Parent Beliefs, Socialisation Practices and Children's Development in Indian Families

A Report

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contribution to the project was efficient and effective. Additionally, Shashi was always available and willing to assist with challenges throughout the study, especially of the 'black and white' kind. Shipra Suneja has kindly consented to plough through the final draft of the study and I am thankful for her willingness to help with this tedious task. She has done an outstanding job of placing commas, locating mistakes and contributing references for the final draft.

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With my former doctoral students, I travelled through research studies guided by their minds; and to each one of them I want to say it has been a privilege to be part of their academic journey, and my association with their research has taught me much. Writing up this report today, I revisited many of the challenges of transporting a farm full of findings into a small report, restricted by the requirement to make printed sense. Thank you all for teaching me to do this, it was invaluable as practice. Shraddha Kapoor, Indu Kaura, Mila Tuli, Pooja Bhargava and Punya Pillai, in chronological order!

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I am joyful (and relieved) about the completion of this report. Towards the end of any project, the last few months inevitably become hectic, requiring extended hours of dedicated writing. With Sunil, I have shared my achievements, insights and frustrations as I plough through this and other assignments. His pride in my work has always been an immense source of strength. My children are the inspiration behind efforts towards understanding childhood better, and it is my promise to them that I shall make every endeavour to be fair and favourable towards the people about whom I write; to tell the story from their side. My 'extended family members' (Asha, Pratap, their children, especially the delightful Mohit) have contributed in many ways and I am grateful to them. The memory of my mother and her passion for scholarship remains beside me as I place my name here. Together, my father and mother provided us with an academic orientation that has flourished beyond the boundaries in which we, their children, live and work!

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ABSTRACT

This study, titled *Parent beliefs, socialisation practices and children's development in Indian families*, was initiated with financial assistance of the University Grants Commission, New Delhi under the Major Grants Scheme. The primary purpose of the study was the ethnographic description of childhood among selected families of 3-year olds in northern India. For this purpose, 58 families with 3-year old children were selected from seven different localities within the National Capital Region, including one village and two small towns in addition to the city. Based on the criteria of type of residence, household goods and means of transport owned, the families were arranged into three income levels: lower, middle and upper. The lower income group lived in single-room homes and usually owned a television and a cycle. The middle income group had two or three-roomed houses, some electronic goods and a two-wheeler or small car. The upper income group families lived in three to four bedroom homes, owned several electronic goods and one or more cars.

The main focus of the study was on children's daily life, the care that they received and their activities. Additionally, adults' beliefs about children were sought; and along with descriptions of the setting, the context of children's care was examined. Specific aspects of children's development were investigated through a structured play task and the assessment of receptive and expressive language.

The data analysis was guided by 'thematic analysis' and 'functional pattern analysis' approaches to develop themes about the context, care and development of the children. The recordings of the play task were managed by the ATLAS.ti software in order to develop a congruous coding system and also to find patterns related to selected factors. Excel spreadsheets were utilised for the management of the quantitative data on language, both receptive and expressive.

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 they live. Further, regarding contexts of care, it was discovered that exclusive dyadic interactions with mothers were in a small minority, with the largest number of children being brought up in the context of 'Many by Many' (many children by many adults). Children spent most of their time with other children, under moderate supervision of adults of the family. Play with adults was not common. Adults usually let children play with each other and entered the scene when children had to be fed, bathed, clothed or encouraged to sleep. Grandmothers, siblings, cousins, and aunts were all involved with the care of children. The men seemed to be a bit

reticent of the camera, except in a few instances where they were seen to participate in every dimension of children's care.

In the analysis of care of children, it was possible to take into consideration three intersecting dimensions, context of care, attention to the child and focus of the adult. *Context of care* was the adult to child ratio of the care arrangement: One by One, One by Many, Many by One, or Many by Many. Further, although this sounds counter-intuitive, the care provided *by* the adult and the care received by the child could be separated, particularly on account of multiple mothering. **Attention to the child** could be discussed between the two extremes: *distributed attention* and *concentrated attention*. Thirdly, the **focus of adults** could also be examined and classified by the polar categories of *concurrent focus* and *convergent focus.* Further, two possible prototypical expressions of contemporary child care approaches that emerged from the findings were tagged as the *Buddha syndrome* and the *Yashoda strategy*. These have been filtered from several observations and are not meant to be either exhaustive or restrictive.

Children spent most of their time with other children: siblings, cousins and neighbours, and learnt a lot from them. From older children, they entered more advanced activities and learnt to be guided; whereas with younger ones, they became competent carers. Most children were either attending school or learning from tutors. A great deal of enthusiasm regarding schooling was evident among families of all locations and income groups. Parents believed that school was the answer to a better life for their children.

The play sessions and language assessments revealed that in most cases, children were happy and interactive through most of the session. Even if they had no specific play materials at home, their activities with the objects of the play task were similar; although the way in which the materials were handled between partners in play was somewhat different. Parents were found to be highly accepting of children during these sessions, and the focus placed on interacting with people during play with objects was noteworthy. Most episodes during play were enactments of real life events in pretend play, which is typical of this age. Children's language assessment showed a clear role of *Inhibitory Control* on the accuracy of the answers in receptive language. Children who waited to hear the full instructions did better. Within the sample, the factors of both location and income group were significant. This was attributable to the context as much as to the child's competence.

Children's care, adult beliefs and children's expressions were found to be deeply intertwined with the circumstances in which families were living. The varied expressions in care arrangements in different settings did not preclude significant similarities. The primary

theme of children's care was the 'socialisation for competence' for contextual, variable, plural, hierarchical and even 'unfair' worlds, heavily oriented towards interpersonal relations over and above material possessions. Materials for play or other use were also frequently attributed with an interpersonal quality like who had brought them for the child. Language interchanges displayed a heightened awareness of 'intersubjectivity', the quality of perspective in conversation. For most conversations with the child, the perspective (of the child) was central, as was found in the use of the elaborate kin terminology in which children were found to be experts.

Regarding cultural differences, it can be concluded that Indian caregivers are as different from other Asian mothers as they are from the European or American; while also showing some similarities with both, thereby seriously questioning dual categories of cultural difference.

METHODS

Families with a 3-year old child were included in the sample using purposive sampling. Almost all families were approached through known people in order to obtain access and also gain the confidence of the family in this sensitive and intensive data collection procedure. Since the researcher had to spend hours with the family members, recording, observing and talking with the families, great care was taken in approaching them. After gaining entry through a known person, the researcher detailed the procedure to the family members. Permission was taken for video-recording.

Focus Group Interviews

Background information was collected from the families initially, or at any time during the visit, 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. Mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles and grandparents were often present and frequently engaged in these interviews. The primary focus of the interviews was on:

- i)   Views of parents on childhood
- ii)   Future of children
- iii) Specific views on education of children
- iv)   Issues and concerns

Naturalistic observation

The children were video recorded as they went about their everyday activities in the home, street, neighbourhood, school or playground. Naturalistic observation is a technique that involves observing subjects in their natural environment in order to access the phenomena under study with minimal intervention from the researcher. One of the primary advantages of this method is that it allows direct observation of the subject in a natural setting. The data were gathered through video recordings. After seeking permission from the parents for starting the recording, the researcher usually placed herself in a strategic position with reference to the child, and followed the child about her daily routine. Although all children could not be followed from morning till night on account of practical difficulty, activities of eating, sleeping, getting ready, playing and interacting with others covered a wide range of spaces in which children were recorded. Sometimes the researcher would be included in the conversation by the child or by the adults, and she responded to their queries, sometimes even engaging with the children. On an average there were 5 hours of recording

per family, ranging between one hour and 7 hours of recording time. Each parent was given a recording of the sessions with the family after data collection was completed. Additionally, each child also received a gift of books or play material for their participation in the study.

Activities with children

This section was added to bring some amount of uniformity in the otherwise wide range of circumstances within which children were being observed. Since the purpose of this study was also to develop methods of study that are culturally appropriate, contextually familiar and developmentally appropriate so as to gain favourable access to children's activities, much attention was given to the selection of procedures for this section. Thus, these conditions for each of the tasks may have been flexible, the spaces used may have varied, but the materials and instructions provided to all children were the same for all the sessions of play activities and language assessment.

<u>Play with toys</u>

A bag full of toys was given to the child and the child was encouraged to play with the toys. 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 half an hour unless it had to be terminated for some reason. 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.

Language expressive

A three-year old child's vocabulary is expanding every day and child seems to have a word to label several things in his or her environment for instance. Point to nose and ask what is this? In this task questions were asked related to: common actions, common labels for things and common activities.

a. What can you do with your mouth?
b. What can you do with your feet?
c. Tell me what food you eat.
d. What all does your mother do
e. What can we buy from the market
f. What toys do you have at home?

Language receptive

A 3-year old child is able to understand two stage commands for example, pick up the glass and drink water and understands contrasting concepts or meanings like night/day, stop/go, in/on or over/under. In this task 25 picture cards were shown to the child, the child was asked to indicate the agent of the given action in the picture. The child was given three chances with clear instructions before it is counted as failure to answer.

For example:

Picture 1- Toy on cart. A card has four pictures with different positions of toy with reference to the cart, and only in one the toy is on the cart. The child is asked to point to the picture where the toy is ON the cart.

Picture 2- Cat and boy. The card shows a cat and a boy in four positions only one of which shows the cat following the boy.

Data processing

The data in the study were gathered through different tools and techniques in order to acquire multiple perspectives on childhood in general and 3-year old children in particular. Data were observational, interview responses as well as assessment outcomes. For a comprehensive and detailed view of the field of study, it was necessary to utilise both quantitative and qualitative methods of study. For each 3-year old child, there was contextually rich data for which coding was derived guided by the primary objectives of the study, namely to describe the settings within which children live within seven different social settings in and around Delhi. 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 despite the fact that the children were only 3-years of age. 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. In all other contexts, the language exchanges were noted and used for explicating the communication during any event.

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).

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 58 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 58 children. Also, children's performance on language tasks is taken specifically to get a picture of their performance. Similarly, the play with given materials (structured play) activities were also analysed separately for a different view on children and their activities. The family interviews were also scrutinised to gather opinions and trends in beliefs about childhood among the sample. Lastly, the ethnographic observations were also screened for specific descriptions about the families. The third format for presenting the findings was related to within group differences in the sample. In this section, data were separated to explore differences in behavioural and developmental patterns based on different factors. Particularly, there was an attempt to look at rural urban patterns in childhood experiences and participation. Other factors were also explored when they were considered to be significant, like gender, birth order or family size and economic conditions. The main effort in the analysis was to remain faithful to the events while making them comprehensible. The manual for data of play analysis has been appended at the end of this report. All names of children and places (except Delhi which is retained as a placeholder) have been changed to protect their identity.

THE SAMPLE

Description of sample

A total of 58 families consented to be part of this study; however, the full procedure was conducted only with 53 cases. The ages of the children varied between 32 and 47 months with a mean of 41.7 months (SD = 3.49). Of the total of 58, there were 28 male children and 30 females. The relative mapping of income group ranging between the lower income group to upper income group was, lower (14), middle (24), and upper income (20) groups. 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).

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. 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 12.9 years of education (Range: 3 – 18, SD 4.44) and mothers had an average of 11 years (Range 0 – 19, SD 5.65). 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.

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 (27). Sixteen fathers were businessmen, with five owning large businesses and 11 small business enterprises. Many of the fathers (11) were self-employed, running food carts, doing electrical repairs, or pulling rickshaws. One father was a doctor with a private practice and one a casual labourer. These two were hard to classify in the above categories. Also, information about three families was missing. Regarding the occupation of mothers, it was found that a majority of the mothers were homemakers (40), 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, we found several employed mothers who were living in extended families to be willing for 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. Twelve were in private service at different levels, from domestic workers at an upper class home (5); 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.

A majority of the children were born in hospitals (49) whereas mostly among the lower income group, there were some home deliveries (9). 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.

The distribution of members per household shows a positively skewed distribution 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.

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 = 2.55[1]).

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, 18 were only children of their parents, although if they lived in joint families, there would have been other children in the home.

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.

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[1] The SD shows a 'bottom effect' on account of the high number of zeros in the distribution

FINDINGS

The findings of the study exhibit several important dimensions of the culture of childhood in India, in general, and the care of children in particular. It is essential to remember that these families lived within a circumscribed region of a particular area of India, the National Capital Region. Within this vicinity, the two ends of the economic continuum have been left out. The study did not include the very rich or the very poor. The findings contribute towards a better understanding of children's lives and their care on account of the legacy of shared traditions in family life and the resonance with other research studies. Regarding within sample variation, the fact that there were some common features in the experiences of children does not detract from the fact that there were important differences between settings.

Children's care and family dynamics.

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 care and concurrent attention. 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.

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.

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.

One Child by One Adult

	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
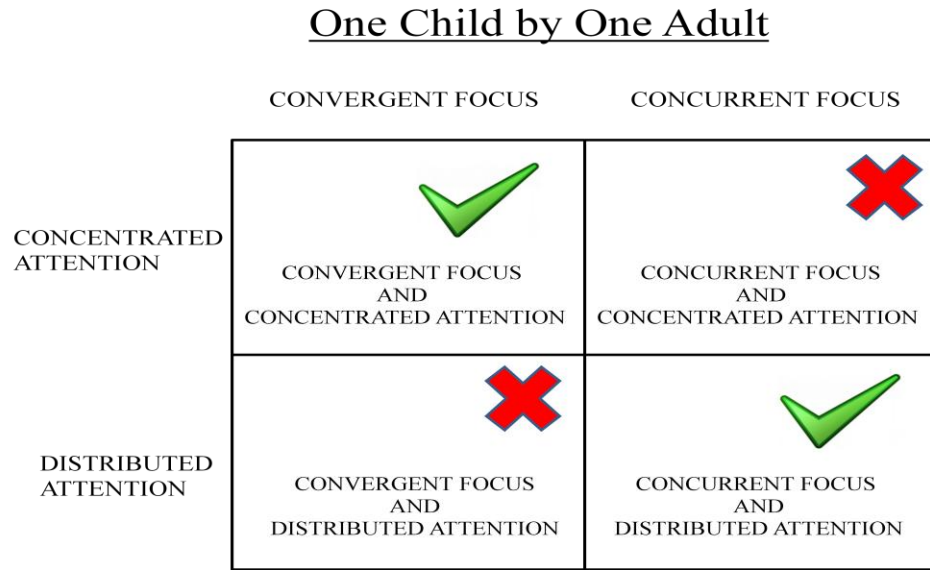
Figure 1: Attention to child and Focus of adult in One by One context

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 possibility 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.

Many Children One Adult

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

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:

One Child Many Adults

	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
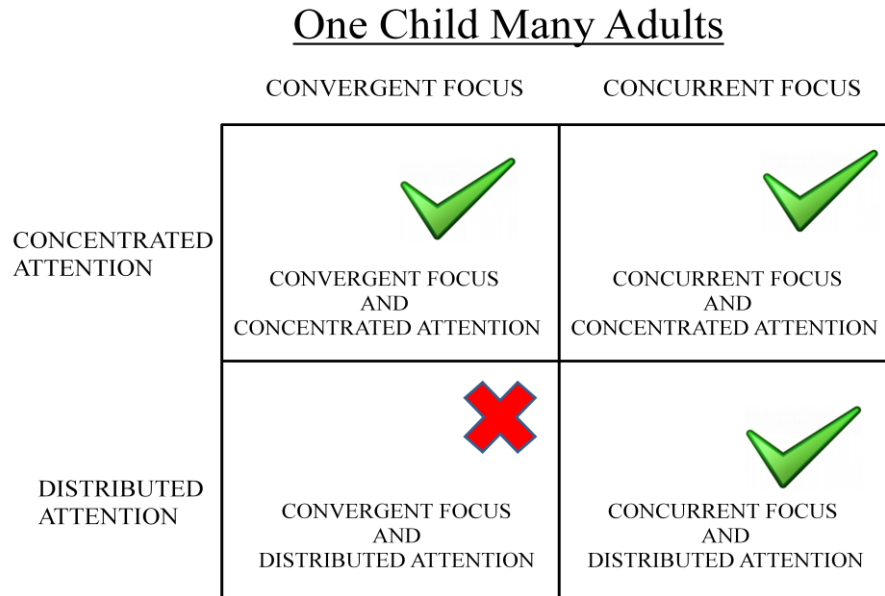
Figure 3: Focus of adults and attention to child in the context of One by Many

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 combinations 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 concentrated attention by one or more adults who may focus exclusively on the child, 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.

Many Children Many Adults

	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
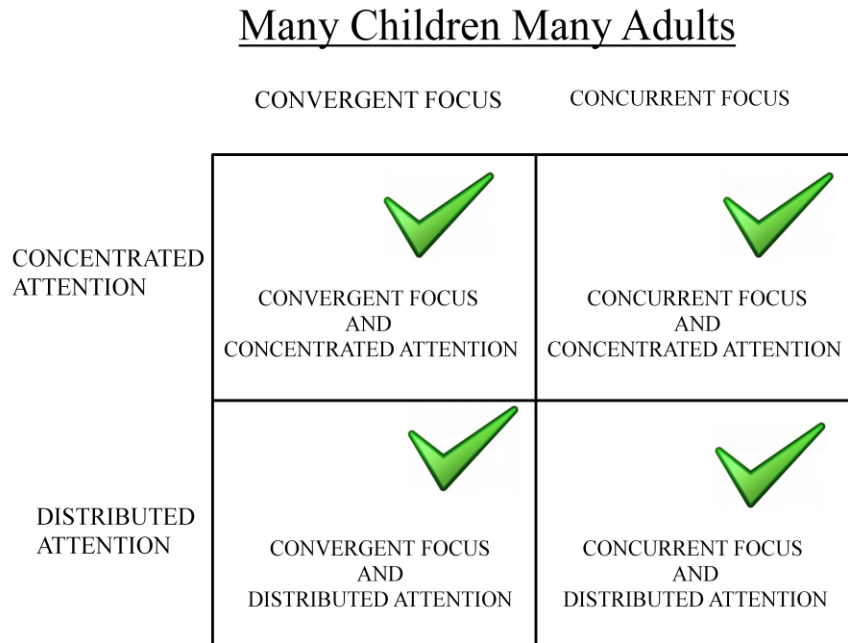
Figure 4: Attention to children and focus of adults in the context of Many by Many

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 display the involvement that Roopnaraine and Suppal (2003) found among urban Indian fathers. The reports in the interviews indicated 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.

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, 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 every drop 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!

Services and facilities available to children.

It could be said without any doubt, that none of the children were seen to be regularly availing any government services, whether we look at playgrounds (they were private, when available, otherwise they were not there), schools (all children were in private schools), health care (most reported using private doctors even among the poor), and sanitation in the cities or towns was also seen to be very poor. These children lived within what was provided and paid for by their parents and families regarding every facility, whether it was housing, food, health or entertainment. The only exception was the public water tap and community toilets in Nagar. But there as well, the usage would levy a charge to the person, and the provisions were well below the requirement. Children in the sample were found to be growing up in a world of privately accessible goods and services. Thus where there was lesser purchasing power, families would find themselves greatly constrained to provide for children.

A mention must be made here of the gated residential complexes that have been introduced into the Indian housing scene. These areas were found to be safe and adapted to children's activities, although these were available only for the relatively affluent families. Children could play around without fear, and parents and the elderly had opportunities to bring children out to play more frequently than in other settings. A similar facility was also seen in the Delhi college campus families. These modern facilities, at least in Bhawani and Delhi, seemed to provide the framework for community care and children's engagement with other children without tight supervision of adults. Somehow the same phenomenon was not observed in Shantipur's gated colony for some reason. Perhaps this complex was far too expansive to give the sense of safety for the independent movement of young children.

Children's activities.

Children played with other children most of the time. Spontaneous and unmediated play did not throw out many differences between what children did together, although materials used varied between abundance to non-existence. It was found that when a partly

mediated task was set up, children's play by themselves and with others flourished in all the settings. Not having materials did not in any way, seem to interfere with the capacity for children to engage in play. However, the material to child ratio did result in particular strategies that are worthy of mention. Children tended to frequently pull a cluster of toys towards themselves among families which had minimal toys. In the play task, giving and taking was observed, as was also resignation and even acceptance to another child's attempts to take away something of interest. Episodes of play were more fragmented on account of the intervention by other children, and many times, a child would not be able to complete an initiated activity.

In the play sessions, several important findings were revealed from the analysis. Children engaged in many instances of symbolic play, mostly enacting real life events. There was an interesting observation regarding the frequent references to people, present and absent, since much of the play involved others. Children were found to be playing with other children; somewhat differently with younger children and older children, and also showing some interesting trends in larger group play. Clear age related dynamics was seen even at this stage, where 3-year olds followed older siblings and companions, whereas the older ones tended to dominate play with younger partners. One interesting finding regarding play with the small chair and scale errors by children, was that children with younger siblings were least likely to make 'scale errors' (De Loache, 2006) with the chair, dismissing it as 'too small', sometimes not even bothering to check. Younger children, especially toddlers, were found to be sitting on the chair frequently to check if they would fit. Also, 3-year olds, when they were the younger of the two siblings were also often seen in this activity. This finding needs further investigation to be substantiated. Although play activities between the different settings did not differ in the conceptual content, there were differences in the length of each episode (shorter sessions in groups on account of frequent changes) and the strategies for giving and taking of the material among the children. Instances of asking and being asked "यह क्या है " (What is this) were not observed among rural children and the urban poor, clearly indicating towards the absence of an instructive or pedagogical orientation in the families (LeVine et al., 1994). Regarding the stages of activities, it was found that the activities ranged between simple looking at and picking up objects, to lifting them and indicating or asking other people its name. The next level was seen to be the classification of objects like stacking plates, lining up cars or glasses or blocks, more often seen in the company of older children. The children also expressed functional use of objects on themselves, and then on others, or dolls. Conceptually, the highest level of play was pretend

play using two or more objects in enacting real life events like an accident scene, tea drinking ceremonies or serving a meal for others. Except in the play with dolls as babies and choice of cars as play objects, no other gender related patterns in play were observed. Boys and girls were otherwise equally interested in the kitchen set, the chair, blocks and the doctor's set.

The language task displayed the most discomfort and drop-out by children, and was sometimes not completed due to the number of people gathered around, where it was not possible to find a secluded spot to carry out the interchanges. Prompting, assisting, teasing and intervening (repeating the instructions when they were told not to answer for the child) were the many strategies used by others. There was a sense of frustration observed when children could not answer, especially when it was assumed that the child would know the 'right' answers. The findings of the language task must be interpreted with caution and regard to these observations.

In many instances, children revealed the classic Piagetian phenomenon of transductive reasoning when they used assortments (Piaget, & Inhelder, 1973), either to classify objects in the play task or answers in the expressive language task. There was evidence of what Cole (2005a) calls 'distributed intelligence' when some of the children were seen to be suddenly disadvantaged by the silencing of a constant partner, as in the language task. One of the main things observed about children was the ways in which they assisted and watched out for each other, and also challenged and learnt from each other. The individual session was most uncomfortable to conduct among all the tasks, particularly in Mandipur and Nagar.

The dynamics among children was a pleasure to experience; assistance, gentle teasing, much support and regular companionship and care was evident among children under the distributed or concentrated attention of affectionate adults. Children's play with other children seemed distinctly different in the presence of adult supervision and intervention. This was evidenced in the initial watchfulness of the children towards the researcher. When they realised she was not likely to censure them, they would go about their activity without restraint.

Communication between children and adults.

Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) found two distinct forms of communication in communities: either the speech of adults was adapted to the child, simplifying the language in order to assist in understanding and communication, or as in the case of the Samoan and Kaluli families, the speech of adults use regular utterances with children and build

circumstances around which the child is encouraged to perform. The difference therefore lies according to Ochs and Schieffelin, in whether children adapt to adults or adults adapt to children. In this study, both modes of communication were exhibited. Rural families were found to speak in the same ways, not even slowing their speech for children, whereas some accommodation (although not as much as the amount written about in dyadic settings) was seen among the urban educated families. A special note needs to be made regarding kin terms. Again we see how this domain becomes foregrounded in every encounter. Kin terminology was always used from the perspective of children. The adult, whether related or not, would be spoken to even by adults, 'as if' the kin term which was actually deictic[2] in nature, was adapted for children to provide a nominal quality (Chaudhary, 2004). For instance, the child's grandmother would be called "दादी " (grandmother) by everyone while the child was around. The use of parental terms for grandparents and names for parents in some homes were shown to display some language games among children which found several mentions during conversations about children.

It was found that a large majority of the communications between children and adults (used more frequently by the adults), contained utterances in the form of a statement, but asked as a question. 'Pick up the plate?' An instruction question; and another type: 'This is red?' may be indentified as an 'endorsement question'. Such questions were strewn everywhere in the discourse, and needed specific attention. The only other source where a mention of this strategy was found was in Desai (2010):

Isn't it a typical Indianism to end questions in a negative? "Right, no?" "है न" (Isn't it)? In our everyday language, we use the negative ending to a question all the time in an unconscious way. As a mannerism of language that we employ routinely, it is useful in pointing towards an underlying cultural characteristic. The negative in the question prevents an opinion or a suggestion from being an assertion. It includes the person being spoken to, allowing for his or her input. In some ways, the person is unconsciously apologising for having an individual opinion and is appeasing the other person by attaching a note of self-doubt at the end. The doubt is dangled for the purposes of etiquette, and gives the speaker an escape route if the listener were to disagree.....The dangling negative inquisitor....is a sign of a culture uncomfortable with prickly individualism and helped turn individual inquiry into collective assent (Desai, 2010, p. 115).

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[2] Derived from deixis or pointing, implying different from different perspectives

Similar responses were also found in interactions of Japanese mothers with their children. The equivalent expression in Japanese, *ne*, implying "Isn't that right? Don't you agree?" finds resonance here (Shapiro, Ho, & Fernald, 1997), despite the fact that the parenting strategies between the two countries are quite different (Rothbaum, Pott, Azuma, Miyake, & Weisz, 2000). This seems to be an exciting area of study especially since it concurs with the model of a socially guided view of childhood, where the 'other' is essential to the self, resulting in the need to retain the recognition of another person's support in conversations, whether declarative or instructive. This fits in well with the language socialisation theory of the instruction for the use of language as well as the instruction through the use of language (Miller, & Hoogstra, 1992).

There were some differences based on setting which also need to be mentioned. Communication tended to be more verbal in urban homes, and whispers and inaccessible conversations were found to be more frequent among rural families, at least among children. Three of the children were particularly quiet, Chand, Nina and Bunty. The reasons for this were not evident from the study. Most children spoke Hindi, or its dialect (Mandipur and Nagar) some children also spoke other languages, like Anusha (Gujarati), Paras (Punjabi).

Learning in early childhood.

In the study, it was found that children learn a lot from other children. Learning and play were viewed as separate activities by most parents, but especially so among the urban poor families, where formal learning was initiated and supported as a matter of advancement and passage to a better life. All adults were found to be highly enthusiastic, supportive and encouraging of school attendance, education and a career for their children, although the ways in which this enthusiasm was expressed differed from family to family.

Academic learning or schooling can in fact benefit from the different settings that children come from. In opposition with this theme, schools work towards homogenising children, and dismissing their differences towards an ideal, uncomplicated and truncated view of children modelled after the child as a passive, but enthusiastic vessel, accepting what the school has to say. An appreciation of children's home environments, kin relations, ecological wisdom and cultural knowledge can help the school to accommodate and learn from children, although this sounds counter-intuitive, unless such a position is advanced, children will remain the least important aspect of a school, although extolled as its 'principal' person, to use an apposite pun!

While wrapping up this section, it is essential to review what can be taken as lessons for education. Presently, there is sufficient research to show how the child's home environment is not believed to be a place from where children can come to school enriched with experiences. On the contrary, there is a tendency to see home as interfering with serious learning, a place where children are expected simply to support school activity. The findings of our study causes a serious dent in the myth that children come to the school with little knowledge and that children from poorer homes have even less to offer to school learning. At entry to school and recent participation in the classroom, we found that 3-year old children in the study had accomplished several important milestones on account of their experiences at home. Even the poorest of environments held rich experiences for children, something that schools have failed to recognise. By and large, our school system organises itself around a few gifted scholars, leaving the rest at the mercy of neglect and negotiation. These children were in fact, highly motivated and encouraged for schooling, and it is likely that the first encounter with an unfriendly and rejecting school leaves them disheartened and disillusioned. This is especially true for the poor families, both in rural and urban areas. We need to inform ourselves, and also remind others, that children come to school with 3-years of intense social activity, physical exploration and language interactions. If we look at what the children know, rather than what they have not yet accomplished, the perspective is transformed; something that schools could benefit from being reminded about.

In this study, apart from the ethnographic observations, the children were also studied during activities with a standard set of play materials in order to estimate how children in different homes with different availability of materials and different economic facilities would play with the same toys. The first and most important finding in this regard was that children played with the material in all situations, even when there were several 'others' with whom the material had to be shared. The differences lay in the strategies children used to access the toys and not in the ways that children played with them. There was no evidence of a disadvantaged 'way' of playing among the poor. Out of a total of 58 children, only three showed a low level of engagement with the material, these children were also shy and withdrawn throughout the study. Further, it was also seen that Chand, Nina and Bunty were also wary of the researcher and generally quite fearful of her presence in general.

The observations and interviews revealed that there was a universal and unconditional enthusiasm towards school and its benefits were accepted among all the families. Adults went out of their way, eked out small amounts of money, spent time and energy for getting these young children into preschools. The 15 children who were not enrolled in regular preschool

were being taught by tutors from the family or neighbourhood. All children were knowledgeable about schooling, and demonstrated an eagerness and enthusiasm about going to school. Having said that, it becomes important to discuss that economic, occupational and educational circumstances of the families determined some of the strategies they used to access and support schooling. There are some important lessons in this section that we need to highlight from the point of view of children:

- All children were found to be enthusiastic about schooling and most (with the exception of 15) were attending regular preschools

- Adults believed in the magical strength of formal education, and motivation for education was evident for all children in this study. Parents and grandparents among all sections, rural and urban, poor to rich said they would like their children to study and find employment later in life, irrespective of gender.

- There was a serious interest in developing skills of writing and recitation, over and above reading.

- Reading stories out to children was found to be a common activity and was reported only in four families

- Children were found to spend more time with other children than with adults and in the process, they learnt a lot from them. The economic and ecological conditions and cultural traditions guided children towards group activity, rather than separate, dyadic, adult-child interaction.

- Rather than 'sharing' and 'caring' there was a lot of exchange between children, a sort of informal give and take where the older, more advanced children actually used several strategies to try to trick the younger ones into 'giving' them play materials, something that the younger ones were particularly quick to catch on to.

- Unlike what is believed about 3 year old children, they were quite capable of being without adults for extended periods of time. They manoeuvred slides, climbed stairs, ran around streets with confidence. They explored the environment, played with other children, solved problems, ate food, drank water, changed clothes, washed things, and generally, were able to keep themselves quite occupied in the company of other children. The exception perhaps was sleeping. Many children were found to need the mother or

grandmother when they wanted to sleep, or when it was time for their nap. This was more often seen in the village than in the towns and city, although not exclusively so.

- Children learnt from a variety of experiences at home, they are keen to pick up ideas transferred to them directly (writing, reading, pretend play) or indirectly (kin terms, conversations and use of resources) all known to be valuable skills for schooling.

- Children learnt from their older siblings and child companions, the rules of games and were quick to accept and adapt instructions. Due to the constant company of children of different ages, children were found to have gained impulse control, and would willingly wait and watch for opportunities, although there were temperamental differences among children.

- Children, when in the company of other children were also found to be able to negotiate with adults quite effectively

- The absence of play materials and books in the home did not at all influence the children's enthusiasm to play with the materials provided during the study. Children were quick to understand and follow the instruction about not bringing in their own toys to mix with the play session

- Children learnt best when experimenting with the surroundings and available materials, this helped them in finding out new solutions to problems and also experimenting with the material

- Apart from command over the home language/s, children were found to have developed a sense of ordering, classifying, using functional materials appropriately as well as playfully, following rules, improvising strategies, giving and taking of play materials

- Children benefitted a lot from conversations with parents and grandparents regarding things that interested them at home and in school

- Different communities prepared children differently for school - some for writing, some for reading and others for other activities

- There was no evidence in this study, of gender related differences in children's activities or the organisation of the home and relationships related to learning or school.

A school too far.

Sharpened, condensed and focussed care of children, where they are brought up under high supervision, the world is brought to the child. Examples of this are observable in the feeding (as opposed to eating by themselves among the rural mode...and eating by themselves among recent urban migrants), purchasing materials for children to play with (as opposed to the child's freedom to explore the surroundings without barriers), sitting with the child to learn (as opposed to instructing the child to pick up a book, if at all), speaking to the child and exchanging conversations (rather than speaking about the child to others which the child can hear). What we find in this study is that there is a clear advantage that urban middle and upper class children have with tasks involving reading material. However, with regard to the exploration of novel material consisting of a variety of rather low cost everyday items, all children were actively engaged with these items. Even the most fearful and restrained of children from disadvantaged urban poor environments, showed sharp and focussed play activity when confronted with play materials provided during the course of the study. Notwithstanding the slight differences in patterns of approaching the material at the outset, the exploration of the material, the willingness to play, the exchanges with siblings and peers, the sense of ownership of the materials were all distinctly observed in all children.

These findings have a critical bearing on school experiences for young children in India. Presently, there are clear disadvantages for children from rural and urban poor environments regarding performance at school and formal learning. Experiences of early schooling among neighbourhood schools, whether these are private or government, are seriously focussed towards the unadulterated pursuit of formal learning, namely writing and recognition of alphabets and numbers, whether in English or Hindi. Many children were found actually attempting to write at this age. As the example of one 3-year old from a lower income family demonstrated, everyday, she was sent for private tuitions to a neighbour's home where under the surveillance of a stick, she was urged to write 'A' repeatedly during the research session. When the child was unable to make the lines join at the top, she received a stern reprimand from the 'teacher' who comfortably declared that she does not spare the stick to teach children. She considers this her duty since parents spend hard earned money for this tuition, and she wants to produce the best results for them. Although this was the case of only one child, this is a reflection of the prevailing idea of early childhood education among the rural and small town communities, even without the stick. Even among the wealthier families, although play, art and craft were provided for in the schools, the emphasis on formal learning was also evident. In conclusion, it could be surmised that there is a failure of the

schools to adequately understand and adapt to the lives of children, especially among rural and urban poor. On account of the adaptive activities of children, there was a clear preference for physical exploration and interpersonal engagement, while familiarity with and favour towards the written word was not evident. On account of this emphasis, the early learning experiences of children seem to get completely lost since the school environment fails to appreciate this learning that has already happened at the home. The school teachers start afresh, often denigrating the child for unfamiliarity (and worse still, unwillingness) with the written word on account of the family environment. This negativity clearly overshadows and even obliterates the advantage these children have with social interactions, physical exploration, spontaneous play and improvisation. The early learning at home is sidelined and the child is brought into the formal classroom with little or no preparation. No wonder that these children are least likely to find engagement with school as is reflected in their performance and high drop-out (push-out, actually) rates. The early learning environment of the school needs serious revision to provide a place where children's early years at home find expression and legitimate recognition. The idea of a classroom is one where children learn to write and read. This belief is shared by the community. Even parents expect such intervention, since it is often believed that school is a place to learn discipline (उठना बैठना सीखते हैं), and not freely do your own thing. This prevailing ideology and the clash between the school curriculum and the developmental status as well as cultural context of early learning create an immense dissonance for the young child. The child then becomes most likely to find failure at school, thus adding to life-long, increasingly expanding gaps between their lives and the educational system. School failure is sown early in the lives of many children, especially in communities where families struggle to keep children in school anyway. The story for children from educated families was also not always happy, even though it was not as difficult.

Contentious elements in children's care.

Cultural differences in the evaluation of children's care are an undisputed reality. Yet, this is one domain of cultural activity where there is a clear preference for known ways of bringing up children. What may seem as a matter of common sense in one community may be anything but that in another (Geertz, 1975). The conclusions would be incomplete without the mention of a few aspects of the care of children that would be qualified by international standards on children's rights as 'contentious'. I will pick up this difficult task as a responsibility to make an attempt to understand, and therefore explain (not justify) specific

elements of children's care that was observed, even if it was only in one family. Rather than writing of the prevalence, I shall invoke the events that brought the practices to my attention so as to better understand the situational and/or ideological reasons behind them. First let me list these out.

- Children were found to be fed, which could sometimes qualify as 'force-feeding
- Children were occasionally spanked, but often only threatened with physical punishment
- Children were frequently offered rewards for their actions, rarely given.
- Children were often given the responsibility to care for younger children
- Children were made to write
- Children were made to work around the home
- Adults frequently used the researcher's presence to make the children do something
- All children slept with adults way into early adolescence and sometimes beyond
- Children were breast fed (sometimes) beyond early childhood

I thought a lot about placing these encounters in print, since these could easily be misinterpreted to conclude that Indian parents were following unethical practices with children. It would have been much easier to cloak these as incidental and close the chapter with a pleasant account of children's lives, a sort of light-hearted story that would be easily consumed, and perhaps also effortlessly forgotten. I decided not to do that and resolved to do this the hard way, to take on each of these themes and try to explain them from the inside rather than the outside, searching repeatedly for meaning and reason, rather than treating them as bizarre trends of an anachronistic culture.

This list is pan-Indian. I have seen well-educated mothers in other cities hound their children in public spaces (not common in the north) following them around with food in their fingers, distracting them during play, cleverly scooping in mouthfuls of the valuable food prepared specially for them. I have heard about breast feeding others' babies among hill communities in Uttaranchal who often leave them behind at home on days of long work in the fields. The babies are often breast fed by others. I have seen children being spanked in buses and aeroplanes to manage their excesses, and I have watched over and over again, children being cared for by children. But I have also heard a 'foreign' co-passenger comment his desire to "drop a bomb" on the awful Indian babies in the row in front of him, since their cries on account of "poor parenting" were disturbing his precious sleep! These are features of

Indian families for which Indian parents have even found themselves deprived of their children by 'authorities' on the care of children in other countries, as recent examples from Norway and England have shown.

Care of children by children.

By no means is India the only nation where care of children by children is encountered. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that care by siblings and cousins is universal, although not noticed or studied by mainstream developmental psychology that overburdens the mother as if she has nothing else to do but to sit beside the child and smile warmly at her (Burman, 2008). In this study, the care of children by children was found to take place mostly in circumstances characterised by and tailored to what has been identified as distributed attention and concurrent focus. This strategy was seen to be an adaptation to rural life, although by no means restricted to rural homes alone. Children learnt effectively from older children since they were caring but not crowding; favouring them, but not forever; watchful but not hovering; teaching but not targeting; adapting but not always accommodating to the younger one. If the older child was protective on occasion, she was found to also take the rewards for the commitment at another time. In this manner, the young child was often challenged beyond the domain of possibilities provided by caring adults. Children also learned from younger ones that they could not always get away with tricks, that they would gain favour from the family if the care they provided was effective. They learnt because they could teach. Almost all adults encountered in the study had experienced interacting with children before having their own, men and women. The reason why children's care of children works is because of the companionship, the kind of companionship that adults can never provide to children even if they make serious attempts, precisely because they are no longer children. The ideology that children learn from other children was not always articulated, but found tacit manifestation in all homes.

Did care by children always end up becoming favourable? The answer is 'no'. When young children cared for younger ones in the harsh neighbourhood of the urban poor, where other adults may be friendly but not always favourable, where injury and illnesses make frequent visits on account of economic constraints and poor provisions by the State, children were found to be vulnerable. The care system that was better adapted to a rural setting, when transported to the city under conditions of poverty, was at best a compromise, one that often broke the mothers' hearts. Mothers who went out looking for small amounts of money for food, would lament and worry about their children, frequently making many adjustments in

their work schedules and job arrangements in order to avoid leaving children 'alone'. Where there were other relatives who could care for the child, mothers were found to be at peace.

The expectation for older children to be responsible for younger ones was prevalent in all homes, and also evidenced in conversations and discussions about school, homework, feeding, activities, and entertainment. Sibling relationships and relationships with other children in the extended family are tested and treasured and actively supported by adults. It is rare to find the sort of rivalry and attack that Anil expressed with his younger brother, perhaps because he believed that it was on account of the little one that he was separated from his parents and left in the care of the maternal grandparents. From this example, it is also perceptible that the care of the grandparents as a substitute for parents does not emerge as favourable as that experienced by children in multi-generation families. Perhaps this is why the joint family ideology still sustains, especially when the children are young.

Breast feeding.

Indian mothers regularly breast-feed their children well into early childhood. Among the urban elite working families, there is likely to be a higher dependence on formula milk, but there is active resistance against that in public spaces. For the ordinary Indian mother, feeding her child is considered natural, and children are usually fed until the next one arrives, sometimes even persisting with feeding of both children. Shefali, a mother of two reported one day that her two and a half year old was down with fever, and in the conversation, I happened to ask if she was breast-feeding her. Somewhat amused, she said "Not only she, my seven year old also wants to take my breast. Whenever he approaches me I give him a smack to get him off". For me, what was instantly noticeable was not just the demand from the young boy (that was interesting since it must have been permitted to be demanded), but the ease with which Shefali spoke about it. Feeding your own children is considered natural, even though for more modern Indians, this episode would be seen as rather weird! Another encounter needs mention.

Two mothers were sitting and chatting on the cool floor in the afternoon time in their one-room home in Nagar. Three children were playing around them, somewhat sleepily. The first woman Asha had two boys (both unclothed on account of the summer heat, smeared only with some talc that made them appear somewhat ghost-like), a 3-year old and a year and a half. The other woman, Bindu, had a baby about 10 months or so. Bindu chatted with Asha about family and then also about the children. Asha's younger one was walking about around

her as the 3-year old lay on the cool floor, almost asleep. The young baby was active and exploring in her mother's lap. Instantly, Asha takes Bindu's baby into her arms and briefly checking with her mother with a look, she pulls the baby to her lap and pulls out a breast from the neck of her night-dress, making an attempt to feed her. This action has several reactions, Bindu is amused, Asha's younger son begins to grumble and approaches the mother and tugs at her. The young baby quickly moves her face away from the breast and looks at the mother, refusing to turn the other way. She is not accepting mine, Asha says, to which Bindu has a response, she picks up Asha's younger son and holds him in her lap, comforting him and then tells Asha, 'She has just eaten something '*Halwa*' that is why she is not feeding from you. The women laugh about it.

Feeding others' babies is not unheard of; as a matter of fact while discussing this episode with other mothers to check its prevalence I was told of many other incidents. Some examples were of children whose mothers were absent on account of a medical emergency and the grandmother started actually producing milk when she placed the young two-month old on her breast, otherwise he would not have survived, I was told. Stories about life in the village were reported, where long hours of absence make such a practice inevitable, the women told me, and mothers feed each other's babies on such occasions. Sometimes this exchange would also lead to some teasing about having the child become 'indebted' to the other mother!

Unless the action is understood within the context in which it occurs, there is bound to be some misunderstanding. For these women, it was playful and funny, even commonplace, and Bindu's reaction, actually affirming that it was not the baby's rejection of the other woman's breast, but the fact that she had a full tummy that was the likely reason, again tells us as much as the action itself.

Sleeping arrangements.

Proximity to adults was not always encountered during the daytime. As a matter of fact children were found to spend more time with children. And yet, all children were found to be sleeping with mothers or others. Why do children continue to sleep with adults in all the settings? Why does this practice persist even in homes that had special rooms for children filled with play material and cots which were never used? One important reason is certainly the absence of space. You cannot place a value on sleeping separately when there is only one

room! So, in this sense, sleeping together is adaptive. Yet again we see the persistent tradition, and the value placed on proximity during sleep during which a child is seen as most innocent and vulnerable. Despite being able to afford separate rooms, children slept in their parents' bed even in wealthier homes, the proximity was reported to be based on affection and care for a young child. Sleep during the day was also frequently with caregivers, always to *put* the child to sleep which could take up to half an hour, but also longer to keep the child rested and secure. For many mothers, it is perhaps the only time that they do get with their child from a busy schedule of house work on an ordinary day. Resting with children, putting them to sleep was also restful for the women, it was observed. Most mothers took the afternoon nap with their child, and on a hot afternoon in the tropics, the rest is a relief. In the villages where people sleep out in the open, the presence of an adult is a security for the child, and it also offers support to the older women who invite those whose mothers have had younger babies to sleep with them. The cuddling, cajoling, patting and sometimes singing to the child were always affectionate and endearing. Children were also reported to be fondly sleeping with their fathers as was observed in Yukti's case during the morning. The father was taking some extra time in bed, and Yukti ran and cuddled up to him before school. Children were kept close because it was considered 'too early' and 'unsafe' for them to sleep by themselves, children would get 'scared' if they discovered themselves alone in the middle of the night, and only an uncaring parent would allow such a practice. Similar findings have been obtained from other studies (Shweder, Arnett, & Goldstein, 1995) where mothers from Bhubaneshwar were found to evaluate the American practice of separating babies as cruel!

Physical punishment.

Children were sometimes spanked (three episodes in all) and many mothers were unhesitating in their declaration, of using spanking as in Ankur's mother's case. The grandmother sitting next to her responded that she does not believe in hitting children, they are too young for that, but she slaps him, referring to the mother. Children were also seen to be slapped by other children. However, children did not cry, and the punishment appeared mild. The threats of physical punishment were in abundance, but not the execution. How is one to interpret these threats (and the same happens with the rewards) of punishment that are not backed up by punishment itself? Why are they used? It was found that even though parents did not spank their children often, the threats worked! And children did seem to avoid actions when they were told "मार दूँगी तेरे को ", (I will hit you).

Regarding supervision of physical punishment by the State, there is a regulation in place for punishment in schools, but in order for it to be attended to in the home, the act needs to be labelled as 'abuse'. I believe that unbending state supervision of children's care is as contentious as use of physical punishment. However, the point that is important here is that the use of physical punishment can be hurtful and damaging to children, especially if they were hit to hurt or abused violently. It remains extremely difficult to assess the boundaries between disciplining and abuse, thus the censure. Some small slaps here and there were considered okay and even effective in managing children's conduct, although all parents agreed that hitting children was unfavourable. To assume that the mother who spanks is one who is abusive may be an error of judgment. At this point, the widely repeated story from the Epics about young Krishna and his mother comes to mind. The epitome of an affectionate and indulgence, Krishna's adoptive mother, Yashoda, often finds herself frustrated by the young boy's pranks. The story goes that Yashoda picks up a stick to spank the wayward Krishna, but as she advances to hit the child, she breaks into irrepressible sobs at the idea of being so cruel. I will pick up this story for reference a bit later as well.

In a cultural tradition where the spanking of children was considered effective when used sparingly, its use as a threat was found to be frequent. Perhaps the most reasonable way of concluding this section would be to say that adults' use of physical punishment was seen in very few instances, and did not emerge as hurtful from a distance. However, the use of threats was effective and omnipresent. If we went only by what parents *said* to children, we would perhaps conclude, wrongly, that children were frequently beaten, as it would be to say that children were never touched for physical punishment.

Tricking children into doing things.

Like punishment, children are often 'tricked' into doing things for rewards that are rarely ever given. Whether the demand was to recite poetry for the camera, or to dance, or to eat a particular food, adults frequently offered children things that they were not seen to be giving. Why they did this seems related to several issues. One was found that despite the low rate of follow-up, these strategies were effective. It was almost as if the child stood up and took notice of something that was important. Another reason may have been the underlying assumption that children must get used to the fact that rewards and awards are valuable; but in this frequently unfair world, it is not necessary that the other will always do what is said, and that an award will always be given. This seems like a tall story, but again, the encounters on the field compelled a search for reasons. Perhaps it was believed that rewards would be

valued only if they were given occasionally. Despite the intermittent, or rather rare backing up of an offer, many children were seen even to ignore adult requests, and some listened to them, but conceded when they felt like. Again a straightforward analysis of the discourse would lead to the erroneous conclusion that these parents used reward and punishment for managing children's behaviour, it would be more apposite to say they used references to rewards and punishment regularly. There is an interesting comment on language that we can make here. Does saying something imply the 'doing' of it? Is it enough just to say something and not back it up with action? There is a specific cultural flavour to this particular relationship between language and behaviour in Indian homes that could be misunderstood as perpetuating falsehood.

Using others for disciplining.

Adults were often experienced to be using others for disciplining children. "What will aunty say?" was a frequent reference to the researcher when the child was doing this or that. This could be seen as shirking one's authority or passing it on, or other such conclusions. However, being among the families for extended field work, it was seen to be effective, and children responded to these references (as was seen in Sheena's case in drinking up her milk). However, it was not simply the action completion that was found to be significant. The inclusion of others was an important objective, and to make the 'other' in an authority position, was one such strategy in the landscape where close relations among people are valued. The long hours spent by the research in intimate moments of the care of children provided her a legitimate position which the adults tended to communicate in other ways like building fictive kin terms for her and repeatedly requesting her to join in the meals.

Feeding.

With the exception of the rural and recent migrants from villages, all adults fed their children and some would even qualify as force-feeding, that is, giving food to the child which the child was reluctant to eat. The reasons why this happens are likely to be related to two or three factors. Firstly in these homes, food for the child is almost always made by the women of the house, often the mother, from start to finish, food is freshly cooked three times a day. Perhaps this effort makes the food appear precious, and not to be wasted. Often mother's were heard saying "म्मा ने बनाया था !" as added information for the child. Mothers poured over tiffin-boxes to sniff out leftovers from school which would then be queried.

There is a parallel belief that children will not eat unless they are fed. Their attention is too wavering and they do not realise how important it is to eat nourishing food prepared by

affectionate hands. The idea of adequacy for children eating is far beyond what children were seen to be in fact eating. Paradoxically, feeding of children is also believed to be potentially inviting the evil eye from others and the lament that children do not eat may indeed also be linked with this fear. A child who does not eat well is not likely to be vulnerable to others' envy! When the Olympic medallists were seen after they returned home from the events, family members were frequently shown on TV, feeding them affectionately with sweets. Young adults report the highlights of being fed with affection when they returned home from a trip or hostel life.

Another linked sentiment is the belief that food is not to be wasted. Food stuffs are costly, and the work done on it by the mother makes it valuable, as mentioned earlier. As a result, each morsel is treasured and nowhere was food seen to be discarded. All left overs were recycled for other children, adults, or animals and birds, never to be thrown away. It is possible that children are not allowed to eat on their own on account of the potential spillage. "गिरा दिया ", or "गिर गया " is seen as unnecessary wastage, therefore feeding. Children in the village were skilled in 'not wasting' since they were seen to be serving small quantities at a time so as not to waste food. The practice of not sharing food on account of its becoming 'jhootha' among unknown adults was not found to be applied to food eaten by young children. As a matter of fact, sharing a child's *jhootha* and its reverse was noted as a special tie between children and adults. "मैंने तेरा झूठा खाया है " (I have had your *jhootha* [no adequate translation is available] food)!

Methods for studying children.

The findings of this study point clearly towards an increased alienation of children from the rural and urban poor homes when individualised assessments were introduced. Group settings are seen as natural and comfortable, and any request for separation or isolation or even special attention made children feel awkward and highlighted in a social environment where they are used to being one of many. Any methods planned for children accustomed to distributed care must take this reality into account, or there will be an unfavourable distancing of the child from the research study often leading to faulty conclusions. As Misra says, "You can change reality with one word" (Misra, 2010), just as you can change the assessment of a whole group with a single instrument!

Techniques that use a narrative format have been known to be more successful in engaging children. Babu and Misra (2000) in their study of children from different economic background in India indicated that use of story narratives was more successful in capturing

children's talk about other person's mind than using the standard 'False Belief' task. According to her, maternal input in terms of reference to the mental states of others in their discourse facilitates theory of mind development in children which are not adequately captured by using the standardised version of the 'False Belief' task. The use of language as data is also important to examine. Although language spoken provides several significant patterns in socialisation studies, it is also advisable to expand communicative exchanges to include other elements like clothes, decorations, pictures and other semiotic devices people use as markers (Gottlieb, 2012). Another point needs to be made about the relationship between what people say and what they do. The distance that was found between the threats for punishment and the promise of rewards, and their actual delivery, exhibits a particular arrangement between speech and action that needs further attention in order to be substantiated.

In the discipline of cultural psychology, the use of pre-coded categories, rating scales and rigid measures of entified processes are avoided on account of the foreclosure these cause while analysing phenomena (Valsiner, 2012). Since culture is everywhere, our task as social scientists is to be able to apprehend real life phenomena within the existing meaning systems so that the contextual symbolic sense is not lost in translation, so to speak. The translation from reality to academia can seriously obfuscate and even distort reality by creating artificial divides, oppositions and implications that may not exist in reality. Explained reality is distinct from experienced reality (Berger, & Luckman, 1966) despite the fact that it is believed otherwise. Although this applies to all social phenomena, somehow this becomes more problematic when we discuss children. The motivation to look favourably at children is not something they (the children) can set-up, as it may be done by university students. Neither do they have the capacity to modulate their conduct for 'socially appropriate' research behaviour that would gain favour from developmental psychologists. Even the permissions for doing research are in the hands of the parents.

In this research, several phenomena were encountered that I have chosen to display rather than disguise. The list of contentious care practices has deliberately been presented so as to open up the phenomena for reasonable discussions. There is no attempt to justify the unjustifiable, but to dismiss common care strategies as bad practices is as condemnable in the world of science as its opposite, to glorify certain cultures as having the final answers to the care of children. Hardly ever have I heard or read about the great deal of effort that Indian parents make to conserve resources while bringing up their children. This is not something the technologically advanced world wants or needs to reckon with precisely on account of

their increasingly precarious economies. Yet, the per capita expense on a child in India would be only a fraction of the expenditure her counterpart in the US or Japan may be utilising. This contrast is brought with great skill in the delightful documentary by Balmes (2010) titled 'Babies'. Although a brilliant presentation of only 4 babies from four diverse places, Japan, Mongolia, Namibia and the US, Balmes makes it amply clear that the degree of difference in the investment in children does not necessarily result in a matching outcome!

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The main focus of the study was to investigate the dynamic arrangements within which children in seven different communities live and learn. It was found that the strategies used for the care of children were inextricably linked with practiced ways of living and the unique person-environment dynamics within each cluster. However, it was also noticed that the differences did not preclude enduring commonalities. Submerged within these subliminal algorithms in variable settings, some continuity was discernible. Several distinguishable linkages could be made with India's various pasts. There seems to be a body of beliefs that constitute what may be visualised as an 'inertia of motion' of persevering cultural traditions that run through family life in this study, can be heard in folk stories, read about in myths and legends and also in the list of ethnographies from different parts of India. This section is an attempt to consolidate these similarities and differences in order to disentangle the fluid from the firm elements of children's care.

In general, the findings of this study endorse the belief that "children's development.....is a creative process of participation in communication and shared endeavours that both derives from and revises community traditions and practices" (Rogoff, et al., 1993; p. 8), and their care is organised within the symbolic spaces that the families inhabit. In this regard, a prominent priority in the guidance of children was directed towards interpersonal dynamics and social relationships over and above material elements in all settings. Material goods like toys, clothes, and food were all wrapped in the network of relationships. Who gave what to the child, which adult was the child's favourite person to eat with, whom the child likes to sleep with, which toy had the child's *masi* had lovingly selected for her for the last birthday, were all evident themes in the dialogues with and about children. Children were seen as members of and belonging to a family rather than to a couple. Multiple caregivers, sometimes indistinguishable, unless the elaborate kin terminology was used for identification, were found to surround children in villages where mothers seemed more distant and others were predisposed towards caring for groups of children. It was found that children were experts in the complicated kin terminology and its applications at the age of three. In villages, infants received special attention on occasion, but this tended also to be sporadic as was the concern for young children when there was some issue that needed attention. This group-care theme prevailed in all levels of the data, activities, observations and beliefs, although the manifested strategies tended to be adaptive to the prevailing circumstances, and therefore different in different settings.

Enduring traditions were found to coexist along with modern approaches. Also, some domains of activity found more or less emphasis in the different settings resulting in the impression of multiplicity and multi-temporality of beliefs and practices in the care of children. Modern parenting strategies regarding active engagement with children's learning was found to coexist with the encouragement of regular religious observances, for instance. Dual-earning couples in corporate jobs invited their parents to live with them so their children could receive family care rather than being sent to day care, a finding also encountered before (Kapoor, 2005). Village women retained the regard for patriarchy, but actively supported education and employment of women. The findings reflected an assortment of different ideas about childhood to create a patchwork of beliefs with which families conducted their lives. The expression 'patchwork' does not imply adhoc-ism, rather a fluidity and adaptability that is believed to be the reason why these traditions have been sustained.

In her 2003 publication, Trawick ends her essay by asking whether the rather complicated and often tenuous relationships within the Indian family will survive the pressures of technological progress and commercial advancement. An answer is attempted here. The relationships within the Indian family were found to be resilient and responsive to change, allowing for differences and disagreements with a tenacity that was exceptional. It was seen that when families break up, the conflicts are usually so bitter on account of the surface tension that keeps the multi-generation family together, that differences were irreconcilable. At least where there are young children, the forces of fusion were seen to be much stronger than their opposite. The format of family life was also able to recognise and respond to differences between individuals without either dismissing conflicts or exaggerating them. Perhaps the families where this was not present would have splintered, so we see only the functional multi-generation families. I wish to propose here, that in the family life-cycle, the joint family is the strongest during the phase of raising young children, sometimes falling prey to pressures as children grow older. Another important clause to be considered is that the study did not include wealthy Indians living in upmarket areas of the metropolis who maintain regular contact with Western life-styles through personal travel and regular visitation, and it is possible that the forces of modernity and consumerism may have had more impact on their choice of a different life-style.

Within the study, adults in the upper, educated group who were living with technological advancement and modern facilities were also found to be making traditional choices, whereas apparently traditional homes displayed liberal attitudes towards children. This quality of Indian social life is an enduring feature. Plurality, resilience and adaptability

of Indians have always been written about, perhaps based in its history. Paradoxically, even the past is fraught with plurality. India "does not have one past, but many pasts" (Ramanujan, 1999, p. 187). To add to the texture of multiplicity is the fact the past always has a constant presence in our present (Anandalakshmy, 2010). As Thapar (2000) remarks, "At certain levels there are aspects of cultural traditions in India that can be traced to roots as far back as a few thousand years, but such a continuity must not be confused with stagnation" (p. xxv). Thus we find that there is an intricate weaving of the various pasts, such that "every description of tradition can be as a negation or contradiction of another" (Anandalakshmy, 2010, p. 19). As Rich (2010) writes about her days as an American student of Hindi living in the city of Udaipur,

> This town is in a time warp, though it is hard to say which time. When neighbours wave and ask "Who was that who walked you home?" I think the '50s. When the *rikshaws* whiz by, looking like Model Ts from the back, it's the muted Indian '20s. But when I go to the doctor and find myself next to a tribal woman with an enormous gold nose ring, or when I talk to a Rajput, a member of the autocratic warrior caste – the men have knife-straight backs and villainous handlebar moustaches – I can see the links to the Middle Ages so clearly, its startling....In the centre of time's web...is the sly tugging present. (p. 49, 52)

This sense of parallel historicity accompanying technological advancement in every sphere of life is enormously difficult to comprehend especially for people who live in homogenous-looking environments of technologically advanced nations. There is thus a collective 'multivoicedness' and multi-temporality that characterised the care of children. It is like living in a time machine which simultaneously creates periods of history along its journey. Some of the ways in which families were living seem to be unchanged from the times of the earliest ethnographies of family life in India (Minturn, & Hitchcock, 1966), whereas others have been changed forever (Seymour, 1999). Parents still sleep with children in the same bed for several years before they are separated, multi-generational families still find favour and children continued to be closely supervised in specific domains like feeding. On the other hand, education is a high priority and parents spend a large proportion of their income in gaining access to 'good' schools for their children.

From the findings, it appeared that children were being socialised for a high tolerance for multiplicity in social relationships. Some of the practices suggested a tacit guidance of children towards coping with 'unfair' practice, or a socialisation for competence in a world perceived as frequently biased and undemocratic. Rewards were frequently mentioned, but

rarely given; but neither was punishment. Children were told to care for other children and accommodate to older people's needs without demanding reciprocity. Goodness was repeatedly discussed and recommended by using the approach towards *achha bacchha* and an avoidance of *ganda bacchha* (good child and bad child), but often without an adequate explanation, again indicating that rather than fairness, reason and equality, children were being brought up with regard for inequality as difference, deceit as inevitable and respect rather than reasoning, each as a preference and not in opposition to the other. Thus it was not that reasoning was absent, but regard and respect was favoured. In evaluating Indian parenting, a common error is to take authority as undemocratic and respect as uncritical acceptance. From the findings of this study it was found not to be the case. These ideologies were favoured, not exclusive, thereby permitting a multiplicity of ideas to coexist.

The findings of this study have important implications for the research on Indian families in general and childhood in India in particular. As the findings indicate there are certain distinctive practices and characteristics of the contexts of Indian childhood that need to be considered when we are planning for children. Having entered the households and conducted extensive field observations with each family, there are some important implications that emerge from this study, and these are listed below.

Regarding childhood.

About childhood in general, it can be said that the families in the study presented a belief in childhood as a continuous stage. The orientation towards the special status of children, in need of care and protection, especially vulnerable to experiences, was not clearly evident in the findings, except among the highly educated sample, that have access to the global discourse on childhood. It was particularly evident among the cluster of families in Shantipur, by and large the wealthiest cluster in the study. However, even in this group, and thus within the group as whole, the value for multiple caregivers, the orientation towards people, the value for multiple generation households especially for children's well-being, was evident in all homes. In was obvious in the laments of the urban poor families when they spoke about the safety and security of life in villages that they had left behind in their search for a better life; and it was evident in the interviews with the middle and upper class when they spoke of the desire for their children to be respectful and caring towards the elders in the family. There was a high value for relationships and the social dynamics with family life, where not equality and equal rights, but vertical 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 1988; Sen 2005; Verma, 2005).

In this study, it was found that children were expected to learn this rule fast enough, that they had to behave differently with different people. Older children were expected, encouraged and supported to take care of younger children every day, not as substitute caregivers, but as mentors. Birth order and age were found to be 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.

Children's care and children's learning was found to be deeply adapted to the social, physical and historic settings in which children have lived in specific and significant ways. This finding is in consonance with the works of Cole (1996, 2005b), Rogoff (1990), Rogoff and Gauvain (1986), LeVine, et al. (1994), Greenfield and Cocking (1994), and Greenfield, Maynard and Childs (2003).

Regarding context of care.

The care of children in these homes was unique to the ecological settings in which they were living and adapted to these circumstances. A close observation and analysis of their care displayed the possible separation of children's care as being different from adult attention. This separation was possible because of the phenomenon of multiple caregiving. These care patterns were found to be adapted to the conditions in which the families were living. Seymour (1999) reports evidence of what she called "dispersed care" from a variety of

mothers (p. 126) in her study on child care in Orrisa. Similar findings are also reported by Trawick in her discussion of one family in Tami Nadu (2000).

Regarding education.

Cole (2005) remarks that both 'culture' and 'education' are concepts that refer to process as well as product; often leading to confusions regarding which meaning is being invoked. Regarding the linkages between the two processes, there is much debate about whether the bureaucratically organised system of technologically sophisticated societies is the best possible solution for all cultures (Hallpike 1979; LeVine, & White, 1986; Olsen, 1994). Education as a process is universal since all societies at all times have prepared the next generation for cultural participation (Reagan, 2000) and that education must not, the author adds (in the African subcontinent) be separated from life. I wondered a bit about this qualification as I read the paper. Is there any situation in which such a separation should be justifiable? And yet, for some reason, education has become synonymous with the school as we know it today, a synecdoche. Broadly understood, schooling is simply a preparation for inducting members for cultural participation and educe the full potential of a person (Cole, 2005) and strategies in societies range between implicit and explicit teaching for children's learning (Bruner, Olver, & Greenfield, 1966). From that general direction, I fear we are explicitly lost! As missionaries and educators travelled to places they could not pronounce the names of, they brought with them the inherent assumption of a better culture of education (Chaudhary, 2013). In the post-colonial world, we have lost the old without having fully gained from the new and the 'white man's burden' gradually became converted into the brown man's bastille!

Schooling is not a simple either-or situation. As the research of Mishra (1997; 1996; 1988) has demonstrated, there are many factors that will determine what the experience of schooling is for a child. Regarding the Indian system of education, many difficulties with the enforcement of English education have been discussed and debated. The sheer joy of learning and curiosity expressed *Divaswapna* (Badeka, 1989) seems to contrast seriously with the "colourless, dust-wrapped" primary schools of India (Kumar, 1989, p. 3). A similar engagement with the child through art suggests a sense of joyfulness in learning that was found to be completely missing in the enterprise of 'education' in this study even among the educated families (Prasad, 1998).

The enthusiasm of the children and families stood in sharp contrast to the business-like ventures that the children were attending in the name of 'school'. There is little or no

discussion of preschool education; and how the approach needs to be somewhat different from children of this age, in fact, for all ages! We need to take collective responsibility for this mess that we have created in the name of educating our children. Surely the desire to make 3-year-olds repeatedly write 'A' on flimsy notebooks in precarious positions needs explanation and accountability. How did we go so wrong? Why is there such a serious disconnect between what children 'should' be learning, and more importantly *how* they should be learning? Of course the easiest thing to do is blame the parents for their dislocated priorities, but that would be delusional. We need to take collective responsibility (and corrective action) for the heedless application of half-baked ideas about education. This is not a model of English education that we once attempted to adopt; it is a distorted remainder of remembered pasts. Unfortunately, we are remembering the wrong things and more seriously using wrong strategies of working with children. There are so many important movements in the NGO sector that derive from more culturally appropriate sources for child-friendly approaches to education from which the mainstream school system needs to learn and correct itself. To add to these woes, we do not even have an adequate 'mainstream', since there are just not enough schools! Unless these approaches become a movement, we shall continue to invite enthusiasm and instantly knock it back down before engaging children and push them out by saying they are not good enough to study. This is child abuse in its institutional form, for which someone needs to take responsibility.

The findings on education and its importance were remarkable. The high level of regard for education as an activity was phenomenal. Parents made arrangements, saved money from their meagre funds, awoke early each day to take children to bus-stops, packed lunches for them and supervised their work for school with dedication and seriousness. Perhaps sometimes it seemed like a lot to expect at this age, but everyone took school seriously. Everyday supervision of and checking was not found among the rural families, but the intensified frenzy over writing among the urban poor must be noted and understood within the social context. The urban poor families were struggling under the pressures of limited resources and difficult living conditions. Having moved from villages, they all had high ambitions about making it in the city. However, the serious challenges and fast paced progress of educated people around them brings home the reality that education is critical for a good life. They did not seem to have any time for what we label as non-formal education or learning through play. They invested their hard earned funds in school or private tuitions and they wanted to see results. The only result that eased their minds was writing or recitation. Reading was, for some reason, not given that much importance except in a few homes.

What is an important message for us in this domain is that although school enrolment is quite low and many children remain out of school, the findings of this study clearly indicate that the reason for that is not because people do not want to send their children to school. It is because there are too few schools available for that parent, who is eager and enthusiastic to find a place to send their child who has been prepared for the dream that school will bring to his or her door, the success that their parents could only dream about. Parents repeatedly narrated stories about the struggle for admissions to school. Each parent, whatever the economic status had a story about a struggle related to schooling for their child. They sent small children long distances in the hope that they would become better 'qualified' to gain entry into a 'good school'. The story about school is disturbing. Somewhere our governance and school administration has failed the people and especially the children. Why should a small 3-year old attend private tuitions with a punitive neighbour when she should be in a preschool programme receiving the benefit of provisions especially made for her well-being. Chand's mother was exemplary in her commitment to the child's future, and invested in the tuition to get her a little closer to the target, but she has a long and hard and desperate battle ahead of her, where her chances of success are denied by the very system in which she has so much faith. We have collectively failed Chand and her mother's dreams. With the level of preparation and investment in school that these families were seen to make, our schools should have been filled with happy children eager to arrive in the morning to a place where their dreams would be fulfilled. The reality on the ground is dark, and not just for the poor. There is an urgent need also to bring the home and school environments closer by including home experiences with a sense of pride (Sarangapani, 2003) in order to ensure an effective transfer of learning and the development of wholesome identities among children.

As Nambiar (2013) laments in his article about the drive for getting into a 'good' school, families give their very best, and sometimes even better than the best, making attempt to buttress their circumstances to gain approval and admission into desired schools. However, disappointments are abundant, and parents trudge from school to school in search of placement for their children, finding their children rejected on account of what they said, who they are or who they are not. Children from families of the well-placed or wealthy find themselves handed admissions over the table, repeating the privileges of the erstwhile British raj. The people in power have raked in all the benefits for themselves, leaving the public for whom they were appointed with begging bowls for basic amenities and fundamental rights.

Regarding gender.

Much has been written about the dreary story of gender in Indian society. According to experts, gender equality is a major concern for India. Social activists have reported disadvantage to the girl from the day she is born, which is even being expressed in the form of female foeticide and infanticide (Visaria, & Visaria, 2003). The expectation for fertility and domestic work place tremendous pressures on young women, especially (although not exclusively) among the poor (Chaudhary, & Mehta 2004). Among the urban middle class, however, increasing attention to gender issues has led to positive responses toward gender equity, and girls enjoy near-equal status (Datar, 1995; Saraswathi, & Pai, 1997). For the middle and upper income groups, education and career for women are often as important as for men. Increasingly, young men (even among the urban and rural poor) are seeking out partners who are educated, arguing that an educated woman is an asset to the family (World Bank, 2004).

The story that emerges from this study lies in sharp contrast to the prevailing one. Although it is possible that the dark moments of child abuse and gender discrimination may have been hidden from the camera lens, the evidence must be placed before the reader. Let me start by addressing the issue of care. There was no evidence in the study that girls and boys were being raised differently. The amount of attention and affection was perceived to be similar. This was observed across the clusters. There was no evidence of less food being given to girls or more attention being reserved for boys. With reference to schooling again, all families had aspirations for their children to have a productive life, and work was an important part of that, even the grandmothers in the village said they would want their girls to work as teachers, or join the IAS. The case of Mukta, the young daughter who insisted on being addressed as a 'boy' is important. One of the family members was recently awarded a medal for wrestling in the Olympics, and Mukta was being encouraged to follow in his footsteps, it was reported. In her appearance as well, Mukta was dressed in a sports T shirt and shorts!

The only indication where some concern was expressed was regarding the safety of young girls. The recent coverage of crimes against girls and women had become a reason of anxiety, the adults declared, even in the rural families. Yet, during the interactions with and observations of the families, it was found that the level of supervision and control on movement was the same for all children. Adults were not found to be significantly more protective of girls. In areas where the provisions for children's safe movement around the home were not ensured, parents were found to be equally vigilant about their sons as they

were for daughter, the extra anxiety was an expression only in their conversations and was not found to alter their supervision or protection of children.

Rural families did talk about their concerns about chastity and the fear of losing family honour in case a daughter goes astray, but they also said that a family can potentially also be lifted to great heights by daughters. Among rural families, the lives of men and women were quite separate, and men moved about outside the house, driving cars and motorcycles, much more than the women. But there was no evidence of differential treatment beyond the belief that boys and girls have different lives, roles and responsibilities later in life. As an aside it should be mentioned here, that all young girls and boys were dressed similarly in the villages, their hair short for convenience, they wore innocuous looking tshirts and shorts, whether they were boys or girls.

There is one episode that brought home this possibility that we were hearing only the nicer stories. Firstly, there is every possibility that those who allowed us in were the happier families and those homes where there may have been serious relationship issues would have thus been filtered out at that juncture. It is also plausible that the stories we heard and witnessed were not complete. The stories of abuse and neglect of women were there, but we were not able to discern it at the time. As mentioned earlier, the story of the Sohail's family was a revelation and bears repeating. Sohail's parents had married out of their own choice, the father indicated during the interview, but for himself, he would not support love marriages for their children because they had to face a lot of hardship on account of rejection by the family. However, when the family was visited a year later, certain other overtones were discovered, and need to be mentioned here. During the visit in preparation for the longitudinal study two years after completion of this data collection, the family was visited again. To her distress, the researcher was told by the mother about several difficulties between the husband and wife. After marriage, there had been instances of abuse, and she was distressed on that account. However, she added that he was such a caring father, that she always managed to stop herself from leaving him. The economic constraint of managing two children without any source of income, having been ostracized for marrying him by her family in the first place, she said she really had nowhere else to go. She would look at her children and bear with him, and as years went by, he had become more bearable. As far as the children were concerned, he was unfailing in his affection and responsibility, she declared. The reply to the researcher's question about how someone who had had a marriage of choice would be strongly against it for her children came two years after it was asked. Oftentimes, we have to be reminded that it takes that long to find answers to questions, and the darker

images of a home may indeed not reach the researcher. Perhaps the hint of the disconnect was there for us to see, but the father's enthusiastic involvement and active participation in the care of his two boys was so magnetic, and even unusual, that it overshadowed everything else about the family. I have revisited the recordings, and am now able to see a few signs of agitation that were not noticeable before.

Regarding poverty.

Families that struggle with limited resources have an arduous task raising children along their aspirations for family life and the children's future. Often oblivious of the responsibilities the parents carry on their shoulders, children were found to be happy and playful. The absence of specific materials to play with did not diminish children's enthusiasm or capacity for play when toys were provided to them. The most important implication regarding poverty is that the enthusiasm for schooling among the poor may have been understood only as the mastery of writing, but there was a belief in the power of education to make a better life. Somewhere this energy must find support in the future if we have to provide a better future for our children. Further, it is also believed that when so much importance is placed on a particular institution, the disappointment that children and families face when there is school failure, or more appropriately, when schools fail to engage young children with learning, the sense of distress is perhaps so strong, that the damage to the child's spirit is serious. The findings of the study demonstrate the investments parents are willing to make, but the schools are far behind in fulfilling their side of the bargain.

There are many other issues, providing toilets, running water, low cost, efficient housing, health care, opportunity for entertainment and so many more reasons on the different fronts on which we have failed our children.

Regarding children's development.

Children in the study were found to be developing in similar ways, although the strategies they used in their play and interactions were adapted to the social and physical conditions in which they lived. Although the findings showed lower expressiveness and some hint of lower scores in receptive language as well, the reported finding showed clearly that the assessment was not well adapted to the social setting in the two locations where the performance seemed to have been compromised. Nevertheless, this is a finding that needs attention.

In play, children were found to be active participants in all settings, and when material was provided, except for three children who seemed temperamentally distanced from the camera, the play sessions were interactive and energetic.

There was no evidence of gender differences in children's care, or of any difference in their developmental capacities in the course of everyday observations. Children pretended, imitated, followed and led each other throughout the sessions irrespective of location.

Regarding cultural difference.

When we look at the culture of childhood in these seven communities, all living within the National Capital Region, we find interesting divergences and evident commonalities. What do these findings mean for the culture of childhood in India? Perhaps one important lesson is that despite much divergence and discrepancy in demographic characteristics, it was possible to define certain features that were given priority for the children's lives that could be linked with India's enduring cultural traditions. The sustained importance to relationships, respect for elders, importance of school and teachers, learning to live with and among other children, learning to care for other people, and learning that it is important to be a good child (*Achha bacchha*) were some of the common features observed across income and occupational lines. The priority given to people over and above material objects was thus ubiquitous, with things and spaces being defined by who gave them, who lives there and how it was used between people. An interesting observation in the play session highlighted how in the play task where there was more than one child present, that children were almost always attracted to objects when another child evidenced interest in it. Over and over again, it was found that a toy may have been lying abandoned for a while in the session, but if one child picked it up, children used all sorts of strategies to 'own' the same object, leading to the improvisation of so many strategies that have already been discussed.

The implication for the discourse on cultural differences is serious. Firstly, what is evident is that the differences within the sample, and hence, between the separate clusters, are far from inconsequential. The structure of the homes, the residential colonies, and facilities available, frame children's lives in important ways. Whether they play freely or within boundaries of the home, what materials they play with and how the play is transacted, who all the children spend time with and what they can do together, finds expression within and among the constraints of setting. Another detail that mediates this process is the perception of the surroundings, whether these are considered safe or otherwise, the relationships between

people who live next door to each other, even if they are related further imposes upon the ways in which spaces are used. For instance, the urban poor were very favourable towards the traditional format of care, multiple carers where children are companions and not necessary exclusive carers, but the settings in which they live proves to be a constraint on account of several factors: Village life is far away, space and money constraints prevent them from bringing others from the village to live with them and finally, the people who live nearby are sometimes depended upon, but they frequently violate that trust on account of competition or circumstance. Sometimes neighbours may even violate the family, making children most vulnerable to the conditions in poverty areas. Thus the context itself can never be the same across communities within the same country, especially when there is so much cultural, linguistic, religious, economic and ecological diversity. If we see culture as the process, a verb rather than a noun, then the explanations are more effective. If culture is seen as the dynamic organisation of setting, mediations of circumstances within a geographical and historical context, we arrive far closer to a reasonable explanation.

The setting and the mediation of the circumstances by family members have been presented as two important factors of the context of childhood. In order to fully expand this discussion, it is also important to look at the active expression of childhood and its exchanges with the adult world. What became evident was the ways in which children's care was effectively 'adapted' to the ecological setting and traditional beliefs. For examining this theorem, let us take the example of the families in the village and the recent migrants from villages in nearby urban homes among the middle and upper income homes. Characterised by multiple caregivers, distributed care and concurrent focus, these children spent marginal amounts of time in direct interaction with adults. I was trying to imagine a mother oriented towards concentrated attention and convergent focus in a rural setting. What would happen to her? Firstly, she would lose support of others in the family for being so 'self-indulgent', her children would probably be left with no one to play with because she would be so used to adult company. The food and drink for the child would not be available since most of the produce has to be processed by the women, even in richer rural families. In case this 'exclusively oriented' mother decided she was determined in her ideology of care, she may take to searching for a market for their needs. Well, it is likely that some of the essential items would not even be available in the local market and he would have to go to the local township to find what she may need for the baby. In other words, convergent focus and concentrated attention would result in a complete misfit regarding the social and physical context for the child and parent, and the family would eventually be forced to adapt. Among

migrants to the towns and cities, selected remnants of the rural life were chosen to be sustained within the family dynamics, whether it was distributed care with concentrated focus by multiple caregivers, or retaining the rural kitchen for the preference of taste. For the nuclear families, there was no other option available but to express concentrated attention and convergent focus, and where it was not possible on account of economic constraints among the poor, where mothers had to often search for work outside the home, children were at a clear disadvantage. The care of children by other children in villages was always conducted under circumstances of multiple caregivers where responsibility was shared and everyone around would know the child and her home in case of any need. Among the urban poor, young children were sometimes in the exclusive care of slightly older children, and therefore sometimes at risk. The supervision by others around was available but often unreliable. Children were found to be very effective companions and even caregivers, but the support available by the benign presence of adult care is undeniable. The exclusive care of young children by those who are only slightly older was not seen as favourable.

In a predominantly multi-lingual country, the issue of language of instruction is another serious issue. As we found in the study, children were fairly adept at negotiating the linguistic environment at home and street, even inclining towards the knowledge of words in different languages. However, the use of a medium of instruction, or forced imposition of an alien language in the early years needs to be done with due consideration to the research on language instruction in early childhood (Mohanty, 2008b) so that languages are not lost when others are gained, and the child is able to cross-over with ease from L1 to L2 and so on. In this regard, the initiation of language learning in the mother tongue has been known to be favourable for young children. Studies done in India to explore the development of mental state words indicate that children who are studying in schools where the medium of instruction was their mother tongue (Oriya) were better at acquisition of mental state vocabulary than children studying in English medium schools (Babu, 2003; Babu, & Misra, 2000). In order to reduce alienation of children from the language of the classroom at all ages, the use of the mother tongue has been proved to be a critical factor in MLE (Multi-lingual education and the promotion of social justice through use of language[3]. As Mohanty (2006, p. 283) argues,

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[3] http://ajitmohanty.org/portfolio/social-justice-through-multilingual-education/

Analysis of the nature of Indian multilingualism shows that, despite the strong maintenance norms, the hegemonic role of English gives rise to a socially legitimated and transmitted hierarchical pecking order in which mother tongues are gradually marginalized and pushed into domains of lesser power and resource in what can be characterized as a self-defensive anti-predatory strategy. Caught in the process of unequal power relation-ship between languages and lacking a clear multilingual framework, education in India is unable to balance the demands of the societal multi-lingualism and the dominant status of English. The place of languages in Indian education and the various nominal forms of multilingual education are analyzed to show the cost of neglecting the mother tongues and tribal languages in education. Some studies interrogating the myth of English medium superiority and showing the benefits of mother-tongue-based multilingual education are discussed. It is argued that education must cater to the social needs of every child to develop from mother tongue to multilingualism and provide equality of opportunity through a language-shelter type of multilingual education that begins in mother-tongue medium and introduces other languages after at least three to five years of primary schooling (p. 283).

An observation also needs to be made about differences between cultures and the conflation of these into East and West, or other similar classification. Rothbaum et al. (2000) demonstrate the fundamental differences between mothers in the United States and Japan to discuss the divergent orientations and strategies in the care of children of all ages. The Japanese mothers were found to be deeply engaged with their babies and children, accommodating to and orienting the child towards adaptability and adjustment; while keeping a careful understanding of inside and outside the home conduct. American mothers were more likely to focus on autonomy, while also being more directly controlling than the mothers from the Far East. Looking through the sensitive and systematic adjustment of Japanese mothers, it can be realised that they are as different from Indian caregivers as the Americans. Indian caregiving has some similarities with the Japanese mothers, like the use of endorsement questions and the differential expectation for conduct within the home and outside (although in Indian homes it was more different for different persons depending upon the relationship and social context, rather than an inside/outside distinction), the convergence ends there. There is some resonance with the American sense of 'control' over the situation, but

without the underlying dedication to the ideology of individualism. Indian adults were found to control in specific domains and let children 'go' in others, creating a sort of 'patchwork' of strategies, clearly suggesting that certain activities (like consumption of food and social conduct) are strictly supervised. Indian caregiving was found to be relationship-specific and domain-dependent (Chaudhary, 2004). It would be grossly erroneous to assume any further similarities between the family dynamics of the two countries (Roland, 1988).

Regarding social change.

Tradition and modernity were not found to be in opposition in the study. The care of children in most homes is transacted with and sustained by the rich tradition of the importance given to others, especially older people. Age is an important factor in the arrangement and transaction of social relationships, even among children. In this regard, the work of Sharma (1994) comes to mind. In her conclusions about the lives of adolescent girls, it was found that tradition and modernity were not in opposition at two ends of an imaginary continuum. In fact people were found sometimes to be high on both tradition and modernity and the relative intersections of these to phenomena were experienced. This is supported by the findings of this study, where even the most technologically advanced parents persisted in retaining selected values for children's upbringing while allowing liberal notions for other areas. Respect for elders, value for conserving resources, maintaining relations, importance of food cooked by the family, these were all evidenced, whereas liberal ideas about career, marriage and play were also observed. Similar findings have been reported also by Seymour (1999), where she found that although children in the city were not growing up in multi-generational households, the value for relationships sustained, and even though not as extensive as in village settings, care of children by other adults was observed. She found that there was a discernible shift from what LeVine et al. (1994) called the paediatric model of care (health and safety) to the pedagogical model of care in cities. The findings of this study, on the other hand displayed the sustained belief in tradition, and the corresponding manifestation of different concurrent models of children's care. For food, the model was frequently the 'paediatric' model; for school, the 'pedagogical' model, and to add to this, perhaps the 'participant' model for childhood within families, where children were part of all activities around the house. Seymour's contribution in the literature of child rearing in fact, highlights the diversity of care experiences between children from the old township in comparison with the new in Bhubaneshwar.

This also finds support in the work of Kağıtçıbaşı (1996) and Sinha (2002, 1982) regarding the multiplicity of combinations regarding modernising traditions, where it is not one way of living being replaced by another, but its frequent adaptation, and corresponding acceptance that is worked out. Kağıtçıbaşı (1996) writes that autonomy and relatedness are in fact separate constructs and modern Turkish families display autonomy which retaining interpersonal distance at close quarters, displaying the possibility of an orthogonal arrangement between agency and inter-personal distance. The influence of social change, globalization and acculturation has inevitable impact on parenting, women's issues, youth development and socialization (Kapadia, 2008), however, it is not necessary for these changes to be replacements of older ways, it was found. Quite like the use of multiple languages, parents were found to be 'code-mixing' once they were in contact with newer ways of understanding childhood. In summary, it may be concluded that children were being socialised for being competent. This socialisation for competence promoted goodness and even greatness, but with due consideration to conditions of persistent inequality and pervasive unfairness as was recognised in the demands of children and their corresponding responses from adults. Perhaps parents did not want their children to assume absolute goodness and fairness in others, because it would be an unreasonable expectation. Maybe that is the reason why small doses of unfavourable practice was evident in the care of children such as promising but not delivering rewards.

Regarding strategies of care: Between the Buddha syndrome and the Yashoda strategy

The term 'Alloparenting' refers to the phenomenon of adults other than the parents acting as caregivers for children. The definition assumes that the term is applied when the parents are *not available* for care of the child. The findings of this study indicate towards a particular type of alloparenting in most case, one that consists of care by others *along with* care by parents, or multiple caregiving (Gottlieb, 2009). Regarding the role of the mother, apart from the fact that a discipline like developmental psychology has grossly overestimated and over-dramatised the role of a mother in a child's life (Burman, 2008), there has been a concomitant under-recognition of the role of other people which is inevitable when the investment in children is seen in a larger perspective. "Matricentric paradigms are far from the whole story (Hrdy, p. xii). As Kurt Vonnegut (2006), author and also an anthropologist, puts it, the extended family is about as needed as daily vitamins and minerals.

This study supports the finding that children in India are being brought up mostly under conditions of multiple caregivers, alloparenting conditions, where the mother was not

the exclusive caregiver for children, frequently even in nuclear families; with other children, helpers, and neighbours all participated in the care of the child. Further, children were being brought up with specific orientations towards the outside world. The implicit and explicit elements of the socialisation for competence were directed towards the following principles of social life:

- Context-dependent conduct
- Adaptability and multi-voicedness
- High tolerance of ambiguity and ambivalence
- Derived and discursive identity
- Preference for indirect communication with shifting perspectives and multi-logues (Chaudhary, 2012; 2010)
- Constant attention to social positioning
- Focus on social and interpersonal elements over and above the material
- Expectations and expressions determined by situational factors

Wrapping up the findings of the study, it seems evident that there is an underlying theme in the care of children that was discernible through recursion and reflection. Let me start by two contrasting hypotheses: that the world is just, good and fair; and its obverse, that injustice, evil and wickedness often flourish in human social groups. These subliminal beliefs among people will obviously influence their views of the others, and their orientation to other people. Next let me invoke the activity of socialisation. There is sufficient evidence to support the theorem that adults' care of children is guided by their beliefs about the social environment. Further, if a person believes the former, that 'goodness' flourishes in our world, then the care strategies will perhaps resonate with that notion of shared justice. However, its counter-argument, that the world is essentially unfair, needs specific capacities in handling those conditions. Now let us assume that all adults want the best for their children within all the constraints of everyday challenges. There are several ways in which these two theoretical opposite can be handled. A third element in this developing argument is the child. Again, societies have known to vary in their construction of childhood (Aries, 1962), whether the child is born innocent and without the knowledge of good and bad, or whether the child is inherently good, but society changes her; or, that the child is wild and uncontrolled and needs to be trained. We find fragments of all these three themes in our data, although the third is never articulated, it is implied in the recommendations of parents when they express that school will teach children how to "sit and stand" and expression that reflects a belief in the

unbridled nature of children. Interface with the child, the adult therefore has these three fundamental phenomena that guide the care of children. Of course there are others, like the material world, media, social change, and so on, but these are all believed to be contained in the adults' belief system at least during early of their children. Then there are resources and technology as well, but again, at least during childhood, it is the family that mostly decides which resources will be accessed. A TV can influence a child only when it is available!

Now let us put these three elements in one place and see what possibilities emerge. With the belief in a fair world (remember it is not whether the world is fair or not that is being claimed here, but its perception as such) and a good child, parents would bring up the child within an easy and relaxed atmosphere, directing the child in specific ways. With the responsibility of raising a reprobate child in a world believed to be filled with goodness will definitely require stern impositions and regulations for young children. Perhaps some of this enforcement has been observed in different parts of the world, as also in the desire to send children to school to learn to be good children! Let me dispense with the last theoretical possibility before coming to my main points. An evil child in an evil world would perhaps invoke a resignation in the inevitable, a lack of concern to do anything about this, or its alternative, training the child to be evil! This leaves us with what I found to prevail in the bulk of the data, a belief in a somewhat unfair world (Times are bad; Things have changed for the worse; This is *kal yuga*, and the world is a nasty place; Children must learn to cope with hardship, there is no point in sending them to elite, comfortable schools even if we can afford it). Within this world-view, I found two possible solutions that adults chose. Again, I must repeat that these are abstract constructs and derived from but not exactly imaging reality. The two emergent combinations are as follows:

The Buddha syndrome.

Let me first start by narrating the story of the Buddha in my own words. Buddha was born in a forest as his mother, the queen was on a journey with her entourage to her natal home. Descriptions of Buddha's birth are embellished with the prescient knowledge of the new-born's greatness which a visiting ascetic recognises, soon to be found weeping at the child's side. On being asked why the sorrow, he indicated that he would lose out on experiencing the one seer who would find the answer to the conundrum of birth and death. Deeply shaken by this prediction, the royal couple make every effort to protect the young Sidhartha from any negativity, creating an illusory world of opulence, wealth and beauty, constructed especially for him. Sidhartha grows up with this idea of a beautiful world with

gentle ways and floral beauty. He is married and has a son. Inevitably, on one journey across the land, he encounters an old man, wizened and twisted by many years of hardship. The artificial and fragile world of the young and happy Prince collapses like a house of cards, and the rest is legendary. The parents try hard to intensify the illusion of goodness, and the harder they try, the more distant the Prince becomes. The first encounter with the real world leads to a breakdown or a break away. He renounces family life and all its trappings to move away to the places like the one where he began his life's journey and gathered wisdom, faith and followers from all over the world. Perhaps as much as the wisdom of the young Prince, the early life circumstances were powerful enough to precipitate the breakthrough to another world, one in which he was able to 'see' the conditions for human happiness.

Very much like the royal couple, many parents who are predisposed towards protecting the young child from an evil world, land up with what may be called the Buddha syndrome! However, the child's first and frequent encounters with the world are the only solution to recovering a sense of competence with a world that one is least prepared for, perhaps.

Within the families in the study, the best example of this arrangement of care was show in the case of Nayan. The mother makes every adjustment to the child, allows him to play and eat as he likes and insists that she never even scolds him because he is a sensitive child. Further, during the first visit, as the Nayan, his father and mother were in the elevator with the researcher, the mother spoke with Nayan about the toy car in her hand. She said she had just purchased this particular model for him, since he had mentioned it the day before and she had promised to bring him one. More than the action of buying the toy car, it was this discussion that exemplified her views when she said to him that as and when she says she will get him something, she always fulfils her commitment. How could she not bring the car? Nayan for his part is excited and happy about this new addition to his collection. Sometime later, while discussing disciplining, Nayan's mother said she never gets angry with him, and always uses explanations to make him do something, letting him eat whatever he wants "I only hope he doesn't become fat, like me", she adds. She does not approve of punishment or scolding, and said that she makes sure she always does what she promises for him, and wished that she could spend more time with him. Nayan was one of the most advanced children in his language expressions, his scores on the language task and the conceptual clarity during the play session. Nena's grandmother would also be a fitting example of an accommodating and caring adult, making sure that the situation of the child is always favourable and friendly as far as possible. These and some other children were seen t be

'protected' by a layer of goodness, affection and favour. Both were only children in their homes, one in a nuclear family and the other in a joint family with both grandparents; both mothers had recently gone back to work and Nayan's mother was expecting her second baby.

The Yashoda strategy.

Yashoda was the adoptive mother of the infant Krishna. Krishna's stories of playfulness, often innocent and frequently fractious, makes handling the young infant quite a task for Yashoda who has to ultimately let go of him when his real parents return from captivity. Meanwhile, Krishna declares that Yashoda will always remain his *de facto* mother! Although the stories of Krishna and Yashoda abound in mythology, there is one narrative that is particularly evocative and relevant. One day, as Krishna slept soundly, Yashoda was busy churning curd, a daily task in the family of cowherds. Krishna awoke hungry and demanded his feed. The doting mother brings him onto her lap to feed him as she churned, but meanwhile, forgot the milk she had left to boil on the wood-fire. Abandoning the feeding Krishna, she ran to remove the pot from the fire. Krishna's anger was aroused and taking a stone, he breaks the earthenware pot and picks up mouthfuls of spilt butter to feast on. Meanwhile, his hunger satiated, Krishna toddles away to distribute butter to the monkeys nearby, where Yashoda soon finds him. She picks up a stick and makes a move to beat the divine child who permits himself to be caught and tied him to a mortar. Unable to hit him, the tearful mother ties the weeping Krishna to teach him a lesson. The unbearable anguish of punishing her beloved son is evidenced in her remorse, but teach him she must![4]

The Yashoda strategy was seen to be used by many adults, where they were seen to protect and care for the child with affection, but not always so. Sometimes they were preoccupied and would ignore the child; at other times, there would be some rebuke or threat to the child for doing something. Ramesh's mother would perhaps be an apposite example. She doted on the young one, and gave him everything within her means, but she was also firm and strict regarding requirements from him. She would let him play, but within certain constraints. She made every effort to provide the best for the child within their limited income. The father and mother said they were working in the service industry, opening and closing doors for people, but for their child, they would want other people to open the doors for him. Ankur, Abhit and Yukti's mothers also manifested some similar approaches to their children.

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[4] http://belurmath.org/kids_section/18-yasoda-ties-krishna-to-a-mortar/ Retrieved on 28th June, 2013

Somewhere around the myths and legends of childhood, the protection of the Prince and the chastising of the divine baby, Indian mothers and others find their own solutions to the care of their children.

IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In the endeavour to understand human conduct in general and childhood and the family in particular, it is essential not simply to follow trends, but also to create them. With regard to the way in which children have been approached and investigated, there is a critical importance for adopting different perspectives and work towards creating newer ways of looking carefully at phenomena. An important direction is to build "qualitative structural yet dynamic structures for the analysis of complex phenomena" (Valsiner, 2012, p. 3). Many of the studies we have access to are undertaken to look at specific elements of children's lives, and mostly after children enter school, when conducting research becomes substantially easier since children gather in groups, and are mostly organised by age. However, entering the streets and homes where children live requires the researcher to work among people in their natural surroundings, with many difficulties and much negotiation.

As Valsiner notes:

There have been several grand narratives about the Indian people. However, more penetrating specifications of the dynamics within the culture are few in number. Particularly sparse is the presentation of people with culturally related symbolic resources. From the initial alienation as a distant and distinct culture during the ancient and colonial periods, the peculiarities and particularities of different regions of the world have often been enchanting for the social sciences. The construction of the idea of the 'Orient' further added to the mysterious shrouding of lives of people living at a distance from the Occident. In this regard, literary sources have always been an important supplement to academic writing. Stories, verses, films and other creative content presented a vibrant range of detail about the lives of women, the poor, the tribal, the traditional, and the ethnic minorities. Literature has given us much of what psychology was slow to provide. In contemporary cultural psychology we can consider the descriptions of fictional characters in novels, or stories about the conduct of mythological agents, as equivalents of ordinary human beings in their flesh-and-bone ways of being, and in their ways of behaving (p. XX).

Perhaps this volume was spurred by the motivation to provide what was slow in the making, a story of the dynamic arrangements of the social, physical, economic and emotional world of children in these families, thereby fulfilling an important current need within the discipline of cultural psychology. We need to look at the larger picture without losing focus on the ground.

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An important lesson is available in a recent critique of mainstream psychology where Toomela (2007) writes:

> Last 60 years in psychological research have given us thousands, perhaps even millions, of ways how to predict statistically one psychological variable by way of another. At the same time, many fundamental questions have even not been asked because of limited methodological thinking. We still find "objective" scores without knowing how many different psychological mechanisms may underlie the same score. We do not know how psychological aspect of experimental conditions may have contributed to study results. Study of fragments gives very little to understanding of a human person as a whole. (p. 18)

The findings of this study propose a complex and complicated relationship between childhood, context and culture. There are several important themes in the study that mark the need for further research in this highly under-developed field of research. Some specific issues that directly emerge from this study are:

- Rewards and punishments in the management of children's behaviour
- Feeding of children in urban families
- The theoretical separation of care and attention in multiple caregiving
- Many caregivers, many children
- The ubiquitous questions in conversations with children: instructions, information and endorsement
- Care among the wealthy, sustaining tradition in the context of modernity
- Care of child on the street
- The strength of mutli-generational households and the family life cycle
- Converting deictic kin terms into nominal labels from a child's perspective to support the early learning of kin terms
- Inhibitory control and language learning during early childhood
- Scale errors in the use of symbols, like a small chair by children with younger siblings

By and large people have been willing to work with the researcher to allow entry into their homes, but we were careful to seek entry through mutual contacts so that the families would feel secure in sharing their personal lives with the researcher. Once entry was allowed, the willingness and enthusiasm with the study was humbling and rewarding at the same time.

There remain many undiscovered areas about Indian childhood, about the relationship between school and home at a later age, about sibling relationships, about infancy and infant care, about health practices and so many other issues that require more dedicated research. This study finds its inspiration from a long tradition of ethnographic work and observational studies of Indian childhood, and hopefully, it will fuel others to also take up this course of study towards a reasonable representation of childhood in India.

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