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SHIKHYA, SANSKARA O ACHARANA AND PERMISSIBLE MISCHIEFS: EXPLORING CHILDREN'S MORALITIES WITHIN THE FAMILY SETTING

Abstract

What is children's view of their roles and responsibilities in their family life? To my surprise, children in my study flatly replied that they had 'no roles'. Further probes opened up to me a deeper and more complex engagement with morality pertaining to family values that preoccupied children. This paper is based on an ethnographic study conducted in an urban locality of Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The underlying aim of this study is to describe children's immediate family-life from children's own perspective by capturing their 'everyday' life situations and narratives. In the paper, I describe children's rendition of their roles, responsibilities, and mis-chiefs indicating at a broader perspective on moral sensitivities.

Introduction

While doing my fieldwork[1], I came across a common sentiment expressed by the parents and grandparents of the children whom I was studying for my Ph.D. A child with readiness to work (*kamika*), industrious (*parishrami*), prompt to share various chores, and attentive to self-care was openly praised as a child with 'good signs' (*bhala lakhyana*) and 'virtuous' (*guni*). In contrast, children who showed signs of laziness (*alasua*), lagging behind (*pacchua*) and, shy of work (*kamachora*) were openly chided as mischievous (*badmas*) and unreliable (*thakka*) which were counted as 'bad habits' (*kharap abhyas*). In my field setting, there was a free culture of praising and admonishing children in public, by extended relatives and immediate family respectively (cf. Chaudhary 2004). I wondered how the comments around children's attitude to work affected children? Did children identify with the remarks or remained aloof of it? For

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understanding this, I realized that I had to first understand the spirit of parental concerns regarding children's attitudes to work, occasions of invocation of such addresses, and, finally children's outlook on the same.

The current paper consists of four parts of the discussions. Firstly, it locates the topic at hand in the larger debates. Secondly, it briefly talks about the fieldwork and field setting. Thirdly, it presents the field narratives exploring parental concerns, children's attitude to work, and children's rendition of mischiefs and demands. Fourthly, in the conclusion, it attempts to reconstruct children's moral sensitivities in everyday family life.

Locating the Study

1.   *Childhood Studies in the West.*

Childhood studies have a mosaic past, sometimes even considered as anomalous by the scholars (Shanahan 2007). Medieval Europe exhibited three dominant 'cultural images' of the child, namely, the innocent child, the evil child, and the miniature adult (see Sorin 2005). Around the 16th century, Comenius, Locke, and Rousseau had extensively discussed about the importance of children's education and training in building a healthier society. However, we can safely say that childhood as a realm of disciplinarian study was popularised by psychoanalyst and later child development theories under 'scientific' psychology. The 'Child Development' theories promoted 'rationality', 'naturalness' and 'universality' as the key axes of studying childhood (see James and Prout 2005 [1997]). The transition from childhood to adulthood was explained as a natural growth from an irrational, immature, dependent state to a rational, mature, and independent state.

Such an 'essentialisation' of childhood as a standardized biological phenomenon has been criticized by various anthropologists and sociologists, who claimed that cultural prescriptions and practices of childhood varied from one community to the other. Hence, Childhood is a cultural category dependent on cultural values (see LeVine 2007; Nieuwenhuys 1998; Aries 1962; Mead and Wolfenstein 1955). The 'culturalist' framework encouraged a practice of studying children indirectly from the space of family, schools, community, and neighbourhood. By and large, it assumed children as passive agents and unbiased receptors of culture (see Froerer 2011; Alanen 1988). This led to a conceptual schism of conflating the social with the biological; even as childhood was seen as a collective social instance, the child remained a psycho-biological pre-phase. Methodologically this rendered the child ineligible for social inquiry (see Moran-Ellis 2010; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; Corsaro and Eder 1990). Critiques found that the studies fail to transparently reveal the children's life-conditions, because of the interference of the institution's internal cognitive and political structures on the collection and analysis of data (see Parker-Rees and Leeson 2015; and Qvortrup 1990)

The institutional doctrines were another source of a conceptual anomaly in childhood studies. It was in the backdrop of industrialisation, urbanization, and the World-wars in the West, that the children came to occupy a front-stage in the story of the rebuilding of society. A child's life was not only seen as vulnerable, but also as the beacon of innocence, peace, familial love, and a better future. Childhood became a site of moral responsibility where the state took charge of the children's development and protection. (see Venken 2017; Zahra 2009; and Zelizer 1985). Childhood now came to be driven by policies and designed by expert bodies (doctors, educationists, and counselors). Childhood thus became tautological where present was prescribed by future ideals. Shanahan laments, "when either children and childhood…or hope and history…are conflated, ambivalences often result" (2007: 415).

Towards the 1980s, with the emergence of constructivism and interpretative discourse of knowledge, there was a call for recognizing the individual actor as the active creators of their experience, mindfully engaging with the social context within which the human interactions occurred. In the context of childhood studies, this translated into the acknowledgement of the child as an active participant and co-creator of culture (Uprichard 2009; Alanen 1988; and Moran-Ellis 2010). Thus, commenced the era of child-centric studies, which is popularly referred to as the 'new sociology of childhood' (Corsaro, 1997). James and Prout (2005 [1997]) chalked out an integrative approach to study children's lives under the 'emergent paradigm' where the children were seen both as the influencer and influencee of culture. The paradigm advocated ethnography as one of the most suitable methods for studying children lives and emphasized the need of studying children in their everyday, mundane circumstances by taking children as the unit of study, highlighting children's own perspective, and focusing more on children's present moment than on their future 'becoming' (Morrow 2011; Xiao 2008; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; Hood Kelly and Mayall 1996).

Interestingly, critics have come to point out a central problem in the efforts of the 'new sociology of childhood' pertaining to the 'children voice'. Following, the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC), 1979, which granted children the opportunity to be heard, the childhood studies rushed to include 'children voices' and 'vulnerabilities' uncritically. This resulted in an over-emphasis on problematising of children lives, focusing on extreme situations, controlling the research environment for making it child-friendly, and fixing of subjectivity agency based on adult-versus-child identity dichotomy with an intervention driven agenda without reference to actor's engagement with everyday meaning systems (see Moran-Ellis 2010 Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; Ryan 2008; Xiao 2008).

Christensen and Prout summarily put that, there have been four ways of looking at children and childhood- the child as an object, the child as a subject, the child as a social actor, and recently the child as co-researchers

(active participants in studies). They further add that all these perspectives 'co-exist' without any 'neat progression' and in practice sometimes they are 'mixed together' in a given study (2002: 480).

2.   *Childhood Studies in India.*

Childhood studies in India, have been a rare view. To begin with, most of the studies dealt with childhood as a social category reflecting social structures and problems like gender discriminations, reproduction of social class, juvenile delinquency (Bhadra 2014; Kumar 1993). In addition to it, one of the major disadvantages to the studies of childhood in India has been the hegemony of the western cultural and philosophical models, which rejected the Indian childhood as a cultural variant, branding India as a community that lacks a cultural history or awareness on childhood. Such a painted background was then used to promote the western ideas of childhood as signs of 'modernity' and 'advanced'. Indian childhood was often presented as problematic requiring interventions (Balagopalan 2018 and 2011; Saargapani 2003a; Nieuwenhuys 1998).

The Indian scholars, those who have attempted to give Indian childhood its due space in disciplinary frameworks especially from the normal 'everyday' perspective, often did so from the overarching frame of 'modern personhood', which was often searched in the processes of 'socialisation of the child' nested within 'family studies'; searching for clarity on the individual- versus-collective, autonomy-versus-conformity questions in the Indian context. While the psychological work contemplated on the seeming lack of 'individuality' in the Indian cultural understanding of 'familial' self (Robinson 2014 Chaudhary 2004 Kakar 1978; also see Cohen 1998); the findings emanating from cross-cultural socio-anthropological studies revealed that the questions related to development or suppression of 'individuality' and 'autonomy' through 'socialization processes in a child cannot be reduced to the 'adult-vs-child separation' in the Indian context. Rather it can be seen based on other social factors like gender, family structures, traditional authorities, caregiving arrangements, and other moral-emotional contexts (Banerjee 2015; Kumar 1993; Misri 1985;). However, in these studies, the subjective child remained untouched (Das 1989). Das puts it cogently," Here the child is described in terms of the speech of society and perhaps needs a reverse description of society as it is encountered in the speech of the child" (Das 1985: 5).

Influenced by the thoughts of renowned philosopher and educationist Jiddu Krishnamurti and the 'interactionism' and 'phenomenology' approaches in human sciences, Meenakshi Thapan conducted a pioneering study in recovering the everyday realities of children's lives from children's own perspectives by following ethnographic methods. Recently, the practice has found a place in the works of various scholars bringing to board various children sub-cultures and their active participation in meaning-making (see Sarangapani

2003b; Robinson 2014; Chaudhary 2013; Gupta 2015). My attempts at doing an ethnographic study of childhood, from which the current paper draws upon, falls under this legacy of childhood studies. My search for an informal, everyday, natural setting to carry out an intensive study on urban children, led me to access children in their family setting. In the current paper, I focus on exploring children's active engagement with the moral space of the family around the issues of children's works and responsibilities inside the house.

3. *Children and Work*

In the West, children and work had come under review ever since the time of industrializaion and modernity which pitched for children's right to care, protection and education (see Bourdillon 2006; Archard 1993). In this scenario, 'work' was mostly perceived as an adult prerogative, while works by children were either branded inhuman under 'child labour' or relegated to such activities that had pedagogic value aiding child's socialization or development often identified as 'acceptable' non-exploitative tasks (cf. Baraldi 2003; Fyfe 1998; James et al. 1998). This left little room to study children's work as found in varying forms inside and outside the house (Chandra 2000). Recently, however, studies have accessed children's own views on work illuminating their 'willingness and choice' to take part in various works at home and outside (for discussion on children work outside home see Leonard 2004; also cf. Bromley & Makie 2009; for domestic work see Klein Graesch & Izquierdo 2004; Toverud 2012). Moreover, around the world, the dominant western modern ideas about children's work have been challenged by various cross-cultural studies by highlighting the strong association of moral and developmental values with children's work (Ochs & Izquiredo 2009; cf. Liebel 2004).

As we noted, most of the studies on children and work have been carried out under the framework of 'child's right to participate' (Leonard 2004) by addressing the debate of children's autonomy vis-a-vis children dependency. A few have looked at children's work from the purview of children's adaptation to future role-play (Hallden 1994) For the concern of my present paper, I take a different line of the argument concerned with children's perspective on chores and 'being responsible'.

4. *Children, Housework, and Morality.*

In the developing countries, studies reveal that it was not uncommon for children to take part in household work regularly for various factors (Maharatna 1997; Nieuwenhuy 1994; Anandalakshmy and Bajaj 1981; Munroe et al., 1984;). Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009 in their cross-cultural study on the development of responsibility in children suggest that "[C]hildren's routine assistance in housework, childcare, and self-care is a crucial path for gaining what Aristotle called *phronesis* (insight) and Kant called "Judgement," that is,

ability to think in common-sense ways that assume the standpoint of others" (p 392). This implies that the sharing of household chores aids moral development in a child. Tracing a connection between empathy and corporeality, they claim that, 'corporeal participation in tasks' orients children towards others needs making children morally responsible (ibid.). However, studies covering children 's perspective on work, even though reiterate that children participate in housework out of self-motivation and sense of contribution, yet reveal that children did not necessarily see work as handling a responsibility (see Coppens et al., 2014). Susan Seymour, while doing fieldwork in the city of Bhubaneswar in the 1960s-70s observed children taking part in different categories of works in their houses, like child-care (looking after younger siblings), household chores (cleaning, washing), running errands, hospitality, and schoolwork (1988: 358). During my fieldwork, I realized that children's involvement in sibling care and household chores had declined. However, their participation in running errands, hospitality, and school work continued to be rigorous. To my surprise, I also found that children did not attach much value to the housework they did. As Virginia Morrow (1994) explains, "[I]n the course of my research it was adults, rather than children themselves, who used the concept of 'responsibility' in relation to children's work" (p.134).

Keeping this background in mind, the paper explores children's attitude and understanding of their roles and responsibilities vis-a-vis their share of housework (or shirking of it) in their everyday family life. For the purpose, the paper subscribes to Veena Das's idea of 'ordinary ethics' which views 'morals' as a "dimension of everyday life rather than a separate domain" (2012, p 139). That is to say, the daily habitual quotidian acts offer deep insight into the cultivation of "moral sensibilities" (see also Fassin 2012). The paper searches for an answer to the question, 'does a decrease in participation in housework mark a decrease of moral sensitivities among children?'

Fieldwork

This paper is based on a few of the children's narratives collected as a part of my fieldwork for my Ph.D. study.[1] This fieldwork was conducted in an ethnographic mode spread across many phases, majorly in the years late 2013, 2014, and early 2015. Children were accessed in the informal setting of their homes to find out about their 'family life'. For the purpose, a mixed urban neighbourhood was chosen in central Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha, India. Children of the neighbourhood, not only belonged to various family backgrounds, studying in different types of schools, but also were comparatively open to the idea of a survey, interview, and observations. Having access to children for frank, long, open-ended conversations on issues about the family involved high levels of rapport and deep trust between me (the researcher) and the parents of the children. Hence children were approached based on convenient sampling in such households where the parents and other family

members of the child welcomed and cooperated with my study to the fullest. The fieldwork consisted of long hours of observation and conversations with children in 'the natural' setting of the home where visits were made at different hours of the day hanging out with the child, playing games, reading stories, helping with homework, celebrating festivals, sharing exam anxieties, chatting up with parents, helping in chores and being with them in their difficult times.

Currently, I have picked up cases of three children across three families, out of which two are boys and the third one is a girl. The first child Kush, was a student of standard 10th studying in a well-known private Odia medium school. His father worked as a Grade III officer in the state government and his mother was a homemaker. He had two more siblings staying with him. Kush was keen to take part in chores assigned to him. The second child Atman, was also a student of 10th standard studying in a popular private English medium school. His father owned a mechanical goods retail shop and his mother was a homemaker. Atman had another sibling, posted out of the city, and his paternal grandmother who stayed with them. Atman had a selective approach to participating in chores. The third child is Sania who was in 8th standard, studying in yet another private English medium school. Her father worked as a Grade III officer in the state government. Her mother was a homemaker and Sania had a toddler for a sibling. Sania's paternal grandmother also stayed with them for some part of the year. Sania did not see chores as her responsibility and remained indifferent to it. Both Kush and Atman belonged to a middle-class Hindu Odia family and Sania belonged to a middle-class Muslim Odia family.

Discussing the Narratives

1. *Kush: Shikhya O Sanskara (*Teachings and 'Conducts'*)*

Kush had a very active life within the house. He attended to many chores with his siblings, like taking care of his belongings and arranging them, keeping his cupboard clean and many a time arranging his father's cupboard, washing his father's bike, taking care of the garden, doing errands for his mother and keeping his study area clean. All of these were done routinely and Kush needed no reminders or pushing from his parents. His parents though assured of Kush's promptness never spoke of it openly or praised distinctively. Rather they treated it as a part and parcel of Kush's normal childhood. His mother once explained, "My children know when and what to do, I don't have to remind them … In that, I have put them in a habit". Kush was a studious boy and scored above average in his exams. Even during exam times, Kush cared to finish his share of chores or plan them so as to not affect his studies.

When I broached the question of Kush's role in his family, he simply answered, "As the son of the house" (*Ghara ra pua*). When I pointed out to his regular chores and contributions, Kush laughed and countered me:

"Children have a sense of responsibility (*Daitwa Bhava / Daitwa Bodha*), but no specific responsibilities. Responsible jobs are for elders. Doing little errands, lending a helping hand like assisting Baba in operating mobile, cannot be called responsibilities. These are not assigned or important (*jaruri*) works that we must do daily. These are very small things. Our responsibility is the teachings (*shikhya*). Whatever our parents have taught us, we must follow … Like they teach us to respect elders and to do good works. They call it refined habits (*sanskara*) … Like we were told to start the day with a prayer and follow a proper routine. But then we became lazy. Then slowly our works got delayed.…Everything has an effect (*prabhaba*). If you are a correct (good) person (*Thik Manisa*) then you will realize this has happened. If you did not have correct guidance, then you may not realize (the mistake)."

Interestingly Kush, who undertook several chores regularly and proactively, did not consider these as real works. Real works were the major important jobs undertaken by adults on a regular basis. For children, real work consisted of upholding the moral values and good conduct that he had been instructed to. This he defined as his role being the 'son of the house'. Following up on Kush's insistence on obedience and good conduct, I decided to probe him about mischiefs. Kush, shared the following reflection:

"Sometimes elders tell us good things. Even if parents tell, will the child follow? Once you realize something is wrong, then even if your mind gets attracted you will not do it. But children do serious, bad things. Like they will not tell parents and go to unknown places, they will tell lies. The child starts enjoying it. Some kind of influence of the friend circle is also involved. Also, it depends on the family. In time no one tells the child that what he is doing is wrong or if parents blindly support their child or if they beat him and don't explain properly. Then children keep doing the wrong things."

On another occasion, while talking about being mindful of good and bad behaviour, Kush insisted that "the child does not understand now, and in the future, the child will be in danger. Like if he does not study now and spoils his career. Then it will be too late. Parents have to be very alert."

Given that Kush was in high school, his maturity perhaps allowed him to reflect on influences of external factors, tendencies of mind, the importance of 'self-realizaton', and discernment on the part of children in the daily course of actions. However, it is important to notice the moral struggles and dilemmas in children's life about which Kush's exposition alerts. Mischiefs for Kush are moments of confusion, ignorance, and not intentional. Such mistakes could be corrected in time with timely guidance. For Kush, mistakes become dangerous only when its impacts are irrevocable like, a spoilt career. Given the fact that he identifies with his role as the 'son of the house' whose responsibility is to uphold the good teachings and refined habits that he receives from his parents and elders, he spots lack of appropriate parental guidance as one of the major factors for child's misbehaviour and misdeeds.

2.   *Atman: Problem Apprehended and Problem Real*

Observing Atman presented me with a rather strange case. He had an untamed will of his own and was known for being obstinate and highly demanding. On the other hand, I found Atman's uncomplaining participation in his parent's work, like his father's office, house repairs, grandmother's health care, etc., remarkable. Atman's mother on the one, hand complained about his growing disobedience (*amaniya*), anger (*raga*), and lack of discipline. On the other hand, his parents had enough confidence in his sense of responsibility that they could travel out of the city leaving the house in his and his grandmother's charge. When I asked Atman about what he thought his role and responsibilities were in the house, he gave a practical reply, "It depends on the situation. Basically, we have to be responsible in whatever we do." Atman asserted that children of his age had to be sensitive about what parents permitted or restricted as they (children) suffered from 'teenage confusion'. On another occasion, Atman spoke of the qualities of a good student. One of the qualities he emphasized was, "Obeying family rulings and advice (*family katha maniki*), pure (suddha, in intentions)."

Atman's stress on being sensitive to parent's permission took me by surprise. Because, he possessed a long record of flouting his parents' order like, stealing a scooty (a two-wheeler) ride when he was underage, trying out fire experiments in the house, breaking all dietary rules prescribed by doctors, and even forcing his mother to buy him an expensive new smartphone without his father's knowledge. Once when I asked him about mischiefs, he offered me a deep thought. Taking an example of tearing out papers form a notebook to make paper boats to play with, he explained:

"Your copy will get over. That is your loss. But soon you will forget about the loss. And then you want to experiment with new designs. You cannot stop doing it. It will pull you…Actually, it varies from child to child; someone may think, 'what a loss of paper', and another one may think, 'I am just enjoying, what is wrong with it?' After watching you someone else may get interested and come to join you in it. So, these are all kinds of 'influences…Inside, the child's mind is soft and shiny (meaning innocent)".

In the conversation, Atman further emphasizes on the role of schools and parents to guide children out of such 'influences' of one's own temptations and environment. For Atman, mischiefs are necessarily committed out of ignorance, lack of self-realization on the part of the child augmented by the lack of guidance from parents and school. Atman's need for a fuller realization of a situation in making sense of one's action, helped me to understand Atman's apparent difficulty in empathizing with his parental situations. For e.g., one day, Atman upset his mother by declining to eat the 'tasteless homemade' food. When I asked him about it, he explained to me, "if I am very hungry, then I might just eat whatever it is. But right now, I am not that hungry. So,

I do not see why she is so angry. How can I see the emergency she feels (regarding his health and behaviour)"?

Many a time Atman's behaviour perturbed and anguished his parents. His octogenarian paternal grandmother, especially, admonished Atman openly for his insolence. However, all these failed to change Atman's mind and behaviour. When I probed Atman about his varied reactions to his parent's troubles, he categorically explained:

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

Gradually, I understood Atman's thought process. Running at every beck and call of his family members and foregoing his demands out of concern for his family did not constitute a duty of being a responsible son. Rather he saw his role in helping out his family in times of real need. He chose to make a distinction between 'problems real and problems of apprehension' while deciding his response to family member's entreaties as on many occasions he found their fears to be projected and not real. Paying heed to every fear and hurt that family expressed, for Atman, meant spoiling one's own peace. Thus, for Atman, his responsibility lied in being alert and responsive in times of urgencies and real needs.

### 3.	*Sania: Being Responsible and One-self*

Sania was a top rank holder and very meticulous about her school work. She kept her books, school bag, and study table with extra care. Her father had high hopes for Sania and wished her to become an I.A.S (Indian Administrative Services) officer. Sania too determinedly nurtured this dream. It was Sania's mother who monitored her daily homework. During exams, the mother and daughter woke up around 4.a.m. to revise the syllabus. Sania was not someone who showed any interest in doing chores or attending to errands. Rather she enjoyed surfing on the internet following current affairs, discoveries, and Hindi movies. She had a secret journal with pictures of heroines, models, fancy dresses, and handmade beautiful sketches. Sania was also known for her 'aloofness' and 'high demands'. These habits of Sania made her mother anxious.

"Is her standard good? Can she handle it in the future? I am so worried. She says she will become an I.A.S (Indian Administrative Service) officer. How to become an IAS? She does not think about that. That day one dress was Rs.

5000 and she liked it. Nothing else appealed to her… She is still not responsible (regarding matters of money). How will she handle her life….She keeps sitting on the computer. She keeps doing something in a diary and I wonder what is she doing? Is she spending time in something good and useful for her growth?"

Sania's paternal grandmother who stayed with them for some part of the year was present in the house during my study with Sania. She had a different set of complaints regarding her granddaughter's seemingly lack of empathy for her parents. She spoke grudgingly:

"When her mother went to the hospital, Sania, kept doing her homework, and then washed up, came over to dinner, and asked me to serve her food. No concern. She will order today she wants *puri* and then something else. She will not even arrange her bed after getting up or polish her shoe. Nobody can tell her anything, for she will sulk or be grumpy."

Sania was mostly privy to all these conversations but showed no reactions. One day while her mother was sharing about her own wedding stories, she spoke about her deep fear that if Sania did not excel in her education then Sania might end up having an early marriage and confined to a life of a subjugated housewife. Sania sat quietly reading the papers without paying any attention to her mother's words. Her mother then thought aloud if Sania would ever empathize with her worries. At that moment I asked Sania about her reactions. Sania spoke her mind for the first time in her mother's presence:

"I cannot be so disciplined and routinized. Like after tuitions I cannot sit down and study anymore. I have to go out and eat something. I cannot take so much stress. I do not like doing chores. If I feel like doing (chores), then I am sure I can do it, but I don't bother myself. Anyway, all work gets done (by her mother and grandmother). … There is still time for me (*abhi bohat time hai*) to go away to a hostel or outside. I can learn quickly. If I see once I can figure out".

Later when I asked Sania to describe to me her role in her family, she replied pat, "no role". Then she further mused:

"Being a good daughter, a good sister, and a good granddaughter. Respect and listen to them (elders). They have experienced what we are experiencing. They know more than we know. They take care of us, stand by us. So, we should show our gratitude. (I pointed out to her about her episodes of sulking and tantrums.) At home sometimes I obey and sometimes I do what I wish. After all, I also have my wishes and personality (*Aakhir apni bhi koi marzi hai, koi personality hai*) … At home it is free (from outsiders' presence), I can be myself. It is my space …(I further ask her about her stubbornness and demands.) It is not always bad to be wilful (*ziddi*). Like one time this computer stopped working. I told mama that I can handle it, but she did not believe it. So, at last, I decided to do it on my own and it started working. So, when I know I am

right, I do not change my point so that they come to know what is right. So here being wilful was not wrong ... But if the situation worsens then we must give up .... By showing tantrums (*nakhra*) ... people will give some attention, listen to you ... it feels good to get importance sometimes. It is allowed."

Sania had full faith in her ability to learn fast and acquire the life skills needed for her self-independent future survival and did not share her mother's anguish. Sania realized it well that her parents neither depended on nor expected her contribution to daily housework. This somewhere encouraged Sania to ignore her grandmother's constant bickering around Sania's sedentary lifestyle and demanding attitudes. On the other hand, she chose to empathise with her parent's heartiest wishes to see her excel in her career and gave her best to her studies. She saw her real role expectation in being a 'good daughter, good sister, and a good granddaughter...' I got another glimpse of Sania's deeper empathy with family values when she expressed her disapproval about her friend's behaviour in school. Sania had exclaimed, "This girl (the friend) is an elder sister. She has a younger brother. What influence will she be? Everyone in the class knows that if Sania is saying something means it will be something good. But that girl did not listen to me". As the conversation proceeded, Sania reflected on the importance of "right conduct" (*Sathik Acharana*) following her school teacher's recommendations. Moral uprightness, being a good influence, and always saying the right thing was of greater importance to Sania than being obedient, docile, and ready to please. In her outlook tantrums and demands were acceptable parts and parcel of family life which allowed her the freedom to experience the home space as her own and not as something disharmonious. Rather, she saw them as mechanisms to gravitate the family towards her.

On an occasion when Sania was comparing her early childhood days with her present, she reflected that she was more prone to mischiefs when she was younger as she was not aware of the impact of her action and did not know things well. However, in the present, she saw herself as more responsible as she is better aware of the result of her actions and more careful.

Conclusion

Clearly, children in my field setting, whether participating in housework or not, did not attach any significance to it. For them, responsible jobs were those that were done by elders, independently and regularly. In contrast, children did housework mostly under supervision or as instructed. Moreover, these chores were mostly intermittent and not duty-bound. So, children did not consider their works as significant. Neither children nor parents associated housework with their (children's) role expectations. For parents, children's academic growth and physical health of children were of higher priority (see Hedegaard 2012). For both of them, housework was secondary to schoolwork.

The pressure of performance in academics and making a good career was equally felt by children of both genders in my field (Little 1997; Sarma 2014). Parents readily spent a considerable amount of money on tuitions and coaching for their sons as well as daughters. In most of the houses, parental expectations of children's participation in housework were low even for girls. However, in houses without a hired house-help, it was not uncommon to see children regularly participating in chores, especially so, when children were in middle and high school irrespective of their gender. I noticed that there existed an indirect motivation for children to take up various responsibilities at home in the form of praises bestowed on children, like smart, abled, self-independent, and so on. Thus, the child felt a sense of pride in learning new recipes, home-décor hacks, attending to guests, learning to ride a bike, and mastering the use of computers, smart-phones and helping parents with it. In matters of doing errands and spending time hanging out, the high school aged boys enjoyed more liberty than the girls, who mostly went out in groups with friends or senior women. The younger children invariably were accompanied by adults owing to the heavy presence of traffic and strangers in the neighbourhood. Remarkably, in most of the houses, the child had to balance between the set of the demands emanating from the grandparent's and the set of demands emanating from the parents; often these were contradictory. For e.g., in the case of Sania and Atman, their grandmothers expected them to be more disciplined, docile, thrifty, attentive to parent's needs, and active in daily chores. However, their parents were more concerned about their (children's) academics, health, and emotional gratifications (c.f. Chowdhury 2015; Chatterjee 2013). For their daughters, the mothers in my field were especially keen on providing a future where the daughter was not exposed to the 'burdens of household toils' as them (mothers); education seemed to be the way out. As was evident in Sania's mother's worries over Sania's early marriage, lest Sania managed to make a good career.

Having said this, it might be important to add that, the picture of gendered division of labour within the house drastically changed when the focus was turned to the parental generation, where a child and home care remained the mother's prerogative, irrespective of their (mother's) education and career standing, while fathers mostly played the role of provider and disciplinarian or appeaser (Menon 2013). In my field grandparents played an important role in projecting the conventional gendered behavior patterns. For, e.g., grandparents insisted upon the prevalence of the authority of the eldest male member of the house to whom children and women should comply, early induction of gendered roles where boys and girls maintained separate spaces even in their friend circles, and the comforts of the earning male members were to be prioritized inside the house. However, for the children of the house, of both genders, the most immediate concerns and important values were scholastic aptitudes, honing ones' talent and civil manners.

Notably, amidst these multiple moral demands, children of my field pitched

their empathy with family at a different level. For the children, being responsible for one's family involved 'being a good daughter', 'son of the house', and standing up with parents in times of need. Thus, Sania strongly shared her parents' heartiest wish to see her well settled and made it her own dream to become an I.A.S. Kush on the other hand made it his vocation to uphold family values and follow the teachings of family and school as instructed. And, for Atman, it meant being responsive to the family's real need and urgent time. For all of them, their real obligation towards family and their role expectation lied in upholding the family values and personal virtues (being studious, mutually responsive, morally upright, etc), the moral spirit of which was not seen dimmed by the absence of children's contribution to housework in person. As we can see, the more complex frame of 'character building' dominated the scripts of children's life

Further, amidst all these sharing of family feeling and values, children did not see a problem in assertively advancing their demands and being their self. Especially, Atman and Sania both defended their space to be willful and have their way, as to them, the family was necessarily a space to be 'one's self' and gratifications. Sania justified that being willful for a right cause was beneficial and Atman saw having his own way as a safety valve from losing oneself in the many demands of the family members. Kush though did not speak of being willful and demanding in a positive light, however, he acknowledged the possibility of such behaviour. In the children's world, these individual assertions did not threaten the collective family rather increased the ownership of the institution in the individual's view (cf. Toverud 2012).

Finally, all three children though aware of the problems of mischiefs like telling a lie, disobeying parents and school rules, misconducts, etc., still tended to carry a lenient view on the child's fault in it. I found that children dealt with it from a dual logic, the 'permissible mischiefs' (to be using the phrase of one of my key child informants not included in this paper), and 'teenage confusion'. Children had a separation between the kind of mischiefs which was not harmful, correctible, and a mere expression of being oneself and the kind of mischief that could have irrevocable loss or harm. Three of the children insisted on the major function of the 'impact' of a given action in deciding its culpability. Undoubtedly for the children, it was the duty of parents and school to be alert towards children's behaviour and provide timely guidance to save the child from the harmful impact of their actions if any, thereby stoping a permissible mistake from transforming into harmful mischief.

'Impact' and 'Influence' (both broadly referred to as '*prabhab*' in Odia by children) seemed to have a certain preoccupation in children's minds. All three children asserted the role of the impact of their action as the determining factor of the moral nature of the action. They also sharply pointed out the constant moral dilemmas that a child faced in day to day life owing to various external (peer group, and other media) and internal (temptations of one's mind) influences. 'Teenage confusion' was time and again projected as the mode of

being for children in which state making a decision needed extra care and consideration. It was to these constant moral dilemmas and teenage confusion that children pointed out as the cause of mischiefs and not to the child's deliberate intentions even in the situation of long-term deviances. According to children, it was the ignorance of the impact of one's own action on oneself and others that took children wayward. The need for 'self realization', fuller understanding of the situation, and the awareness of the result of one's action was seen as inevitable by children in coming out of their errant tendencies.

Notes

1. This paper is a part of my Ph.D. work being pursued at the Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad. It aims to explore the moral-sentimental dynamics of school-going aged children's family life, inhabiting an urban mixed neighbourhood. The current chapter forms the basis of one of my substantial data narrative chapters in my thesis where the issue is discussed in greater details.

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