

Who is A Child?:

The Adults' Perspective within Adult-Child Relationship in India

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Abstract

Based on the assumption that childhood is a social construct, this qualitative study explores how children across ages, are perceived by adults. Using modified grounded theory approach, seven adults, teachers by profession, were informally interviewed over several sessions, supplemented by TAT-like picture cards. Theoretical coding led to the extraction of the following key themes. To begin with, participants divided childhood into several phases, each characterized by distinct adult-child relationship and interaction. Secondly, compared to earlier times, children of today were seen as maturing faster along with greater democratization in adult-child relationships. And finally, analysis of social position of children in participants' interviews showed that children were being perceived using an ideology of dependency and incompetency that manifested in various marginalizing practices within adult-child relationship.

Keywords: social construct, social position of children, adult-child relationship

Twentieth century- the 'Century of the Child' witnessed the revolutionary United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and the 'new Social Studies' of Childhood, which brought childhood to the forefront of international political and academic debate. Childhood is also an extremely visible entity in the policies and programmes of Government of India. A signatory to the UNCRC, India presently has more than 120 schemes for welfare and development of women and children, yet most discourses on children remain predominantly Eurocentric (Raman, 2000). Thus, the primary aim of this study was to explore some discourses that commonly exist about children in India and to add depth to the search for indigenous

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representations of childhood. Part of a larger study, the present paper includes findings relevant to adult-child relationship.

Childhood as a Social Construct

Social Constructionism proposes that ‘conventional knowledge’ and all ways of understanding are relative and sustained by social processes (Burr, 2003). Treating childhood also as a social construct, social constructionists have argued that there are many possible answers to the questions: ‘who is a child?’ or ‘ what is childhood?’ For them, each notion of childhood is generated by successive generations out of a mix of tradition, social intercourse and technological development (Qvortrup, 1996). It is this conceptualization of childhood, which formed the starting point of the current study. Various perspectives on childhood, within this approach have emerged.

In 1962, Philip Aries (Aries, 1962) proposed that childhood, which is now defined as the years between infancy and adolescence, had undergone the process of social construction. Studying Medieval paintings and literature, he argued that childhood emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, with the emergence of specific social institutions- namely, the modern school and the bourgeois nuclear family which created distinct roles for children. Further developing this theme of childhood as a social construct, is the new sub-discipline sometimes referred to as the ‘Sociology of Childhood’ or the ‘New Social Studies of Childhood’ (Greene & Hill, 2005).

These sub-disciplines are critical of the oversimplified status of childhood with the ontological assumptions of children- as passive, universal, unformed socialization projects. These are seen as perpetuated by traditional sociology and developmental psychology, which over-relied on the development metaphor (Hogan, 2005; De Castro, 1996; Skolnick, 1975). In comparison, the ‘new social studies’ of childhood, sees children as actors and childhood as a participatory and not just preparatory phase of life. According to Alanen (2001), three main kinds of sociology take children as their focus. ‘Sociology of Children’ focuses on the child as an agent and as

participatory in constructing knowledge and daily experience.' 'Deconstructive Sociology of Childhood' focuses on the varying discourses about children and childhood and 'Structural Sociology of Childhood' analyses major movements like scholarization, urbanization etc in terms of children's everyday lives.

Within Structural Sociology of Childhood, Mayall (2002) has proposed that 'the most promising concept for considering childhood in its sociological relations to the social order, is that of generation.' Bourdieu (1986) defined 'social generation' as 'groups of people who share similar experiences, which influence their later experiences and relationships.' Mayall (2002) extends this to children, who comprise another social group, or 'social generation' and live 'within a specific set of social conditions and subject to specific understandings of childhood.' Research using this idea studies childhood in terms of how it is defined in contradistinction to adulthood and how individuals come to be known as children, with certain characteristics. Clearly, Mayall emphasizes the relational structure of childhood, with what is childhood, being defined and shaped mainly within the context of adult-child relations. The study adopts Mayall's propositions of viewing children as a social group and focuses on adult-child relations to explore notions about the developmental processes in children and their social position and status.

Research on Social Position of Children

It was the UNCRC in 1989, put the debate on childhood on the global stage through the participatory rights, the child developed from an object (of provision and protection) to a subject, an actor and citizen. Within academics, child rights have become a popular theme. While feminists argue against home and family domains being apolitical, power relations in adult-child relations are being systematically explored only recently. Hood-Williams (1990) refers to the subordination of children within adult-child relations as 'age-patriarchy' and Qvortrup (1996) has analyzed devaluation of children as economic contributors and their 'precious but burdensome status.' Mayall (2002) has proposed a political theory of childhood, with children occupying a 'minority social group', 'with home and school organized around power of adults to determine the

character of children's experience...and children frequently talking in terms of denial of their rights'.

Similar concerns about marginalization and subordination of the child have also arisen in Indian educational literature. While social hierarchy is part of the Indian society (Raman, 2000), the revolutionary National Curricular Framework, 2005 stated clearly that 'children and youth are the most marginalized sections of society' (4.3.1). The mainstream Hindu tradition seems to be dominated by authoritarian-deferential attitudes in adult-child relation and belief in the ignorance of the child which is also manifest in teacher-student relations (Sarangapani, 2003; Kumar, 1989). Thus, while exploring perceptions of a group of Indian adults, one objective of the study was to look at the position given to children, as a social group, by adults.

Childhood and Research in India

Conduction of childhood studies is of grave importance for India, since India has the largest young population in the world. Despite this, childhood is a latecomer on the social sciences scene in India (Kumar, 1993) and systematic research is of recent origin. Psychologists agree that relatively little is known about the normal and abnormal childhood experience in India (Mohanty & Prakash, 1993; Pandey, 2001; Viruru, 2001). However, social scientists in India are recently beginning to actively and systematically engage with the study of uniqueness of Indian childhood (Mohanty & Prakash, 1993). Some of the research findings of Indian childhood studies are presented below. To provide an idea of different notions of childhood in different socio-cultural and geo-political contexts, the findings have been presented in the form of a comparison between western and Indian ideas of childhood and adult-child relations.

Western and Indian Childhoods: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

Most studies find existence of plurality of childhoods in India, varying with family structure; socio-cultural, economic and political setting; birth order; gender etc. (Saraswathi, 1999;

Chaudhury, 2004). The childhood on which we currently have the most information is Hindu childhood and this has been used as a basis for comparison.

First of all, in West, following Rousseau, childhood has been seen as a distinct era, with clear boundaries between child and adult worlds. However, in the Indian context, the boundaries are not so rigid (Anandalakshmy & Bajaj, 1981; Kakar, 1981). Saraswathi (1999) talks of such continuity in terms of expectations and similarity in life course with girls constantly groomed for their future roles. Weak adult-child differentiation has also been found, expressed in the sharing of the same spaces, in both rural sections and urban educated middle classes (Raman, 2000). The child lives embedded in the world of adult activity. Kumar (1993) however, points out that wider macro processes and economic changes like immigration, breaking-up of joint families, and scholarization is changing this.

Secondly, Chaudhary (2004) argues that 'familism' is a significant reality for Indian families. According to this, children are presumed to 'belong to' their parents with their social identity mirroring that of their parents. The notion of bounded, unitary self itself is not familiar to basic Indian psyche. This is not so in the West where individualism is valued and the self are seen as bounded and autonomous (Geertz, 1984).

Thirdly, several unique features of developmental tasks are reported in India. According to Kakar (1981, 2003), while the first few years of the child's life are marked by maternal indulgence and no developmental demands, the child gradually enters the masculine world and faces inflexible standards of absolute obedience and conformity to familial and social standards. Raman (2000) proposes that the typical developmental stages and tasks like toilet training, weaning etc. considered problematic in Western scholarship are 'not imbued with such significance by the mothers. Maturation was a more relaxed and leisurely process' with mothers concern centering on the child's future.

Some similarity seem to exist on Western and Indian understandings of agency in the child, with children in both communities being seen as largely immature, incompetent, dependent and passive, occupying a subordinate position with respect to the adults (Qvortrup, 1996; Bisht &

Sinha, 1981; Kumar, 1993). Thus, given the need for India-specific literature on childhood, this study was conducted primarily to contribute to the search for indigenous representation of childhood in Indian culture. Secondly, given the emphasis on children's rights, to look into the social position of children in India, using Mayall's proposition of children as a social group or 'social generation'.

For this purpose, the objectives formulated for the study are:

1. To explore the perception of adults on the developmental processes in children.
2. To analyze the adults' perspective on the social position of children as a social group.

Method

Participants

Participants included seven adult teachers (four females and three males) from two schools situated at Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh. Since teachers as a group come into contact with children in two contexts: home and school and adopt two roles: that of a parent and teacher, for an ideal adult position, teachers were chosen as participants. Four teachers (two male and two female) were from a co-ed English-medium private school catering to upper-middle class, and three teachers (two female and one male) were from an all girls' Hindi-medium Government school for the lower income group. All participants were between 35-45 years, married with one or more children and taught classes from 5-10.

Following the basic principle of theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the participants were chosen based on their relevance to the research topic, for including gender and socio-economic status variations, their willingness and ability to articulate and the Principal's recommendation.

Procedures

Two methods employed for data collection: one was interview and the other was narratives based on picture cards. The interviews were conducted in the schools of the participants. Interviews began with the researcher explaining the study and asking the participants to contribute, as collaborators, to the evolution of an indigenous understanding of children. After obtaining personal information, each participant was asked to talk about his/her family and share their childhood experiences. The incidents recounted by them were then used as cues to ask general questions on childhood. Open-ended or 'non-directive questioning' was used to elicit responses from the participants about their childhood, offspring and student children. To direct the interview at some points, some of the questions asked included:

'(1) Tell me something about your childhood; (2) According to you, who is a child?; (3) When will you consider that children have grown up?; (5) List five strengths and five weaknesses of children.'

When some of the participants emphasized the difference between their own childhood and that of their children, questions were added to tap this theme, e.g. *'Are today's children different from yesteryear's children?'*

Each interview ranged from 20- 40 minutes with six to eight sessions per participant. The interviews were conducted largely in the participants' mother tongue, Hindi, to facilitate informal and open discussions. These were recorded using a tape-recorder with the permission of each participant.

To further invoke narratives from them, six picture cards (selected from images of children and adult-child interacting in print media although not pre-tested) were presented and participants were asked to make a story about the picture. Thereafter, the motives and characteristic behavior patterns of the child and adult were probed.

Analysis

Theoretical Coding procedure of Strauss and Corbin (1990) and general guidelines by Dey (1993) were used for analysis. After being reviewed line-by-line in open coding, Constant

Comparative Method and Dey's (1993) method of refining categories by subcategorizing and combining categories were used for axial coding. Thereafter, five themes were obtained using basic selective coding.

Key Themes and Discussion

Developmental Processes: Phases of Development and Adult-Child Relations

In the interviews, participants divided childhood into three developmental phases, each characterized by distinct adult-child relationship pattern. However, these phases were seen as having blurred, flexible boundaries. These phases, described below, roughly coincided with Early Childhood, Adolescence and Late Adolescence. However, young people in every phase were still referred to as 'children'.

Chhote Bachhe (Small Children)

This phase is overlapped with 'early childhood'. Till about 10- 12 years of age (up to class 7 in India), the child was seen as a 'small child' or '*chhota bachha*'. Early childhood was characterized by complete immaturity in cognitive, emotional and social domains and the child was seen as 'dependent', 'ignorant' and unaware of her surroundings and her actions. Misbehavior in the form of tantrums- shouting, throwing things, being stubborn or '*ziddi*' and showing lack of emotional control were seen as frequent. Also, the child was seen as possessing inherent goodness and innocence- freedom from all evils - devoid of greed, selfishness, dishonesty, and malice. Carefreeness, impulsiveness, spontaneity in speech and low awareness or care for worldly details were interpreted as its manifestation. When asked to identify weaknesses of children, one participant stated, '*children have no negative traits... there exists pure feelings in their heart.*'

Adult-child relations at this stage were found to be marked by significant compliance, obedience and deference by children to adults. Children were seen as uncritical of adults, always believing in adults' expertise or goodness. As one teacher said: "*Students up to 12-13 years are damn*

good listeners. They listen to what you say. They take you religiously". Another teacher said, "Till 8th, children look at all teachers as good, even if the teacher is not good". At the same time, participants reported that children were highly pampered and indulged in at this time. Tantrums were perceived as natural and lovingly condoned and young children were allowed to speak and behave the way they desired, without many restrictions. This is exemplified in a poem one participant narrated about her son:

*"oh lovely childhood! tears one moment, laughter another,
getting angry and irritating parents to get what he wants,
father irritated, mother crying..."*

Kishor Awastha (Adolescence)

Entrance in class 7-8 (12-13 years onwards) was associated with the phase of adolescence, termed '*kishor awastha*'. Children were referred to as neither big, nor small and participants perceived an emergence of cognitive maturity in children of this phase, in terms of analytical and reflective abilities (understanding lessons instead of just memorizing them) and some ability to discriminate between good and bad. They also reported manifestations of individuality, with children independently evaluating things, forcefully asserting their opinions and feeling the need for privacy. However, all participants stressed that children of this age were extra-susceptible and vulnerable to negative influences from the environment. Typical statements were "*adolescence is the age in which boys and girls go the wrong way*". '*Bigadna*' or falling in bad ways was explained as getting into substance abuse, bunking school and into stimuli with high sexual content. Several participants also saw this period as a time for identity confusion in the child. One teacher summed it up: "*Now they have to take care of their adolescence. And this is a very crucial and delicate phase of their life.*"

Some participants felt that at this age, children were impulsive, rash and willful along with being unable to discriminate between right and wrong. Interestingly, children were also seen as relatively more mature and individualistic. The use of force or '*zor-zabardasti*', was seen as successful with younger children, was lessened and child given more freedom.

Adult-child relationship was influenced by the belief of adults that deprived of proper guidance and supervision the child would get 'lost'. It was repeatedly stressed that the adolescents could not be left totally free and supervision and awareness about their activities and the company they kept was essential. As one participant stated: *"we can't even leave them fully on his/her own. We can give them this much freedom that you can do this, go wherever you want to go, but inform and go"*.

Bade Bache (Big/ Mature Children)

From class 9-10 (14-15 years onwards), children were termed as 'Bade', and many reported a 'major transformation' at this stage. Children were seen as more mature cognitively and socially or 'samajhdar'. Social maturity was manifested in their understanding and following of social norms and having a sense of responsibility. Strong individuality was seen in children who perceived themselves as capable of independent functioning, decision-making and it was felt that they couldn't be forced. However, it was also stressed that they were still not fully mature and needed guidance.

Participants narrated that their relations with children from class 10 involved comparatively less use of force. For attaining academic goals, force was replaced by more democratic strategies like discussion of pros and cons. As one teacher stated, while defining childhood: *"when we talk about children, I think we can consider till class 10. Reason is that after 10th, we can't make children learn by threatening. We have to change our attitude. If you do, then this..this... and if you don't do, then this..this.."*

Table (1) shows the developmental phases into which childhood was divided by the participants and adult-child relationship in each phase.

Table 1. Developmental phases of childhood and adult-child relationships

Phase & Boundary	Characteristics	Adult-child relationships and interaction pattern
Small Children 'Chhote Bachhe'	1. Completely immature 2. Ignorant of social norms	1. Indulgence 2. Unquestioned obedience and

Nursery – class 7 (4-12 years)	3. Dependent 4. Inherently innocent and good	deference expected
Adolescents 'Kishor Awastha' Class 7-8 (12/13 years onwards)	1. Developing maturity 2. Emerging individuality 3. Heightened susceptibility to negative influences	1. Greater freedom to child & less use of force 2. Supervision, control & guidance felt essential on child's activities & company
Mature Children 'Bade Bachhe' After class 10 (15 years onwards)	1. Quite developed cognitive & social maturity 2. Strong sense of individuality and independence 3. Some immaturity	1. More freedom given to child 2. Force on child replaced by reasoning & democratic strategies 3. Felt need for some guidance and control

* Source: modified from Bisht (2007)

A review of studies on Indian childhood revealed that there was, to the researchers knowledge, no study, which focused on indigenous notions of developmental phases in children. Most researches focused on pre-defined phases of early childhood or adolescence. However, the association of early childhood with divinity and consequently, purity and goodness has been found in several studies (Kakar, 1981; Sharma, 2003). Misri (1986) found that parents perceived children on an Axis of Human-Divine, considering them as gifts from god. However, adolescence has not been a phase associated with traditional Indian childhood (Saraswathi, 1999). The findings of this study are consistent with Saraswathi's analysis that in the decades to come, with greater access to schooling and economic prosperity, adolescence may emerge as a distinct phase cutting across gender and class.

Socio-Historical Change in Developmental Pattern of Children and Adult-Child Relations

One of the themes emerged related to socio-historical changes in developmental pattern of children and adult-child relations.

Faster development/ Maturation - Children were seen as developing/ maturing faster in present times, as compared to earlier years, especially with reference to their entry into the period of adolescence. One participant said about today's generation, "everything about them matures faster". Many felt that the adolescent phase of childhood was now starting from the age of ten years,

instead of fourteen years, as thought earlier. Some also felt that this was a negative development. Children were getting more vulnerable and prone to negative influences and behavior about two-four years earlier than before. Comparing with his own childhood, one teacher said, *“in their times, children took to bad ways after 14-18 years but now its starting from 10 years”*.

Greater democratization of adult-child relations - Several aspects in the participants' interviews showed the increasingly democratic and participative nature of child-adult relationship, compared to earlier times. This was in terms of greater negotiation of control by children; use of democratic strategies by parents and their less use of force; open adult-child discussions and growing knowledge and competency in children. For example, most participants felt that children today actively negotiated control, many times successfully, especially over the nature and amount of control the adult exerted over their behavior. Children were termed as 'smart' since they strove to make adult-child relations less autocratic. “Earlier, if the father or mother used to say something, then they (children) would not even ask anything much and become silent. But now children ask. They are not the ones to become/remain silent”, reported by one participant.

Also, most participants reported that there was a change in ways of exercising control over children, with most parents preferring to use persuasion, reasoning and love, i.e. *‘samjhana’*, instead of rigid disciplining. Persuasion was seen as the more effective strategy and exercising control through force or physical punishment was avoided as it was thought to ultimately threaten established child-adult power relations with children resisting or opposing it. Parents today were also seen as unable or unwilling to exercise control over the child. While some related this to the phenomenon of working mother, others related it to over-indulgence as well as a change in parents' understanding of their role. One of the teacher's said, *“70% just leave their children to grow up as animals on the street and its just a 30% jo abhi bhi (who even now)... control..., they are pulling the reins on the children.”*

Many participants reported that adult topics of discussion, which were previously tabooed topics for children like intimacy, romantic liaisons, puberty-related changes etc. were nows being openly discussed. Children were also seen as 'more aware' now ,whether about sexual issues or

awareness and concern about career. As one female participant candidly stated, “*how ready/prepared these children (girls) are, perhaps we’re not that ready even after marriage*”. Thus, children were now viewed as more competent and responsible for self, house and younger siblings.

When asked to enumerate some of the events responsible for such a change, participants mentioned the following: excessive importance to education and academic performance in the society; phenomenon of working mother and nuclearization; greater role of print and visual media; over-indulgence by parents; better nutrition; better facilities, smaller family size and change in educational pattern.

Research in the Western world on transitions in inter-family relations, as far back as 1960s, also showed an increase in demonstration of affection, in companionship between parent and children and greater democracy in the family decision-making process, as compared to traditional, patriarchal family forms (Kauffman, 1961).

Social Position of Children

When the social position of children within the interview data of participants was analyzed, it was found that children, as a social group, were perceived using an ‘ideology of incompetence and dependency’ (Rodham, 1973). Within this, children were perceived as essentially vulnerable and susceptible to negative influences, immature, essentially innocent and needing protection and the adults adopted the role of a ‘mentor’ with the child always being the ‘mentored/ the project’ in the relationship. Also, there was found some scope of control and subordination of children, within adult-child relations.

Ideology of Incompetence and Dependency

Within the interviews, childhood was seen largely as a negative, relational category defined by presenting a contrast with the social category of adults in terms of some competency. All participants saw the child as immature or ‘*nasamajh*’ in contrast to the mature, ‘*samajhdar*’ adult, through his/her ignorance of social norms, inability to discriminate between good and bad and

lack of sexual awareness. When asked to define childhood, several participants used a negative framework, defining the child through his subordinate and dependent status. One participant thus defined, “*child is one who can't take his decisions, is totally dependent on his parent*”. The specific beliefs within this ideology, as found in the study are given below.

Essential Vulnerability and Immaturity

All participants perceived children as vulnerable and susceptible to negative influences, as part of their essential nature. On being probed further, five teachers proposed that children were attracted to negative things more and learnt them far easily, while at the same time, they were resistant to positive influences. One participant spoke about her children, “*it is very difficult to make children (into good)*”. Many saw the active role played by the child in learning easily and effortlessly from his environment – through observation and absorption, as making the child more vulnerable to the effects and characteristics of a bad environment. Bad company or ‘*kusangatiyaan*’ was another frequent reason for the child falling in bad ways. Children were also viewed as immature, ignorant, impulsive and unable to reason and evaluate the future consequences of their actions.

Essential Innocence

Another belief was that children were essentially innocent or blank and picked up bad habits only from their environment. Thus, the need for protecting the child was emphasized in the narratives. With children being felt to play an essentially passive role in their own development, perhaps, parents and teachers felt an even greater sense of responsibility for the child.

Adults as Mentors, Children as Projects

Lastly, there was a clear-cut differentiation between the roles ascribed to the children and to parents/teachers, in the interviews of the participants. The image of the child as one needing constant guidance and support and the parent/teacher as one providing this guidance and support was apparent in more than 90% of parent child interactions reported in this study. There

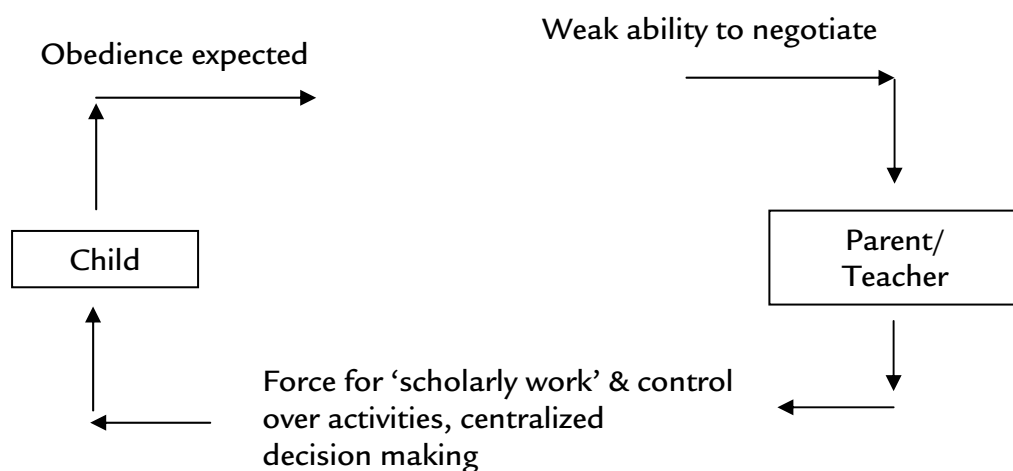
was economic dependency, dependency for appropriate environmental stimulation and dependency for guidance and support as children were seen as unable to make certain decisions for themselves and discriminate between right and wrong. Thus, participants as adults adopted a morally superior position of a 'mentor' with a deep sense and pride in their responsibility.

In the context of this role, most participants recommended and justified force in some form or the other on the child, as part of fulfilling these roles and responsibilities. *"We as an Indian family would never allow the child to do whatever he or she wants to. We do have our certain norms that we want our children to follow. ...and using force for that, I wouldn't call it unfair,"* reported by one teacher.

Scope of Control and Subordination of Children within Adult-Child Relations

This ideology could be seen as finding its manifestation in several facets of child-adult relationship. In the participants' narratives, children were reported as being forced to perform 'scholastic work' (Qvortrup, 1991), there was centralized decision-making and control by parents with no participation of child and children had weak ability to negotiate amidst expectations of obedience. Following figure (1) is an account of the marginalizing practices which an adult as teacher or parent exercises and the range of responses available to the child.

Figure 1. Controlling and marginalizing practices within adult-child relations



Force for 'Scholastic Work': Most participants reported that children were forced for what Qvortrup (1991) calls 'scholastic work', defined as 'unpaid form of work done outside school'. It included a high degree of control over the child's activities e.g. curbing of playtime or vacations of the child, early entry into the school, viz. 2 & ½ years and control over the structuring of the child's daily life by parents. One participant elaborates: "*they would put their child into school from 2 ½ years for coaching. He has just got up from sleep, is sleeping or is sleepy, they would take him to coaching.. whether he is studying or not. At 6, they get him back again and then again make him study at home.*"

Some participants' narratives brings to light how the child has become a route to and mirror of parents' ambition, who keep pushing him/her for all round excellence. This process can be clearly seen in the following statement of a teacher, who when asked to talk about her childhood said:

"I couldn't do number problems fast and I used to feel quite bad. And its result is...I have two sons. In primary education... people used to tell me, even my mother used to say, what are you doing, why are you behaving like mad? I've made my children write alphabets, numbers so many times, that perhaps few other mothers would have done so. I've overcome my limitations in my children."

Forcing the child for studies has been reported as a common phenomenon for middle class (Saraswathi, 1999). While Viruru (2000) relates this to 'a sense of insecurity which pervades the Indian middle class' Kumar (1993) interprets it as an expression of adult-child continuity.

Centralized Decision-making and Expectation of Obedience

Within the participants' interviews, there were multiple instances where parents were seen as making decisions for the child, without even consulting them, and where children were expected to comply. One participant, while talking about her own childhood stated she could not

go anywhere alone since her mother had ruled that she had to take her younger sister everywhere with her. The silent discomfort felt by her was evident in her use of ambiguous terms, *"everyday... I used to feel very 'something'. Mother used to say/declare no, don't go alone"*.

Parents also expected children to perform various kinds of 'work' and children had to obey the parents' directives on this for example on household work' for lower-class girl-child, 'scholastic work' etc. Adultocratic relations were seen as natural between adults and children. Interaction from adults was in the form of orders, threats or force, which the child had to obey. As one participant state, *"there are some children, if you slap them once...like if you slap them in class 9, it will work till class 12"*. Obedience was expected as natural in early childhood, participants stated that complete obedience and compliance from the child, can be taken for granted.

Control by Adult and Weak Ability to Negotiate in Children

Most of the participants felt that some form of control had to be exercised on children for bringing them up properly and one participant stated, *"when control is not there, children are bound to fall in wrong ways"*. Control over the movement of the child in spaces outside house and school and along with this, awareness and supervision of the child's activities and company was stated as crucial by most teachers. Many clearly stated that too much freedom was not good for the child. No participant reported any decisions being made, related to the child or even otherwise, with the participation of the child. Only the nature and degree of control was seen as different for different phases as has been discussed in the earlier sub-section.

The existence of such a subordinating ideology and marginalizing practices have been talked about by many international and Indian social scientists. While Mayall (2002) termed this 'the subordinate -dependent status of the child' and proposed that childhood constitutes a 'minority social group', Qvortrup (1996) termed it 'paternalistic marginalization'. He defines paternalism as 'the combination of dominance and benevolence, in the sense that any dominant group allegedly knows best what is good for the dominated group'. Indian researchers like Kumar (1989), Kakar (1981), Sarangapani (2003), Bisht and Sinha (1981), Clarke (2001) have also

highlighted that Indian childhood occupies a subordinate position within the traditional social hierarchy. According to Vasanta (2004), 'the power dynamics between parents and children... teachers and students are completely overlooked because they are considered natural'. Sarangapani (2003) in her ethnographic study in a Government school near Delhi found that: *"childhood is a relational category in that child is everything an adult is not. ... that unlike an adult, the child is considered to be vulnerable and dependent (in need of protection), irresponsible and ignorant.... the mainstream Hindu tradition seems to be dominated by authoritarian-deferential attitudes in adult-child relation and belief in the ignorance of the child."*

Thus, she relates this to the larger socio-cultural system in India. Clarke (2001) has also talked about Indian social framework being defined by hierarchy. Kumar (1989) writes that family norms in India do not encourage children to ask questions since it is perceived as an expression of disrespect for the adult's nurturing authority. However, it was also found that childhood, especially early childhood, enjoyed much privilege, indulgence and even envy. Participants held strong notions of responsibility as parents, as a female participant said, *'I have only two children. I am dedicated (samarpit hain) to them'*. Almost all of the child's needs including love and care were seen as being looked after by the parents and specifically by the mother. Thus, the issue of subordination of children and marginalizing practices is more complex in India and needs further exploration.

Conclusion

The study found that firstly, participants divided childhood into broadly three developmental phases, each characterized by distinct adult-child relationship and interaction patterns. Small children were both indulged and expected to obey unquestioningly, adolescents were granted relatively more freedom but constantly supervised and guided and mature or big children were considered competent and given more freedom, while also being guided and somewhat controlled. Secondly, compared to earlier times, children of today were seen as

maturing faster and adult-child relationships becoming more democratic and participative. This was manifested in greater negotiation of control by children, use of democratic strategies by parents, open adult-child discussions and growing knowledge and competency in children. Thirdly, analysis of social position of children in participants' interviews showed that children were being perceived using an ideology of dependency and incompetency which manifested in various marginalizing practices within adult-child relationship. These included children's experiences being shaped by adults, control over their activities, exclusion from decision-making, force for 'scholastic work', rigid expectations of obedience and weak ability to negotiate were some of these practices.

This study had set out to explore an Indian perspective on childhood using Qualitative methodology. While the finding about indigenous classification of developmental phases can assist in development of an alternative and more authentic framework for childhood studies in India, knowledge about socio-historical changes in childhood are relevant for both parents and practitioners, keen to understand today's generation and their experiences. Given growing concern for child rights, the study's finding on subordinate position of childhood is extremely relevant to India, which is a traditionally hierarchical society. While similar findings have been reported by several Indian researchers like Kumar (1989), Kakar (1981), Sarangapani (2003) etc., this study provides indepth understanding into the ideology underlying it and specific marginalizing practices supporting it.

Thus, this study takes preliminary steps towards giving a platform to indigenous (Indian) discourses on childhood and problematising 'naturally occurring' power dynamics within adult-child relationships, within these discourses.

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Received: March 29th, 2008

First Revision Received: September 18th, 2008

Second Revision Received: October 3rd, 2008

Accepted: November 2nd, 2008