TV programme, and in her case, it was the younger brother who chose to inform the researcher (when she didn’t answer) that he favourite

programme was “Bheem”, but she also watched other cartoons, he said. In the case of Garima who now has a younger sister, when she is asked about her, she instantly changes her voice into a different affectionate tone, as if she is speaking with a little baby! Clearly demonstrating her preparedness to approach the baby as an older person, and mimicking the tones that she has heard other people using with the baby. There is in her case as well as others, a clear knowledge of the positioning of a child’s place in the age and relational sequencing within the home and close relationships. Children are very clear on kin terminology and these are among the first words that they learn to speak, also being able to learn very early on, the modulations and shifts in perspectives for babies, children and adults. This sensitive, detailed and delicate awareness of social positioning was encountered repeatedly in the data.

Garima, on the other hand, loves to sketch, and she spends most of her time drawing on the wall (as well as other places). She decides to show the researcher around the house where she had made several sketches, and suddenly gets into complaints about her mother saying she rubs off everything she draws, then stands up and asks her “Why did you do that?” The mother responds by saying “To make space for more drawings” but the child is not satisfied and keeps returning to that comment again and again. She had taken the painting of the walls some time ago to heart.

Naitik is a single child among four adults and by the second visit, the mother had had a second baby. He has a huge range of toys and brings them into the session to play elaborate character games with the superhero figures. The indulgent grandmother and grandfather sit and watch as he makes up these imaginary stories as does the mother. The child is good at languages, the mother reports with pride and does well in school, she says.

Regarding friends, most children were able to answer the question, although it was difficult to find a substitute for the term “best friend” for all the children, especially the village children. They usually spent a lot of time with other children, usually in groups consisting of siblings, cousins and neighbours. This question was therefore far more clearly spelt out where children were part of a community where such a concept would be known, since specific choices in friendships were possible as Sheena discusses so well in her description of the dynamics of the approaching friends and making a plan about how to negotiate herself between two friends, one who did not want her to spend time with the other. She says to the researcher that she came up with an idea. She said she thought that she would sit with friend number 1 and then on days that

she was absent from school, then she would spend time with the other. But the second one has since left the school, she reported. This complex negotiation was quite remarkable, not only in the idea itself, but its clear articulation by Sheena.

Children were very aware of each other's preferences as well, and often spoke on behalf of each other. They also knew what the other child would or would not know, poems, songs, dances or even food and choices of TV shows. I see these as expressions of the "distributed self" where a person's developing notion of who she or he is is bound very closely to the people. There was evidence of this in all the homes, a theme that could be said to cut across the variation in context, although the expression of this "other-oriented-ness" found different manifestations. Among the rural children, there was little speech interaction with the researcher, and even with each other. Far more time was spent in doing things, whether by the adults or the children. Speech was not the preferred mode of interaction. Children spent a lot of time with other children, loosely supervised by familiar and caring adults, but also chastised by them in case of an unfavourable action. This censure was also distributed, and any familiar person had the informal authority to accost the child and guide him or her. As reported in another setting, oftentimes, it was not possible to discern who the mother was for the first visit even, unless the question was specifically asked.

Kaju was very clear about all the chores that she did in the home as an older child, apart from minding the younger sibling (albeit in a neighbourhood where adults watched over each other's children, although that was not a guarantee), she also said that she cleaned the dishes and made the beds in the home. The task of carrying around, and caring for younger siblings was an important, undesignated duty of older children. For Tanvi, the older sister was always around, and was frequently found to boss her around, but she also willingly took the responsibility, when Tanu was a bit younger, to serve the food and carry it, covering it carefully behind her, from the kitchen where food is prepared by the women once early in the morning and during the evening meal, which was also witnessed, she herself (the older sister) went and sat beside the grandmother and adopted the position of someone who was 'fed by' another, the grandmother. In this manner, children were acutely aware of their 'relative position in the group' and tended to transact their conduct and relationships somewhat differently, depending upon the people present and their relationships relative to the child. In a neighbour's home, both Tanvi and her older sister, sat quietly for a while, simply watching the proceedings, choosing not to participate until

some subliminal message was passed to them or by them, that it was now okay to play (in the pile of sand).

Children's relationships with others, is a key element of their emerging identity and sense of self. The patterns of care and interaction have displayed some trends that are discernible, based on the socio-ecological setting. There are clear trends that emerge from the different settings which allow the possibility of imagining distinct models of childhood that will be discussed in a later section. Among the participants, in general, it was found that children spent more time with other children than with adults, in most homes.

Weisner wrote in 1996,

“.....(C)hildren were being taken care of by other children much of the time, not by their mothers or fathers, and even when the mothers were present, they were not directly involved with child care, but rather managed, coordinated, and struggled with the tasks of domestic life in a way I did not grasp..... I had to figure out a system of sibling caretaking, of socially distributed nurturance.” (p. 308, 309)

In other words, the goings on in these patrilineal, patrilocal and horticultural communities of Western Kenya were concerned with issues that were far removed from the concerns of North American families with children. The prepared methods had to be discarded, modified or adapted.

4.4. Adults' views on childhood and their own children

There was a clear divide among the village adults and urban middle and upper class adults in their approach to the interview questions, revealing a clear difference in the ways in which changes in childhood are understood. It was only when specific details were questioned (about eating or dressing) that the mothers/grandmothers commented that their children were surely doing all these things. In another distinction, there was also no particular behaviour that they seemed to categorize as undesirable in rural families. Perhaps accompanied with lesser sanction on children, there was also greater acceptance of a range of behaviours, at least at this age. In Guna's case for instance, when the mother was asked about her having dropped out from

school, she quickly responded that she had tried a couple of times to go to the school and ask the teacher to be kinder to her, but had dropped the issue. Perhaps there is also a greater acceptance of circumstances as well. This attitude can clearly be an adaptation to the setting where there is far less opportunity and time for taking control of the situation related to school. Mothers are usually occupied all day in chores around the house and farmland, leaving little time for supervision and structuring children's lives.

Among the urban families, much more supervision and management of children had indeed resulted in greater discussions and higher vigil, also leading to much longer interviews with minute details and enthusiastic responses. The child was a favoured topic for discussions. They were delighted to report most of the changes which their children were expressing. In some instances, assertiveness became a nuisance, when it didn't fit in with the idea of appropriate children's conduct, like talking back or being stubborn, the parents reported. Episodes of aggression were also looked at with some disapproval, sometimes with a sense of defeat at being unable to handle the child's conduct. There was a range of tolerance after remarking something like, "children being children after all". Some of the behaviours that were marked included greater confidence, ownership, maturity and concern in relationships with others. They were reported to be more sensible, understanding, in control of the self, sensitive towards others, adjusts in difficult contexts and expressive in their views. Their communication skills were seen as having developed dramatically in terms of vocabulary, sentence formation, expression and confidence while talking to others. Most parents associated this spurt in language acquisition to the exposure to formal school. Parents reported that their children were now more confident, participative, interactive and sociable. The speed and efficiency with children could pick up new information was also noted by several adults admiringly. Most of the children were reported to have liked going to school and they were also doing well in studies. Regarding reluctance to go to school noticed in some children, parents said that they were loath to wake up during cold mornings in the winter. Whereas school was mostly seen in a positive light regarding the effects on children, the interactions with other children sometimes led to the picking up of unfavourable habits, like foul language, some adults reported. The most frequently mentioned positive change was that children were comparatively more "*samajhdar*" (sensible). They said that they (the children) had become lot more caring towards siblings, parents or even other adults. The capacity

to do many tasks on their own was noted (by urban adults) as freeing parents from constant supervision. No such sentiment was expressed in families in the village or urban poor.

Regarding what children enjoyed doing, urban parents made more detailed disclosures about their children, also saying that they (the children) did not like being ignored. Children liked playing a lot, both indoor and outdoor games. Gender differences were remarkably visible in the adults' responses. Where girls preferred playing with make-belief toys or games boys were more involved in toys like cars, video games and action cartoons. All the children loved TV viewing, the parents reported. A few of them chose to eat their meals in front of the TV with their choice of program. Some children were fussy eaters while some said that their children did not like vegetables and milk. Rural respondents were dismissive of any negative changes in their children. When parents were given a chance to ask anything from the researchers, only very few of them actually asked questions. Their main concern was to understand researcher's opinion on their child's development. One of the mothers wanted know what she could do reduce her child's anger.

On the whole parents seemed to welcome the development changes taking place in their children. Some of the changes had already been internalized completely by children and some skills, behaviours they were still learning. At some places it was felt that in research setting where the respondents were not familiar with questioning, they had problems in understanding the meaning of question, however probing helped to some extent. It must be noted that these same families had been visited a year earlier, and were very comfortable with the researcher. Thus it could be re-affirmed that the questions, in fact the approach to looking minutely at developmental changes, did not fit the frame of childhood familiar to the rural model of family life.

4.5. Trends in play

Children all over the world play, and that is an accepted fact. The conditions under which they play like how much structure, provisions for materials, how much time etc. are all variable (Lancy, 2008). The interest of children in play activities is undeniable. The findings of this study support this universal truth. All children were found to be excited about playing. When the bag of toys was opened before them, all children showed an excitement about playing with the contents, although some may have shown an initial hesitation out of shyness.

From the episodes of play, the world of children seemed more accessible, and the standard set of materials provided a productive medium for these expressions. Children who were expressive and interactive in the interview sessions were also the ones who were most intense and forthcoming in the play sessions as well. Sheena, Nayan, Asha, Netra, Shrey and Chetan were among the most interactive and expressed complex forms of play punctuated frequently by intense narratives. As discussed earlier, the urban, middle income families where parents and grandparents were focussed on children's play sessions facilitated the sessions such that play could progress beyond the introductory familiarising, manipulation and labelling. For the multiple children situations, there is no denying the fact that exchanges and engagements with other children and adults allowed the children to conduct complex activity if the other was a partner in play, but when the competing for desired objects got too intense, that is when there were several children vying for the same materials, complex play was frequently interrupted and episodes tended to be shorter.

Adults varied in their engagement with the child, sometimes staying out of sight, on the margins, watchful or intensely interactive. Children seemed to be quite able to play under all circumstances.

4.7. Children and school

By and large, the relationships of the children to school was problematic, and a far cry from the recent amendments in educational policy of the country. The further away a child was from the centre, physically, socially and economically, the greater the problems with schooling. A large bevy of facilities had become available, as lurking business options, of private schools. Somewhere, the belief that these private schools were somehow 'better' because they were a little bit more accountable, and the teachers actually taught the children what the families thought were 'good for' the children. Government schools, especially in the villages and small towns were considered unfit for children if they could afford better, and for the poor, the teachers were far too harsh and punitive, as the children expressed in their conversations with the researcher. There were only a handful of children who reported that they liked all teachers because they were nice to them. Most children lived in fear of at least one teacher on account of the fact that she spans children. This was also the reason for the few dropouts from schools, one into tuitions, and another (Guna) who simply stayed out of school. For wealthier parents in villages, they had the resources to send their children to the nearby town school where the children would learn the ways of educated people, and learn "uthna baithna" (loosely translated as manners or etiquette). The home was seen incapable of instructing the children on account of the fact that many adults were not educated among the village families. Whatever the social category, going to school was seen as favourable by everyone, and a passport to a better life. Whereas the support among educated families was high, the motivation was high among all, and families spent small amounts from their small earnings on private tuitions in the home that they would get some schooling for their child.

Teachers for their part did not emerge from a distance as welcoming or keen to teach children. The onus was on the child and the family on getting the child to school and making sure that he or she stays there. In between these callous and inconsiderate schools, some children dropped out whereas the majority (41 out of 44) were in school by the age of 5. We need serious interventions in the provision of schooling for children to ensure dignity and self-respect among children, the attitude still remains that some children are incapable of schooling and have to prove themselves to the system by withstanding insult and even injury on accession. Much of their enthusiasm and belief in school was heartbreaking.

On the other hand there were children like Sheena, Asha, Chetan and Nayan, teachers' favourites and bright and successful at school, of which the adults in the family were very proud and did everything to sustain their interest and success at school. All these children were going to private school. In fact, only about 4 children were going to government school in the whole sample.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1. In a cultural place (Thomas weisner, 1996 paper on ethnography)

When asked what is the one most important thing a family can give to a child, Weisner (1996) concluded that it was a cultural place, a sense of belongingness, a sense of self and its relationship to others, people, objects, time and space. This centrality of personhood, this narrative gravity (Nair, 2003) is the most important contribution that the parents and family give to every individual child that is born. Indeed, without this centrality, personhood itself is a meaningless void. Respondents in his assignment did not differ markedly from a recent survey conducted by us (Chaudhary & Shukla, 2014), people identify health, affection, nourishment, education, financial security, safety and relationships as critically important for a new-born baby to survive. However, Weisner (1996) argues strongly that although each of these is certainly important for the baby, it is the sense of belongingness to a cultural place that provides meaning to a person, and a place within which the meaning is transacted and sometimes negotiated.

5.2. Children's rights and the cultural context

Several scholars have argued against a rigid implementation of the UN convention in the Rights of the Child. Apart from the fact that it derives from and perpetuates a view of childhood that is based on the ideology of individualism, there are many problematic issues related to the family as a key institution for the care of child. Particularly in a country where economic and social support for the care of children is minimal if not absent, imposing such a statute is likely to lead to a further marginalisation of the family and therefore the child. Decontextualizing childhood from culture amounts to throwing away the very substance that gives meaning to children's (and any other person as well) lives. Regarding individualism, it is often mistakenly taken as an ideology characteristically belonging to the post industrial revolution Europe and North America. However, if we look with a broader lens, we find that the dichotomy of the world's societies into Individualistic and Collectivistic carry serious limitations, not only because they are too simplistic (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996; Oyeserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2002) and there is a tendency to remove within culture variation (Chaudhary, 2004). However, a deeper difficulty is that the collective spirit of individualistic cultures and the importance of the individual in the other

become ironed out as insignificant. As Raman remarks (2000) Eastern religions such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism all recognise the essentials of an individual existence, with Hinduism even confirming this as the final outcome of every soul-cycle. Rather than the notion of a collective heavenly existence (or otherwise) after life, the Hindu is believed to be completely alone in this imagined journey. Teleologically, a human life is importantly individualistic in Hinduism and associated religions. This is something that such simple categorisation fails to account for. Is the independence of street children in India and Brazil independence? Would we label it autonomy? We need to realise also, that meanings in academic literature have very specific orientations, and need to be acknowledged in the transference of terms across cultures. Thus, the articulation and further the imposition of an uniform code of law that is internationally applicable defeats the very purpose for which it is set-up. It fails to ensure a fair deal to children by isolating them theoretically from the core meaningfulness of their lives. It takes away their 'cultural place' (Weisner, 1996).

When we look at the promotion to CRC, there are clear guidelines about what childhood should mean, and is based on a singular notion of childhood derived from the affluent West. In several instances, the Convention and related activity condemns the diversity in beliefs and practice of three-fourths of the world (see Lancy, 2007 about parent-child play) and need to be cautioned towards a tendency to civilize families assumed to be irrational (Sutton-Smith, 2003).

When we look at the findings of the study, the extent of intra-cultural diversity and the deep

5.3. Culture and identity formation

Geertz (1988) urged social scientists to enlarge the dialogue between people from different places, with different interests, beliefs, wealth and power, in order to facilitate a better understanding of our world.

5.4. Self and others

Among human beings, the sense of self is defined as much by who we are as it is by others around us. Even the idea of individualism, that the individual is the core substance of the self over and beyond everything else, is an ideology that has social origins (Habits of the heart, Oyeserman). This study has attempted to investigate young children's emerging identity through mapping their activities and relationships. Through ethnographic descriptions, the young child's

sense of self in context is generated. The findings of the study display that children's identity is deeply contexted within the socio-cultural setting, as was expected. Further the loosely constructed models of childhood have an important impact on the emerging sense of self of the young child.

5.5. Family relationships

The family was a favourable place for a child to be growing up. Rarely were children seeing only their mothers and fathers during the day. Thus, family consisted of a constellation of people around the child. The care of the child may have been often a mother's responsibility, but everyone around pitched in, fathers, grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles, aunts. Seeing the child exclusively with the mother was a rare sight. The distribution of care and contact was much higher in the village, even spreading to the neighbouring community around the child's home. Talking about the child usually generated positive and enthusiastic reactions from family members. Even in nuclear families and mother-child dyads, the inclusion of others (visiting) or even the researcher, instantly echoed the multi-party context that was the norm. Relationships between siblings were special. Older children looked after and watched out for younger ones, made them work, and sometimes even bullied them a bit. Younger ones idealised their older siblings and cousins. In joint and extended families, children spent more time with other children than with adults. And among the adults most time was spent with grandparents, if they were at home. A larger home meant more housekeeping, and adult women and men seemed frequently occupied with household chores. Older cousins and grandparents would watch over children. Relationships between family members of different generations in joint and extended households were somewhat restrained. When older people were around, either they talked or the adults talked. If the older person was speaking, it was found that the adults usually waited and listened to what they were saying. In all homes with multiple generations, the older family members were either silent, watchful, or else they were central and adults watched. Clear turn-taking was observed. The template of the joint, multiple generation family was the shadow norm.

Regarding division of work, women were clearly responsible for household chores and matters related to work seemed to be clear. Kitchen activity was almost exclusively a women's domain, except in a couple of homes, where men were sometimes involved. Care of children was clearly a shared, family activity.

5.6.School

In the 21st century, the international image of childhood has become merged with schooling. In contemporary society, it seems impossible to think of unschooled childhood with the exception of home-schooling, which apart from coming under heavy fire from the State in many nations, is also just another form of schooling with a different venue. However, many children remain out of school, and although this is mostly assumed to be on account of unwillingness or apathy, the truth is that there are just not enough schools for all children, at least in India¹³. Childhood in the modern world has become like a race, to get into the best schools, to have the maximum talents, to be confident at an early age, to speak without reticence before others, and to be endowed with whatever skills parents decide to select the child to be trained for. Parents are expected to participate actively and support children with school and its accessories, and successful children are clearly selected from this pool, accumulating a reputation for belonging to a favourable family as the years go by. In this enterprise, there is a clear advantage for the educated upper class parent who has the time and energy to devote to the enterprise of schooling. If we look at Asian children in the US, the clear advantage that upper class Asians have with school results is one of the major success stories among immigrants across the world. Despite language, ethnic and social barriers, children do exceedingly well in school related tasks, as Lancy (2008) demonstrates with the Spelling Bee contest.

India has had a very robust tradition of education which was characterised by the Guru-Shishya parampara, both for the arts as well as the sciences. Without the antagonism that drove religion and science apart in Christian society, Hindu and Islamic schooling was embraced by the religious communities, although far more available to the royalty and upper classes/castes. However, certain critical features of this system are now receiving a lot of nostalgic interest since schooling seems to drive families and children apart more often than not. If this does not happen, then children find themselves gently (or not so) out of school for one reason or other. The missionary school experience was a successful subaltern model where English-ness was emphasised at the cost of ethnic identity and family values as I experienced personally during my years at a missionary school. Active distance was to be maintained with the family that was viewed as excessively over-indulgent and crudely uninformed, without any of this being true.

¹³http://www.unicef.org/india/children_2359.htm

We used to be fined for any indulgence, either in speech or in action! It took me a decade to wash off some of the fake superiority that was created in my head.

Our schools need to be closer to the lives of children and their families. The notion that parents know nothing and that school has all the answers without which a person is doomed needs to be reviewed, especially when we look at the quality of schools around us. The unreflected confidence in schooling without any specification is dangerous and unfavourable for children. Schools should be forced to be such that children enjoy coming. It is a surprise that children and families are all so enthusiastic about schooling, even among the poor, until they enter. Where schooling has persistently produced failures of large numbers of children, there is inevitably, a lot of resentment towards them (LeVine & White, 1986; Serpell, 1993). Internationally, schooling needs major reshuffling, in funds (Lancy, 2008) as well as in philosophy. Schooled language is expected to be in place before a child comes to school, and nursery schools are important teaching ground for that. It is no surprise that children who attend preschools are better retained in school. Repeatedly we spend valuable research funds on proving the obvious, and far less investment is made in actually ensuring child-friendly schools. Whereas, the world over, families are expected to adjust to school, perhaps it is important for schools to adjust to children's lives and community practices.

As Serpell (1993) argues, the three main objectives of formal schooling have been to provide economic direction, transmission of culture and moral and intellectual socialisation. After the early years with the family, children in the modern world are expected to enter school and stay there for the next one or two decades. India has a poor record regarding schooling with a gradually expanding number of literate men and women being added each year. However, with the large number of adults without schooling, their journey as parents with motivation and enthusiasm about schooling for their children is fraught with tremendous difficulty, ranging between being ignored to being actively rejected as uneducable. The findings of this study indicate very clear results related to school experiences. Parental motivation and family support is the minimum but not sufficient condition to get kids to stay in school. It is only when motivation is backed up with a strong educational background and a stable income, that schooling for children becomes successful. Even income itself is not enough. It is the combination of the three that creates the most favourable atmosphere for children. However, education of parents, even when not accompanied by high income will still get the child to

school. Being motivated towards and educated yourself will be very helpful, and if you are also wealthy, the child's journey is secure. Missing motivation will get you there if you are well-educated as well as wealthy. But, when the parents are not educated, neither motivation nor money seem to work very well. Money will still get your children to stay in school, but without that, simply being eager does not seem to work. This is the tragedy of some children in my study. The enthusiasm and amount of investment uneducated parents make with their meagre incomes is heart-breaking. Their children are beaten, abused, teased, rejected and neglected at school after which many of them drop out. Formal schooling in India is a tragic failure when it comes to children living in disadvantaged circumstances. In fact, it would not be misplaced to say that formal schooling is least favourable for those who need and want it the most. It is like preaching to the converted. Maximum investment, teacher attitudes, material provisions and infrastructural investments are made in places which can best afford it. The business of private schools is a booming business with so many tax and other benefits which business houses make full use of. Government schools are under-funded and children are treated very poorly. In fact, the experiences of several children in the study provide sufficient evidence to suggest that schools have failed to reach the very children for whom they need to make maximum provisions, going by accepted agenda of schooling. In fact, school perpetuates the very structural unevenness that it purports to eliminate. Making a strong case for 'perspectivism' in way that it is even possible to have apparently contradictory perspectives on any given phenomenon, Serpell (1993) writes:

The central insight I wish to share with my various audiences, including the subjects whose lives I have followed in arriving at this interpretation, is that schooling is just one resource among many for the enhancement of one's journey through life. It is a resource whose full potential for enriching that journey is realised by only a few. The reasons why so few of the ideals of the curriculum are attained by most of those who enter school must be sought at the point of intersection among a constellation of interested participants: the young person herself, the teachers and the young person's family. The significance of schooling in the life of this person will emerge from a shared interpretation which these parties must negotiate." (p. 283)

Promoting the notion of primary and secondary theories about the world, Horton (1982) proposes that there are two levels of function that are important to the discussion of cultural difference, the primary one being universal, commonly known and experienced facts and their organisation. The secondary level is a level at which differences range between marginal and profound, even defying universal characterisation. This is the level of belief, of having a world-view. The place of school in society is clearly believed to impact economic progress, transference of cultural values and facilitate learning. Through these experiences, we can see how far from this ideology the experience of schooling is. When the secondary level values match, it is only then that children are treated favourably, thus, schools in India seem to be preaching to the converted, as I mentioned earlier.

It is not that the country is lacking in experiments of innovative education. Even something like the Super 30 Ramanujan School of Mathematics¹⁴ survives, as a highly focussed, extremely successful private experiment in training for success. Selecting 30 students from poor backgrounds, the institute charges no fee from them for their highly successful placements, depending rather on donations from their alumni. Many are willing and able to fund for future success. Even at the school level, there are many innovative programmes that have succeeded in making early education fun for children, but these are few and far between, catering mostly to the elite and charging a high fee. Organisations like Pratham¹⁵ have managed to raise the standards of education delivery through concerted partnerships and innovative interventions. A lot more needs to be done so that children can enjoy going to school, spend quality time there, learning, interacting and engaging with other children and adults.

Although this was not a research on educational services, one important element of a child's identity is linked with being educated, both for the parents and for the child. Based on the impressions gathered in this study, some important recommendations for making schooling more favourable for children are outlined here:

1. Multi-level classroom using principles and strategies for mixed ages, peer tutoring and distributed learning will be far more favourable and culturally familiar as models. The adult-child model of one teacher many children of the same age,

¹⁴<http://super30.org/>

¹⁵<http://www.pratham.org/>

separated from their key partners (siblings) is fundamentally disconnected with the way children are used to learning

2. Curricula are distant and disconnected from the daily lives of children. This must change in order to include children's informal and casual everyday experiences into the school.
3. Early childhood care centres must be placed within the campus of schools to allow for continued sibling interaction and supervision.
4. There is an urgent and serious requirement to prevent physical punishment, shaming and rejection of children who are believed to be uneducable. The existence of such a term in formal schooling is a tragic violence on children that needs immediate attention.
5. Despite decades of research findings on these issues, physical activity and play has failed to be recognized either by the school or family members as essential for all-round development.
6. Schools are stressful for all except a very small minority of children. In this study, one could say that around 4 children seemed comfortable and happy about school. Somewhere something is seriously wrong with the system. We need to find quick and concerted solutions to resolve these issues.

5.7. Models of childhood

In his 2008 publication, a thorough documentation of childhood in different cultures, Lancy makes an argument for different models. Between the priceless child and the child at work, there are many variations in the templates for childhood and their activities. Each social group has clearly imagined, although not often articulated, versions of what children are like and what should be done with them. Indulge, repair, restrain, smother and/or spank, what we do with our children is framed within an ideological frame of the place of children in our lives. The recurrent impasse between immigrant parents and the Norwegian Child Support Services is a case in point. Children are precious, and parents must conform to the national standards or else lost their children to foster care for their (the children's) sake. Standards of care and cultural practices are neither understood nor tolerated. Repeated cases of children's removal from the parents' home have been sighted, although mostly only from immigrant families. At least inside

our heads, we all have acceptable models of childhood, these can be simple, singular, or multiple and complex, even contradictory, especially for multicultural individuals and families.

In this study it was possible to discern, that based on the kinds of care settings the children experienced, there were four separate models of childhood care: One by one, one by many, many by one and many by many. Several important affordances are possible to find in the different settings. The first, the care of one (predominantly) by one, is an urban, educated, nuclear family model. Although there are still close relationships maintained with other people, the child is primarily cared for by one person. In contrast, the most common model is the care of many by many, where many children grow up with several adults. Much time is spent with other children and childhood is a distributed and shared activity, involved seamlessly in the lives of the family, adults and children alike. There is very little segregation, school being the unique exception to that. The other two models are equally important to discuss, although the many by one is also a nuclear family model, the presence of even one other child, transforms the care setting for the young child. The care of one child by many is a more recent phenomenon where birth rates are dipping and many adoring adults invest together in this one child. Models of care impact the ways in which children engage with others and is an important detail in the understanding of family life in India that is considered either exclusively nuclear, or actively joint, multi-generation families. Reality for children is always being negotiated between these different models of care, temporarily shifting from one category to another on the arrival or visitation of a close family member or relative. For the families that migrate from villages under difficult circumstances, the urban settlement becomes a quasi village, with similar expectations, clustering of people from the same area, close linkages and constant interactions, but the urban slum is far from the safe haven for children and adults that villages used to be. These neighbourhoods are exploitative; people are untrustworthy, making the children very vulnerable to exploitation, accident and abuse. Good quality, safe and sustained schooling can work wonders in such areas, but there are none.

5.8. Summing up

Robert Serpell (1993) presents a model for interpretation with three perspectives, the participants being written about, persons who are doing the research and the audience. The acid test of course, remains when the interpretation can also be applied by the author to himself or

herself. Researchers have very often, not even bothered to speculate whether their interpretations make any sense to the participants of any given research or theorising. This disconnect has proven to be very expensive for developmental psychology, especially with regard to cultural differences. In this study, I have made a deliberate attempt to overcome this disconnect by using methods and strategies for maintaining an active dialogue with the community and especially the children. The two (community and children) do not always correspond when talking of perspectives, as can be seen in the instance of formal schooling. For this I have chosen to abandon a distant perspective of a universal childhood, so easily adopted by academics. In its place, I deliberately chose to seek out and seek within, both the research setting as well as people's lives. Not so much by incessant probing, but a fundamental acceptance of their lives as precious, important and my presence in their lives as privileged for which the research team was repeatedly grateful. We left families with a sense of clarity about what we doing and what we were going to do about this. At no point was anyone made to feel used or invaded, to the best of our abilities!

The moment we look away from the dominant culture in the published world, many notions of taken-for-granted aspects about family life have to be dismantled. Many such efforts have provided the direction in this regard, Geertz (1993) for community life, Hardy (1999) for motherhood; Burman (1994) for developmental psychology; Keller (2007) and Reddy (2008) for the study of infancy, LeVine (2004) for attachment; Lancy (2008) for childhood; Mead (1928/1961) for adolescence; Shweder and LeVine (1984) for emotions; Weisner (1996) for care of children; Serpell (1993) and LeVine and White (1986) for education; Donaldson (1979), Lancy (1983) and Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) for cognition, to name a few. Valsiner (Branco & Valsiner, 1997) and Cole (1996) have helped us among many others, to reconfigure the relationship between culture and the individual towards a more context-inclusive science, and Weisner (1996), Yoshikawa (Yoshikawa et. al., 2008) and others have helped provide methodological direction. These writings have provided the necessary shift in the discipline of psychology in general and developmental psychology in particular. The heavy dependence on research based in the West has been particularly disadvantageous for a reasonable understanding of family life and children's development in other cultures. Characterised by dyadic relationships shared between husband and wife, the inevitable entry of the peer group structured through organised activities through school and play, the Western notion of childhood has dominated our

research as a universal model towards which all cultures should be headed, sooner than later. Text-books in Developmental psychology spoke of 'other' models of family life in secluded boxes about descriptions of unique instances, referring to groups as well as individuals. Apart from the fact that individual differences were only recognised within the normative population, intra-cultural variation among 'distant' populations was not even considered in most instances. The further away you are from the standard subject, the more homogenous your group is assumed to be! The dominant discourse was exclusively defined by the narrow vision of childhood, post-industrial revolution Europe and North America thereby defining what was normal or natural was culturally bound to the Western notion of childhood. This dominance has come under serious question recently, and this critique has rested mostly on the shoulders of the stalwarts, some of who have been mentioned above. In addition to underestimating the global models of childhood, the academic version of the child also seriously underestimates the diversity within the Western community.

Regarding the world, the error margins are even more serious. The experience of childhood is diverse and quite distant from the protected privileged childhood of the First world. As Lancy (2008) remarks, Euro-american values have come to define everything that is "good, beautiful and true, including our scientific understanding of the nature of children" (p. 1). Although the dominance of the West can be argued as an accident of geography (Diamond, 1977) or history, it is the fact that theories and text-books emerging from the West are accountable for this reality to be treated as the norm (Lancy, 2008). Anthropologists have debated about this bias for a long time (Mead, 1928/1961). The ways in which childhood is understood and therefore organized is a matter of important discussion to clarify issues of development before we make any attempts at comparing children in different cultural settings. Goldstein (1998) remarked about childhood in Brazil that this experience (of being a child) is a privilege of the rich, and is practically non-existent for the poor.

Further complications arise when this rather limited model of child development and family life is used as a standard against which to assess communities from other parts of the world. This, as one can imagine, leads to a double alienation. The first being likely economic and technological one (this too has its roots in world history, especially colonization), and the second on account of being different, or worse still socially maladjusted, personally imbalanced and mentally inadequate. Although these may seem like harsh evaluations, such evaluations are part

and parcel of international welfare work in different parts of the world. It seems strange that the same societies that place the assessments are the ones who are leading the welfare work, and not insignificantly, also receiving disproportionately high salaries in comparison with the people they work for. By any position in an ethics committee, this would be a clear case of conflict of interests. As LeVine (2004) remarked, “the dual identity (of child development as a field) as an ideological advocacy movement for the humane treatment of children and as a scientific research endeavour seeking knowledge and understanding” (p. 51), has led to the problems of excessive claims for universal and normative notions of childhood based on affluence. A trickle-down effect of this hegemony is visible within subaltern nations between the different sections of society. Just as the colonizers had created a class system of “brown sahibs” the administrative cadre of Indians, during the Raj, so also, International aid agencies have sustained a network of locals to perpetuate the formula for welfare activity. Perhaps a hidden agenda could be as follows: “By our standards you are inferior and inadequate, so you will need us to improve (which you can never achieve, because of poverty anyway) so you will continue to need us. Just so that it is not an exclusive enterprise, we will hire selected upper-class educated from among you to perpetuate our enterprise!”

Lancy (2008) resolves the tension thus:

[W]e’ve looked at children through different lenses, avoiding the tendency to evaluate childhood in one society by the ideals espoused in another. But it goes without saying that the lives of impoverished children of the Third world are miserable compared with contemporary children in the developed world – including those living in relative poverty in urban ghettos or rural hideaways. But I don’t think I fall prey to the ‘noble savage’ myth when I assert that children in traditional villages, not yet blighted by overpopulation and outside influence also enjoy lives that are idyllic compared with the children we’ve just been reading about. (p. 268).

If the care practices of people are adaptive to their ecological environment, then what arguments do we have for persistent interventions in this domain? Notwithstanding the key areas of medical aid and nourishment, and that too can be provided in multiple ways better adapted to

local practice and availability. Promoting a version of childhood as protected and preserved, exclusive of participation in the work-force of the family, to be protected, entertained, educated and indulged, is something that provides more problems than solutions world-wide. Any attempt at intervention must be in intimate dialogue with local knowledge systems and practices, otherwise either they will be discarded (just as well) or they may upset the fragile ecological balance of family life. Between the discussion of diversity and universality, it is important to recognize, that although childhood varies in the ways it is understood, there is no denying that children share some common features across the species (James & James, 2001). These needs and requirements are catered for in different ways, and there is no denying a need for a fundamental list of basics like food, nourishment, rest and medical attention, to name a few.

From this study we can find that not only is the model of childhood in India very different from the prevailing ideology of the text-book notion, there are serious differences within the country as well. Within this relatively small area where this research was conducted, clear divergences were found in the ways children were being brought up. For the country as a whole, differences would be even more magnified. The confounding of nation with culture stands critically challenged here. These participants were drawn from a narrow region of the National Capital Region of Delhi, and by no means a representation of the vast variety of ethnic, geographical, religious and economic differences that the India sustains within its borders. And yet, the departure from the dominant academic model of childhood is a shared reality, but even among the model of affluence, the indulged scholar who is the centre of the family, there are important differences from the Western norm. One cannot claim that the urban educated modern Indian parent is gradually becoming like this global idea based on a small minority.

If variety, adaptability and inheritance are the three pillars of evolutionary changes in biology, perhaps it is important also to respect this variety that we are blessed with, rather than to spend huge amounts of money in trying to unsuccessfully homogenize our communities by looking towards a universalised notion of childhood or family life. This study clearly shows how amazingly adaptive children are to their circumstances, and how quickly they learn even under difficult circumstances. Why are children being treated as uneducable, being pushed out of school, or ignored? There is an urgent need to look beyond business deals, political agendas, religious fervour and invest in favourable learning environments for children that celebrate the

very variety and adaptability in family life that has been the hallmark of our survival and success as a species.

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