QUERYING CHILDHOOD

FEMINIST REFRAMINGS

EDITED BY MARY E. JOHN, BARBARA LOTZ
AND ELISABETH SCHÖMBUCHER

Routledge

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This book critically examines assumptions about age, women, and gender. Amidst all the attention that has been granted to difference and inequality, however uneven and unsatisfactory in terms of class and caste, race and ethnicity, sexuality and gender, disability, religion, and nation, questions of age and its importance for feminism have been less well defined.

Drawing on recent literature on childhood, the chapters in this volume cover a range of fresh perspectives. These include:

- What kinds of biological, legal, chronological histories age has and the fundamental ways in which these links are being recast.
- How gender differences occupy a prominent place in historical constructions of identities, especially the frequent infantilisation of women, who are never seen as adults in the full sense of the term nor equally allowed to be children beyond the first years of life.
- Ways in which class, caste, gender, and ethnicity shaped classrooms and opportunities for education in the colonial period and the 20th century to produce new ideas of childhood.
- Gendered outcomes for children in the context of a long entanglement of law with labour, transformations in practices of parenting over time, and how the concept of care emerged in both Western and non-Western societies.

An incisive study on how childhoods have come to be understood, this book will be of great interest to scholars and researchers of gender studies, childhood studies, family studies, modern history, legal history, social policy, social psychology, education, and sociology. This volume will also interest parents, paediatricians, family health providers, teachers and educators, and anyone who works with children.

Mary E. John was formerly Professor and Director of the Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi. She was Associate Professor and Deputy Director of the Women's Studies Programme at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, from 2001 to 2006.

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PREFACE

The ideas and interests that have led to this volume have been several years in the making. The context was provided by being members of Thematic Module 5, *The Challenge of Gender*, as part of the network structure of *M.S. Merian – R. Tagore International Centre of Advanced Studies: Metamorphoses of the Political: Comparative Perspectives on the Long Twentieth Century (ICAS:MP)*, an Indo-German research collaboration. The thematic module The Challenge of Gender has, as its name suggests, drawn on the multiple resources of gender that have opened up new lines of enquiry, brought forward new methodologies, and unsettled academic orthodoxies across disciplines and fields. Gender has in recent decades become an imperative concept in any understanding of the metamorphoses of the political since it inflects all relationships of power. Within the multitude of fields that gender and feminist inquiries have transformed, that of childhood emerged as a relatively new area of common interest among several members of the gender module.

Pre-workshop discussions and presentations were held in international meetings in the University of Wuerzburg in June 2017 (*Gender Relations Revisited: Cross-Cultural Approaches to Violence and Agency in India and Germany*), in November 2018 (*The Challenge of Gender. Producing Childhood: Work, Education, Sexuality*), and in June 2019 (*Producing Childhood: Work, Education, Marriage*). A face-to-face workshop focusing on feminist reframings of childhood and youth studies was eventually conceptualised in 2019 by Janaki Nair and Mary E. John and scheduled to be held on 18 and 19 March 2020 in New Delhi. However, the pandemic and lockdown necessitated the cancellation of the event and its transfer online a year later in the form of the ICAS:MP workshop *Querying Childhood: Feminist Reframings*, held online on 8 and 9 April 2021.

The concept note was an invitation to bring the recent fields of childhood and youth studies into conversation with feminist concerns. What difference have feminist interrogations and investigations made to the ways of charting and configuring the lives of children? As the idea of 'the invention of childhood' has today become something of an orthodoxy, the workshop attempted precisely to open up some of these orthodoxies about childhood to stricter feminist scrutiny. The sessions on the first day focused on age, on regimes of childhood in India and Germany, and on different cross-hatchings around gendered childhoods, followed by papers on the politics of child marriage, parenting of trans children, and youth cultures in Germany. The next day saw presentations on childhood in relation to education and labour, on queering childhood, child marriage and the concept of the girl child in transnational perspective. The presentations made possible conversations on a range of interrelated themes across disciplines, bringing children, childhoods, adolescence, and youth into focus, while foregrounding feminist concerns. What emerged were multiple perspectives, which were both thematic (education, labour, marriage, development, history, culture, literature and so on) and cross-regional (Germany, India, USA).

While editing this anthology, we felt the need to present a collection of stylistically and methodologically quite diverse papers prepared by Indian, German, and American researchers and regroup them under three thematic sections: 'Histories of Childhood', 'Education and Work', and 'Practices of Parenting'. We are extremely pleased with the mix of papers that made their way from the workshop into the volume, and especially with the theoretical, legal, and global perspectives corresponding to comparative case studies from the Global North and the Global South, with a focus on Germany and an even stronger focus on colonial and post-colonial India. A detailed overview of the sections and their individual articles is included in the introduction. As is the nature of any anthology, we do not pretend to offer anything like a comprehensive or even balanced overview – girls appear much more centrally than boys, for example, and there is a concentration of German contributors on the topic of parenting. However, rather than perceiving these disparities as shortcomings, we feel they point to the enormous range and complexity of the work that lies ahead, and should hopefully serve as an incentive to expand further research in the field.

With this volume, not only do we hope to contribute to the overall spirit of the publication series of ICAS:MP, one that is regionally focused but globally engaged, providing a context for debates about global processes and politics. We also wish to acknowledge the immensely enriching impact the international ICAS:MP team has had on our research, and thank our academic partners, including our senior and post-doctoral fellows, many of whom have become close friends over the years. A big thank you goes to Laila Abu-Er-Rub and the ICAS:MP office staff in New Delhi for the tireless

and cheerful support extended to us during the ICAS weeks held twice a year. We are equally grateful to Anette Finger-Albert for organising all the events at Würzburg University and managing the administration with great care.

Thanks to all our contributors for patiently and constructively bearing with us in the journey from workshop papers to book chapters, in all the ups and downs. We especially express our gratitude to Debjani Mazumder, publisher at ICAS:MP, for carefully guiding us through the publication process with her valuable expertise.

INTRODUCTION

Mary E. John, Barbara Lotz, and
Elisabeth Schömbucher

I

This edited volume is an invitation to rethink many of our assumptions about age, women, and gender. While it is certainly the case that 'women and children' have all too often been run together in situations that are too numerous to recount, it is equally true that feminist politics does not have a ready-made articulation of the significance of age for thinking about gender and women more specifically. Amidst all the attention that has been granted to difference and inequality, however uneven and unsatisfactory – class and caste, race and ethnicity, sexuality and gender, disability, religion, and nation, and from a range of perspectives – questions of age and its importance for feminism have been less well defined. While it is certainly true that subjects like mothering are as old as feminism itself, it is also true that the child and its correlates – the infant and the adolescent as distinct from the adult – are much more recent subjects of gender and feminist inquiry.

The reasons for what appears as a lack or a belated engagement call for a closer exploration. The relationship between feminism and childhood turns out to be considerably complex. This has a lot to do with how notions of the child and of childhood emerged in world history. According to one of the most cited and contentious views on the subject, Philippe Aries' *Centuries of Childhood* (Aries 1962, first published in French in 1960), childhood is something of a modern idea. From the 16th century or so, Aries finds evidence in European texts and especially in the field of art, of changes in practices towards children compared to the medieval period. Whether in education, work, or family life, there was not just a greater consciousness of the age of a person but of a new and distinctive relationship with children that

required discipline and protection. In medieval times, children mixed much more with adults – indeed were treated like mini-adults from the age of seven or so. So, for example, children were segregated by age in schools – and for an increasing number of years – whereas prior to this, children started working from very young ages, and what existed by way of schooling were places where learning took place regardless of age. Chronological age usurped the place occupied by the so-called ages of man. Particularly startling were his discussions of sexuality – pre-modern attitudes treated the sexuality of children as a matter of fun and amusement for adults, quite unlike the emergence of childhood innocence that called for their protection. His larger purpose was to emphasise the recentness of the rise of the nuclear family and of the special place of the child within it.

Not so well known is the work of Holly Brewer, which covers much the same period as Aries but from a distinctly different perspective. Holly Brewer comes almost half a century later with her study *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (2005). Curiously, both are dealing with practically the same period of European history (the post-medieval period, especially the 16th to 18th centuries) and are concerned with the very same theme – profound shifts if not inventions in the idea of the child – but their terrain and approach share almost nothing. In Brewer's study, it is the legacy of the Protestant Reformation and, more generally, the worlds of government, philosophy, and the law that are key. Moreover, her arguments revolve around changing regimes of authority and inequality that are the direct effect of the rise of the Age of Reason in modern times, when it is the capacity to make judgements and provide consent that become decisive in public life. Age is a critical vector here as never before. Prior to this, children were folded into the status determined worlds they were born into – a poor child of eight could hang for a crime and a wealthy child of four make a will. Six could be considered a 'ripe age' for marriage. Brewer's study does not evoke the invention of a range of sensibilities in relation to notions of innocence that now require protection, whether through the coddling of the family or the discipline of the school – this is Aries' terrain. She demonstrates how childhood becomes a disqualification through exclusion from the new construction of adulthood, one determined by the criterion of having to be of a certain minimum age, the age of majority, drawing justification from ideas of the capacity for making a reasoned judgement and therefore of providing consent.

Notice, therefore, that Brewer's perspective brings in questions of disqualification and disadvantage – childhood and adulthood are set off from one another such that children are not just segregated from the world of adults but also deemed incapable of participation until a certain age makes them so qualified. There is much more to be said here, and these are but the barest rudiments for bringing the work of both Aries and Brewer together.[1] What even this cursory

discussion makes evident is that age turns into a Janus-faced vector for dividing up people into adults, who now possess a corresponding privilege, authority, and responsibility, on the one hand, and children, segregated into spaces and times of protection and discipline, through having to spend extended years within ever more elaborate institutions for entry into an adult world.

While historically oriented research invariably references the work of Aries, and to a much lesser extent that of the work of Holly Brewer, contemporary research is indebted to the rise of a field called childhood studies. Bearing clear marks of their location in the 1980s in countries like Britain, scholars such as Allison James, Chris Jenks, and Alan Prout staked out a field of inquiry that took a self-conscious distance from mainstream approaches to the study of children in disciplines such as sociology and psychology, where the child was the product of socialisation or of developmental processes, accounts of which left such a child largely passive. Childhoods, they said, were socially constructed within definite historical, social, and cultural contexts and hence neither innate nor universal. Children possess agency, to varying degrees, such that there are no definitive distinctions to be drawn in terms of chronological age. Even notions of adulthood were to be reconceived outside of biological notions of maturity. Childhood studies has expanded to other disciplines and other continents. Scholarship within this ever-growing field has emphasised in numerous ways that children should be considered active participants in the making of their lives and consequently should also have a role to play in decisions regarding their welfare. Indeed, children should be considered political actors in their own right.

As one might expect, such a field has acquired its own share of critiques. In a notable intervention, Spyros Spyrou, Rachel Rosen, and Daniel Thomas Cook, in their edited volume *Reimagining Childhood Studies* (2019), have asked whether childhood studies has not suffered from the very core idea that galvanised it a generation ago, that of the 'constructed, agentive, knowing child' (2019: 1). In their view, this tendency of centring scholarship on the child was at the cost of recognising questions of relationality more generally, and the structuring forces – whether of biology, capitalism, or technology – that require alternate approaches beyond an emphasis on agency. What would childhood studies look like if the 'child' was located somewhere other than at the centre? (ibid. 2019: 19, emphasis original). We will return to this question shortly.

Yet another intervention of relevance to this volume is *Southern Theories and decolonial Childhood Studies,* a special issue of the journal *Childhood*, edited by Tatek Adebe, Anandini Dhar and Ida M. Lysa (2022). Here the focus of critique is on the extent to which childhood studies has been restrictive by 'the dominance of euro-western and northern-centric worldviews' (2022: 256). Interestingly, in their emphasis on questioning the unspoken power of northern scholarship that claims to be global, once again the emphasis is on relational epistemologies.

It is a matter of curiosity to us that questions of gender do not emerge as a critical factor in most discussions of the child and childhood studies. This is evident beginning with the work of scholars like Aries and Brewer. Girls and girlhood are either absent or occupy the shadows in Aries' book, as do their caretakers, who would have been predominantly women. More importantly gender did not appear to have a critical relationship to the new focus on age that both these scholars tracked across historical time. In their volume *Theorising Childhood* James, Jenks and Prout (mentioned earlier) point to the following late twentieth century developments for the new focus on childhood: 'a structural re-adjustment to time and mortality; a re-evaluation and repositioning of personhood given the disassembly of traditional notions of identity and difference; a search for a moral centre; and an age old desire to invest in futures now rendered increasingly urgent' (James, Jenks and Prout 1998: 5). The changes in gender relations, transformations in the family, among other developments do not find mention, even though these would have had profound effects on questions of children and childhood.

Even when new interventions in the name of the child happen to focus on girls, this focus can easily go unremarked. A good example would be Faizal Devji, who in a recent essay has added yet another dimension to the newness of the presence of the child on the world stage. Not only is the child a very late entrant, but is something of an impossible figure in the world of politics. 'Childhood is defined by its inability to make a future' (Devji 2021: 222). He too emphasises that there is nothing natural about the invented division between childhood and adulthood (of the sort outlined by both Aries and Brewer), nor does it stand up to any criterion one might be tempted to offer (there will always be adults who are weaker, less intelligent, more dependent than a child). Therefore, the exclusion of children is the result of a rhetorical device. Devji focuses especially on two particular figures to illustrate his arguments – Greta Thunberg (the environmental activist) and Malala Yousafzai (the advocate for girls' education). Because they are excluded from the realm of the political as children, each in their own way cannot represent their current status but have to speak in terms of their future selves in order to make their claims. We find it noteworthy that though both Thunberg and Yousafzai were adolescent girls at the height of their activism, Devji has nothing to say about the imbrication of gender and age.

II

But if the invention of childhood in opposition to adulthood is Janus-faced, gender is equally Janus-faced as is well known. Binary gender – (cis hetero white bourgeois) public man and (cis hetero white bourgeois) private woman being its standard construction – was also the product of the same era as that of age. The difference is not simply that much more is known about histories of gender in the west and elsewhere. Carole Pateman's *The Sexual*

Contract comes to mind (Pateman 1988) – which provided a clear account of the shift from classic forms of patriarchy to its modern avatar as part of the founding lie of modern political life. From the patriarchalism of the 'father' came modern patriarchy, that of the liberty and 'fraternity' of 'sons' – the twinning of the social contract of freedom under the authority of the state with the sexual contract of the domination of women. In the meantime, the Jamaican philosopher Charles W. Mills argued about a concomitant racial contract, such that at the core of the creation of modern rights are the roots of white supremacy (Mills 1997). It should not be necessary to belabour the intertwining of modern rights with the establishment of colonialism and the rise of anti-colonial movements. Beyond saying that these are histories that have been excavated along multiple registers in ever more numerous contexts, we wish to emphasise the depth and extent of the politics of struggle and opposition to these very oppressions, the many movements against slavery, campaigns for women's rights, anti-colonial struggles, and so on, right up to the present.

And yet, when it comes to thinking about gender and childhood together, we find ourselves up against some major challenges. Some of these have been better acknowledged than others. Barrie Thorne (Thorne 1987) and Erica Burman and Judith Stacey (Burman and Stacey 2010) set the tone in their respective essays by questioning the location of childhood and children in feminist theorising. Berry Mayall and Ann Oakley claim in their foreword to the volume *Feminism and the Politics of Childhood: Friends or Foes?* by Rachel Rosen and Rosalind Twamley (2018) that

> [t]he re-emergence of feminism from the 1960s onwards was matched by a new interest in childhood viewed as a social phenomenon. Both movements have been concerned with social and political status and have fought for the recognition of rights. Furthermore, whilst women have sought to problematise social assumptions about their relations with children, childhood studies have sought to extract children, theoretically, from 'the family' and to site them as a social group with their own interests, and to attend to their specific interrelations with macro forces.
>
> *(Mayall and Oakley 2018: ix)*

Mavall and Oakley are suggesting a mutual and parallel relationship between two subjects, in which both children and women have been 'extracted' from the family and reconceptualised as subjects with a politics of their own.

However, the relationship between feminism and childhood can also be a site of conflict. As Rachel Rosen and Rosalind Twamley put it so well,

> Despite the far-reaching social, political, and intellectual consequences of the ways in which we conceptualise connections between women and children, they have received only scant attention in academic, activist and

policy fields. This is not simply a benign omission: it is a reflection of the difficult and, at times, fiercely territorial relationship between feminists and those concerned with children's struggles.

(Rosen and Twamley 2018: 2)

One of the more visible ways in which this tension or conflict can be reassessed is in light of the feminist visibilisation of the relationship between women and their dependent children. This takes us to the mid-20th century and the birth of second-wave feminism. Activists and academics alike built on prior movements and scholarship to make a special case for what the lesbian feminist writer Adrienne Rich, in her popular book *Of Woman Born* (1976), called the experience and institution of mothering. Today this is such well-trodden ground that it might well seem obvious, but at the time it was absolutely vital for feminism to underscore to what extent children and childhood have to be seen as a *relationship* in which women as mothers and as principal caretakers were taken for granted but with such far-reaching consequences for the reproduction of society as a whole and the subordination of women within it. Writing *Of Woman Born* when she was already an established poet and writer, Adrienne Rich recalls that it 'is rooted in my own past, tangled with parts of my life which stayed buried even while I dug away at the strata of early childhood, adolescence, separation from parents, my vocation as a poet, the geographies of marriage, spiritual divorce and death' (Rich 1976: xvii).

The focus on mothering from a range of economic, sociological, psychological, and literary perspectives has taken new form in the 21st century through a more recent field of scholarship focused on the concept of care and care economies. (For a recent discussion, see Palriwala 2021.) Care, one might say, has become an umbrella term in at least two senses. It has broadened the relationship to all caretakers and all institutions involved in the provision of care to children, beyond the figure of the mother and beyond families and households.

What becomes interesting in a reframing of the feminist foregrounding of mothering, however, is that from the perspective of childhood studies, feminism has focused centrally on the caregiver. But for those concerned about children's struggles, this very centring of the mother can be at the cost of the child, indeed could be in tension with the interests of the child. So one might be tempted to see a certain territorial conflict here – over the rights of women in the institution of mothering and caregiving more generally and those of children conceived as receivers of such care. Recall the question raised earlier by Spyrou et al. in the context of their critique of childhood studies and the need to de-centre the child – can the same be said to feminists and their centring of women and principal caretakers? For their part, Rosen and Twamley make a case for more dialogue and debate, across affinities and tensions in the dynamic of 'women and children'.

But if we look a little closer, there are further elisions when we add to-
gether woman and child as distinct subjects. What if the very construction of
adult and child in relation to the female gender blurs, if not collapses?

In the context of writing about the coming of age in late colonial India, the
historian Ruby Lal introduced her notion of the 'girl child/woman' in world
where women – whether young or old – could do nothing on their own,
such that the separation of a distinct stage called childhood was practically
impossible (Lal 2013: 36). As Mary E. John suggested in her study of child
marriage in India (John 2021), this kind of reconceptualisation should not
be reserved for the time-space of colonialism. It needs to be de-provincialised
to the point of becoming a more generalisable claim: We would like to sug-
gest that there is a peculiar *double bind*, not confined to the colonies. There
has been a pervasive and ongoing effective equation of women with children.
Women were too frequently never quite considered to be adults at any stage,
given their systematic confinement within relations of life long dependency.
Have they, then, only ever been like children? Alternatively, have they almost
never been allowed to be children in the course of their lives? After all, one
might say with as much conviction that women have been historically infan-
tilised as make the opposite claim – that childhood meant little for women,
beyond the first few years of life. An intersectional analysis would therefore
yield the child-woman/woman-child who is a neither-nor figure: Neither a
full participant in the elaborate constructions of childhood that heralded
Western modernity, and never the new adult either, with its connotations of
freedom, authority, power, and independence.

The figure of the child-woman/woman-child is a double bind that finds
fleeting mention in certain classic Western texts, such as those of Mary Wol-
lstonecraft or Betty Friedan (Friedan 1963), though she is extensively ex-
plored in book two of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir 2011),
but without sufficient acknowledgement. As a consequence, we believe that
questions of age have remained undertheorised within feminism. So, while
relationships – that of women and children – certainly require further in-
terrogation both from the perspectives of feminism and those of the child,
this kind of questioning does not exhaust the challenges before us. Querying
childhood as feminists also means recognising the very limited understand-
ings and engagements of age and gender in contemporary scholarship.

III

This volume, therefore, joins several others in demanding not just the recog-
nition of an additional field of exploration – with age as its axis – but makes
a bigger claim for reframing and rethinking what is already known. Whether
it be marriage or parenting, education or labour, the following chapters bring
in fresh perspectives because they do not take the ways in which age divides

up the world for granted, with particular consequences for thinking about children as well as for those who consider themselves adults.

No other disciplinary field has seen more new explorations into questions of childhood than that of history. Scholars in the fields of gender and feminism have made considerable strides in re-examining age in histories of women, especially in the periods associated with social reform and new political movements. It is therefore not accidental that Section I of the present volume brings together a set of works that subject age to fundamental historical scrutiny. We are tempted to ask, does age have a history? And of what kinds – biological, legal, chronological? How do gender differences occupy such a prominent place in these historical constructions?

The first chapter in our volume by Nicholas L. Syrett and Corinne T. Field, 'Chronological Age and the Uneven Development of Modern Childhood in the United States', provides a much-needed comparative perspective on these questions. Over the course of the 19th into the 20th centuries, age became a major criterion for citizenship, and this in turn relied on being able to provide proof of age. In their analysis, using case studies from the administration of pensions from the American Civil War, and especially on minimum ages for marriage, age became a vector of discrimination towards those who are unable to provide such proof. In the United States, while white boys and men had their privileges of citizenship enhanced, people of colour, the poor, and especially girls and women found themselves in a situation where the disadvantages of gender and race were invariably compounded along the axis of age. The case of ages of consent for sex and for marriage are particularly illustrative in the US case – it was only in the case of girls that consent for sex was an issue in the first place. Moreover, girls could just as easily be infantilised on account of their gender as forced into premature adulthood when it came to marriage.

Tanika Sarkar provides an entry point into equally contradictory and difficult questions of age in colonial Bengal in her chapter, 'Is She a Child? Emergence of Chronological Age in Early Colonial Bengal'. Sarkar's chapter revisits much-debated campaigns, such as the abolition of *sati*, or widow immolation, but also takes us to a pre-colonial period through the medium of poetry and songs. Devotional songs and lullabies evoke mothers longing for their daughters who have been taken away to the marital home, whether as children or as mini adults. In the more public realm of social reform, it is the child widow that first gains public attention in the course of the 19th century. It is in the context of debates over widow immolation, the recourse to scriptural sanctions, and their gradual bureaucratisation that the age and the consent of the child widow begins a rocky journey. Age was a slippery issue, as was puberty and distinctions between infant, child, and adult. The British state apparatus meant to regulate *sati* and determine consent on the part of the widow turns out to have been deeply divided over whether a particular

instance of immolation be permitted in the mode of non-interference with the religious practices of its subjects or whether it ought to be criminalised as murder.

Samita Sen's chapter, 'Age and Marriage: Problems of Girlhood in Colonial and Post-colonial Bengal', begins in the present time, before cutting a swathe from the 19th century into the 21st. Once again, child marriage is centrally at issue. She begins with noting the steady decline in child marriage worldwide in recent decades. While this is also the case in India overall, the state of West Bengal has experienced a less dramatic decline in the proportion of child marriages, catapulting it to the top position among states. In this context, Sen reports on a field-based research project conducted during 2016–18 in seven districts of this state. While there is persistence of underage marriage, age at marriage has risen sufficiently that many now speak of early rather than child marriage. The paper examines both historical and contemporary ramifications of the slow rise in age at marriage. It grapples with various legislative measures around age and definitions of childhood in the colonial and post-colonial period and seeks to connect child marriage with child labour and institutional education among different social groups. It discusses also two related themes emerging from the field in contemporary West Bengal – (1) the emergence of a new social category, adolescent girls, earlier among the urban middle classes in cities but now also among the poor in rural Bengal, and (2) a strong perception that deferment of marriage arrangements by parents has led to an increase in elopements and self-chosen marriages by minors.

J. Devika's contribution to this volume, 'Reflections on Childhood in the State of Kerala', takes readers from Bengal to modern Kerala in South India. It offers a typological account of the changing regimes of childhood in Malayali society in a period that spans nearly two centuries, culminating in the present. J. Devika argues that instead of stories of linear change, what is needed is a more complex analyses of specific 'regimes of childhood' in order to get a better grasp over the contemporary politics of childhood and its intertwining with the politics of gender. She identifies four such regimes – responsible parenting, romantic childhood, aspirational regime, and child governance – which have been advanced with different degrees of success and acceptance, and an emergent fifth regime, of securitised childhood. The chapter elaborates on these drawing from a variety of writings from the late 19th century to present-day Malayali society and the wealth of social science research on contemporary Kerala, which focuses on children and youth.

Ashwini Tambe provides another kind of synoptic overview in her chapter, 'The Travels and Appeal of the Girl Child'. The concept of 'girl child' emerged in Indian contexts in the 1980s and travelled in multidirectional ways via UN agencies, reinforcing measures undertaken in the 2010s to 'invest' in girls. In this chapter, Tambe offers an institutional genealogy of the term, tracing

how its age coordinates shifted in its trajectory from Indian demographic research to UN bureaucracies, NGO actions, corporate campaigns, and Indian state-led development initiatives. With a steady internationalist perspective that tracks global movements, what sets apart the 'girl child' from much of the travels of ideas of child rights is that its beginnings were resolutely South Asian, before being picked up by agencies such as UNICEF. From curtailing life through population control to fostering life through education, from the girl child to the adolescent girl, this chapter tracks the entanglements of age and the female sex to ask whether current advocacy in favour of investing in girls marks an enhancement or rather a curtailment in feminist engagements with 'women'.

Section II of the volume reveals that, despite rich scholarship on work and education, the links between the fields of education and the worlds of work in relation to age have been scarcely explored so far. What were the historical links between these spheres and what are the fundamental ways in which these links are being recast? Is there a distinction to be made between child labour and child work in the sphere of home-based cottage industries? How do vocational training programmes relate to aspirations and job prospects of young students of marginalised backgrounds? Are there specifically gendered outcomes of a long entanglement of law with labour? In which ways did class, caste, gender, and ethnicity shape classrooms and opportunities for education in the colonial period, and how did the 20th-century transformations in education produce new ideas of childhood?

Exploring the intersection between education, childhoods, labour, and gender, Rekha Pappu's chapter, 'Gender, Education, and Child Labour: Reflections on Ontological Issues', makes the case for an ontological approach towards the experience of children who combine schooling with work or labour. In her view, the schooling experiences of working children do not find enough place in dominant discourses on childhood. Attending to gender-differentiated experiences of education for the child labourer, she emphasises the idea of multiple childhoods against a conception of childhood articulated in singular and universal terms. The discussion of child rights and school attendance leads her to epistemological issues as she asks how working children, especially girls, negotiate the ontological split when they as members of a close-knit community become members of a category referred to as 'student'. This chapter thus underscores the need for understanding the process by which a child labourer becomes (or fails to become) a student.

Schooling as a dominant experience of childhood (for those who passed through the system) was formative in ways that have not yet fully been investigated. In her chapter, 'The Classroom as Sensorium in Mysore, 1840–1930', on educational policies in the state of Mysore, Janaki Nair shows how the compulsory physical-material aspects of colonial schooling and the mastery of new subjects were embodied experiences, which transformed the

classroom into a sensorium for new forms of learning. Historicising educational schemes that met with success but also failure, she points out three crucial moments in the discourse of schooling within the Mysore/Karnataka region, starting with the role of missionaries and their introduction of physical proximity, bodily discipline, and the training of fine and gross motor skills in school. B.L. Rice in turn set out to shape more literary aspects of the curriculum better suited to upper class school boys. H.J. Bhabha of the Lloyd system in 1907–1920 again tried to breach the barrier between the mental and manual in childhood and young adulthood.

Based on interviews conducted with women workers in the beedi industry of Bhopal and Sagar Districts, Megha Sharma, in her chapter, 'Juvenile Labour in the Beedi Industry of Central India, 1960s–'80s', takes a closer look at the impact of family labour and domestic production on children's lives and the dynamics of everyday negotiations at home. She shows how child labour was strategically employed for maximising production at every stage, and how especially the pressure on girls to remain within the domestic sphere enforced a family's engagement in home-based production. Juxtaposing two age groups of women workers and their aspiration towards education, a gradual shift becomes evident. While for the elder generation, schooling was no option due to economic constraints and lack of support, there appears a clear preference in the younger age group to move away from that work and build a future for their children in terms of education and employment.

A critical approach towards national skilling programmes for the youth in India has guided the ethnographic study by R. Maithreyi in Karnataka, examining the state's vision of urban, marginalised youth in relation to their own future aspirations. In Learning to 'Service': Vocational Training for Marginalised Youth', she shows how government schemes are not only misaligned with students' needs and resources but also aim at creating an underclass of feminised labour for consumptive practices of the elite. Through an analysis of the curriculum of beauty and wellness vocational training and a discursive reading of classroom practices in government schools in Bangalore, she suggests that the selection of job roles seems to reinforce a reproduction of social differences, thereby entrenching the historical caste-based social divisions between intellectual/cognitive skills versus manual/non-cognitive skills.

Moving to Section III of this volume, practices of parenting have been transformed most decisively over time. Responsible parenthood and the notion of acting in the best interests of the child have undergone drastic changes. Among the challenges to older regimes of nurturance and care, but also to discipline and order, is a growing disjunct between genetic and social parenting with the affective care of the biological parent being displaced, broadened, but also reimagined in unprecedented ways. How has the concept of care emerged in both Western and non-Western societies? What is the value of children in the 21st century that makes care more urgent? How

have technological transformations affected the realms of parenting? What are the challenges of adoptive parenting, trans parenting, or single parenting in reordering conventional gender hierarchies? Have notions of 'duty' been replaced by ideas of 'love' in intergenerational relations? The following contributions demonstrate that it is essential to intersect childhood with poverty, class, education, and time frame, besides considering the gender of the child. Moreover, a comparative analysis of childhood illustrates that discourses on gender, children's rights and parental responsibilities are globally negotiated concepts whose knowledge has been widely disseminated by the digital age and which are in turn applied by different actors.

In her analysis of four different sets of interviews with adult West Germans about their childhoods, 'Disciplining girls in German Families: Gendered Childhood Experiences of Violent and Authoritarian Parenting in Germany from the 1890s to the 1940s', which were conducted between the mid-1960s and the 2000s, Christina von Hodenberg investigates how children were raised in the early decades of the 20th century. She explores what types of physical violence and methods of disciplining were experienced by children. Parenting practices towards girls and boys were characterised by emotional austerity, strict child control through methods of discipline, and physical violence, which was common from the imperial era until at least the 1940s. Such practices were not confined to the family but extended to primary schooling. In addition to being beaten, methods of disciplining girls encompassed heavy burdens of domestic labour and care work within the family, such as looking after younger siblings, but also missing out on education and not being allowed to choose their occupation. This general pattern of parenting did not deviate markedly from other countries, such as France or Britain. However, repressive and violent parenting and educating styles temporarily intensified during the Nazi era and were supposed to have led to a specifically German authoritarianism, which then became the core of fascism.

Another methodological approach for understanding childhood experiences, and even particular historical epochs, is through the analysis of life narratives. The challenges for a child whose gender identity does not match with the gender assigned at birth are immensely different from the situation of cis or heteronormative children. In analysing six autobiographies of trans women (persons who transitioned from male assigned gender to female gender identity) 'Narrating Childhood: Difficult Memories in Trans Autobiography', by Barbara Lotz, shows how structures and patterns of memories are shaped within the frame of class as well as the social and moral conceptions of a given time. The three German trans women in her sample were born in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s. The Indian trans women were born in the late 1970s and '80s. All six authors narrate their childhood experiences from an adult perspective. Their childhood and adolescence are characterised as a time of bewilderment about not belonging, about being a misfit, about being

seen as a pervert, and about being alone with such feelings. The Indian autobiographies narrate a different story about early visibility and violent reactions and of leaving their birth families to join the various transgender (*hijra*) communities. Comparing these autobiographies enables invaluable insights into the wide array of frameworks that govern individual modes of growing up as a trans child in India and Germany, over a span of around 50 years. And it leads to this question: What if someone had actually listened to these children?

Possible answers are given by Elisabeth Schömbucher in her contribution, '"I Lost My Son Whom I Raised for 12 Years" – Anxieties Among Parents of Trans Children'. This chapter is based on an anthropological study of parents of trans children who are in the process of transitioning in the more recent period of the new millennium, when gender diversity has become a matter of public debate, been represented in media, and been highly visible in the medical sciences. Advances in the field of medicine and a reclassification of *gender incongruence* as *gender variance* poses new challenges for parents. What does it mean to act in the best interests of the child? Should they give their consent to the medical gender transition of their minor child or withhold it? Parents have to come to terms with the fact that gender variance is now acknowledged by some but highly contested by others. Trans activists have achieved considerable success in their fight for trans gender equality, human rights, and the right to self-identify one's gender. Criticism comes, among others, from trans-exclusionary radical feminists, in whose eyes male persons use transgender identity in ways that violate women's identities and spaces. Despite visibility and media presence, a high level of family support is still required to spread awareness and fend off transphobic attacks from different social actors.

In her chapter, 'Contested Equality: Co-Parenting, Child Welfare, and Gender Politics in Contemporary History', Jana Tschurenev addresses another challenge for parents to act in the best interests of their child. Current debates on shared parenting are her lens to discuss transformations of inner-familial relations in contemporary history. The global tendency towards shared parenting arrangements points towards a normative shift in post-divorce settlements in favour of an equalisation of parental rights, but also in favour of child welfare. The concept of equally shared parental rights would allow fathers to share equally in the custody of their children instead of being responsible only for their financial support. However, several problems remain that would affect the welfare of the child in working out such shared parenting arrangements, including cases of hostile parental relations or (former) domestic violence. Thus, what could be a means to enhance child welfare, as well as to guarantee equal parental rights, can, in some cases, mean that the concept of shared parenting would reinforce unequal gender relations and undermine women's rights.

This is a volume that addresses questions of childhood from a range of perspectives – cutting across the last two centuries and bringing us to some of the most challenging developments of the present. Contributors draw as much from disciplines such as history, sociology, literature, and education, as from fields such as cultural studies, development studies, and women's and gender studies. While most of the chapters focus on India, several are comparative and international in scope. We are poised at a very interesting juncture where fresh ideas and a rethinking of received knowledges are gathering at the intersections of gender and age. If we began this volume with something of a lament about the lack of sufficient engagement at this intersection, we can conclude with the hope that, taken together, these chapters will help redirect questions of childhood and adulthood from multiple feminist locations.

Note

1 Philippe Aries has been subjected to considerable discussion, and there is scholarship that seeks to prove how wrong he was in several of his assumptions. For instance, Adrian Wilson has pointed out that he was a demographer and not a historian and that a lot of his evidence came from depictions in painting, which may have more to do with new codes in the world of art than any social changes. Others said that his claims were overstated – that there have always been children who have been loved and mourned as children, and yet others say that the English version was guilty of mistranslation, such that what was a changing sentiment towards children with modernity was rendered as a new idea or concept (Wilson 1980; Cunningham 1998; Orme 2001). Brewer's work is unfortunately not often cited, and we have found several of her ideas regarding the Age of Reason and new notions of consent to be alluded to in present day literature, but without acknowledging her contribution.

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I
Histories of Childhood

1

CHRONOLOGICAL AGE AND THE UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN CHILDHOOD IN THE UNITED STATES[1]

Nicholas L. Syrett and Corinne T. Field

This chapter examines the history of chronological age in the United States and the ways that age itself has been used to differentiate men from women, boys from girls, in the realm of the law. Far from a neutral marker of identity, age itself has a history that, at least in the United States, has worked to the detriment of women, girls, and people of colour. This history is contradictory. Statutory age – that is, rules and regulations that employed specific ages – tended either to infantilise girls or to force them into premature adulthood. Bureaucratic age – that is, procedures that relied on age for the perquisites of citizenship – tended to discriminate against those who were least able to document their ages: people of colour and the impoverished of both sexes. The combination of statutory age and bureaucratic age has thus had the effect of privileging white men and boys who had their full citizenship enhanced via chronological age and their ability to prove it. Chronological age was a valuable tool for discriminating against people of colour and girls and women, in part because it could be put to such different uses. The outcomes, then, were not uniform because the laws made use of age in a variety of ways.

   In order to illustrate these claims, we employ a handful of specific case studies, including the administration of Civil War pensions, the age of majority, and the minimum marriageable age. In keeping with this latter example, we briefly explore the history of child marriage in the United States, showing how laws regulating the ability of minors to marry shifted decisively in the mid-twentieth century when possession of a state-issued birth certificate became necessary in order to gain a marriage license. Contemporary activists intent on eradicating child marriage in the United States are now focused on changing that set of laws that usually pit chronological age against parental or judicial consent. In sum, we demonstrate that the use of age in American

law has never had uniform consequences for girls and boys of various races; instead, even age-neutral laws tended to enhance differences of race and gender. The protections and perquisites supposedly offered to American children, so defined via chronological age, were distributed unevenly from the get-go.

While it has long been established that legislators in the American colonies and the United States treated men and women differently through the systems of slavery and coverture, lawmakers also used age qualifications to differentiate people, especially in the realm of graduating from youth to adulthood. Males and females had different minimum marriageable ages in most colonies and states, and by the late 19th century, they had different ages of consent to sex (Field 2014; Syrett 2016; Odem 1995; Robertson 2002). In some states, Black children were indentured for longer periods than white, even if born to the same (white) mother; in others, Black boys were indentured for three years longer than girls in accordance with laws regulating gradual emancipation. In both instances, age was the device that lawmakers used in order to create what they hoped would be the most useful raced and gendered servants, useful not only in their obligations as labourers to their particular masters but also in how their legal incapacity upheld dominant ideologies of gendered and raced servitude itself (Fischer 2002: 124–125; Sundue 2015). In some cases – most notably voting and military service – age mattered for men when it did not for women; men became eligible at age 21 or 18 or 16 for one of these rights or responsibilities, whereas women remained 'perpetual minors' (Field 2014; Grinspan 2016; Clarke and Plant 2023).

Another key point revealed by recent histories is that age qualifications in law developed long before reliable methods for documenting and proving age: to borrow Judith Treas's phrasing, 'age standards' preceded 'standards for age' (Treas 2009). The public registration of births did not develop until the early 19th century in Massachusetts. The practice then spread slowly through the Northeast and the Midwest over the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Well into the 1950s, many Americans lacked a government-issued birth certificate; some still do (Landrum 2015; Pearson 2015; Pearson 2021). This finding presents a paradox: governments relied on age qualifications to define citizenship long before they created a standardised process for proving age. Both age qualifications in law – statutory age – and age-based administrative procedures – bureaucratic age – developed before most citizens could document their birthdates. This paradox itself may reveal the most not just about age, but about the workings of democratic power more broadly, for it shows that state authorities depended upon a category that they well knew was arbitrary and difficult to prove. When individuals could not offer satisfactory proof of age, government authorities had full power to impose an age upon them.

In order to meet the 17th- and 18th-century age qualifications in law, ordinary people relied on birth notations kept in family Bibles or baptismal

registries kept in parish records. Sworn testimony was generally accepted as proof of age, but often people simply did not know how old they were (Landrum 2015; Pearson 2015). Others lied, seeking variously to qualify for rights and entitlements or to avoid duties and legal liabilities (Schmidt 2010; Syrett 2016: 148–156, 202, 227). As scholars have demonstrated, people with property, literacy, and stable residence were most likely to have documentary proof of their birthdates, but presenting this information was rarely necessary because rough estimates of age were generally adequate to meet minimum requirements set by law, and officials recognised that age was often an approximation (Field 2017; Dillon 2008; Pearson 2015). There was, however, a fundamental shift in the years during and after the Civil War. During the war years, arguments about age and the ability to prove it centred on underage soldiers and their ability to meet military readiness, as well as parents' rights to their sons, many of whom had joined the military as minors. These debates were worked out in courts, newspapers, and military/medical literature (Clarke and Plant 2023). In the postbellum years, federal, state, and local officials began to use age in the bureaucratic administration of citizenship benefits such as military pensions for the elderly and work permits for adolescents. These bureaucrats began to expect all citizens to document their precise birthdates. This bureaucratic demand for age exactitude often appeared neutral on its surface, but the administrative procedures for verifying age functioned differently for men and women, Black and white people, and rural and urban citizens.

The Civil War pension laws passed by Congress beginning in 1862 offer a rare example of race-neutral age qualifications in law, and in the case of minors' pensions, gender neutrality as well. Yet, in administering the law, the US Pension Bureau developed bureaucratic processes for determining birthdates that profoundly disadvantaged African American and female applicants (Regosin and Shaffer 2008; Regosin 2002; Shaffer 2004; McClintock 1996). The pension act passed by Congress in 1862 granted benefits to deceased veterans' widows, and if no widow survived, to 'children until they severally attain to the age of sixteen years, and no longer' (US Congress 1862: 567). When the federal government opened army service to Black men in 1863, this law remained race-neutral even as the government refused equal pay or promotion to Black recruits. In 1868, Congress granted surviving widows an additional $2 for every child under 16 (Glasson 1918: 139–141). This measure created a new expectation that an administrative office of the federal government would be able to document birthdates on a massive scale, including for citizens who had been born enslaved. Further, because widows had a financial incentive to lie about their children's ages, pension reviewers dedicated themselves to stamping out age fraud. The problem was that they had no reliable means of proving the truth. Employees of the Pension Bureau – both reviewers based in Washington and special examiners sent

into the field – found wide variations in the way people talked about and documented their ages. In many cases, reviewers simply imposed a plausible birthdate because their own standards for age exactitude required that they create birthdates where none existed (Regosin and Shaffer 2008: 5–6; Shaffer 2000; Walker 1882: 75–77).

In 1881, Commissioner of Pensions William W. Dudley directed that 'dates of . . . birth should be ascertained by an examination of the public records, town or church baptismal records'. When no such records could be found, examiners could determine birthdates 'by the testimony of the attending physician or midwife, or by the testimony of persons present at the time of birth', or by bringing the children 'before a medical expert' (*General Instructions* 1881: 26). Because southern states had denied legal marriage and paternity to enslaved people, the Pension Bureau established special administrative procedures for the widows and children of formerly enslaved veterans (Frankel 1997; Brimmer 2014; Hunter 2017). Perhaps most painful for freedwomen and children, pension employees verified dates of birth by consulting the very account books that enslavers had depended upon to underwrite slavery (*General Instructions* 1881: 24). The commissioner gave white examiners' visual inspection greater weight than Black people's own testimony, an echo of the appraisals to which enslaved people had once been subjected to determine their market value (Berry 2017; *General Instructions* 1881: 24). Further, the commissioner alleged that 'colored' people had a distinct sense of time. 'In claims by colored persons', he wrote, 'it will generally be necessary to call the attention of the witnesses to some important event, holiday, &c., to enable them to testify with any approach to accuracy in regard to dates' (*General Instructions* 1881: 29). While it was true that many Black people lacked awareness of calendar time, this was also the case for white people (Sobel 1987). Further, by the 1880s, some Black people treasured records of marriages, births, and deaths as an important dimension of freedom. Capitalising on this desire, printers specifically marketed birth registers to freedpeople (Foner 1988: 82–85; Weil 2013: 139–140, 170). Employees at the pension office, however, created administrative processes based on the assumption that Black people lacked awareness of calendar time. This presumption often worked to the disadvantage of Black veterans' widows and children.

Take, for example, the case of Leanna Beverly, a widow from Princeton, Kentucky, who spent six and a half years trying to document the exact birthdate of her youngest daughter, Norman. Leanna's difficulties arose not because she and her friends lacked awareness of calendar time, but because they offered too much evidence, which resulted in inconsistencies, thus inviting further scrutiny. In 1890, Leanna applied for a widow's pension, confidently stated the birthdates of her three children under 16, produced witnesses who had been present at the births, and offered a record in the family Bible.[2] Reviewers at the Pension Bureau demanded a special investigation. This process

introduced two new birthdates for Norman, 1881 and 1886.[3] As reviewers continued to demand more testimony, Leanna confronted the epistemological reality that there was no proof of her daughter's age beyond personal knowledge. 'I positively know Norman will be 11 yrs of Apr. 14, 1897', she once again stated, adding emphatically, 'it is impossible for me to give it any more correctly'.[4] In December 1897, pension reviewers in Washington, DC, finally approved her claim. Up until the last moment, they were still fiddling with Norman's date of birth. One clerk wrote in 'April 14, 1886'; another crossed out the day and entered 'April 15'.[5] This administrative concern with pinning down the exact day is remarkable, especially given their suspicion that Leanna's entire testimony was a fraud. Tragically, Leanna died two years later, leaving Norman an orphan who ended up under the care of a series of guardians. As her legal representatives, these adults collected her pension until the precise date in 1902 that had been assigned as her 16th birthday. In this case, Norman Beverly succeeded in gaining the pension to which she was entitled, but only after an enormous amount of work; there are numerous examples of those who did not. Laws administered using the legal device of age thus had the consequence of discriminating against one population, in particular African Americans. Black children did not benefit, as children, in the ways that white children did.[6]

Inability to prove age remains an issue in the United States to this day, one primarily experienced by people of colour. Prior to the 1970s, Native infants born at home, especially those from reservations along the southwestern border, often lacked government birth records, which made them ineligible for passports, drivers' licenses, and other forms of government-issued identification. Rural citizens of the Navajo and Tohono O'odham nations, in particular, without proof of their births, were also ineligible for disability benefits, Social Security, or Medicare. Laws that are race- and gender-neutral that function in the realm of bureaucratic age can still be discriminatory if some people are unable to prove their age (Granillo 2014; Gaynor 2007).

In the realm of statutory ages, lawmakers were more likely to differentiate male from female people than they were Black from white or Native American, though there were some exceptions, as we have already noted in the realm of indentures. While women and girls were barred outright from doing certain things that men could do upon reaching the age of 18 or 21 – namely, voting or serving in the military – colonial and early national lawmakers also differentiated boys from girls, men from women, along the axis of age in determining their rights to do *the same* things or achieve the same statuses. Chief among these were marriage, sex, and entry into legal adulthood. The logic behind the different ages is relatively clear, though it varies depending on which age one considers. In the case of the age of consent to sex, which was almost always legislated independently of the minimum marriageable age, and was often different from that age, lawmakers were only concerned

about protecting girls from exploitation by ne'er-do-well men who would 'ruin' them and then refuse to marry them. Because of this, there was no age of consent for boys until well into the 20th century. Boys bore no risk of pregnancy and their virginity was not prized in the way that girls' virginity was. The idea that a boy could be exploited sexually did not carry much weight until the possible exploiter could be imagined as male; indeed, it still doesn't. The effects of what are called 'statutory rape laws' in the United States – because they criminalise by statute what both parties have actually consented to – were mixed. On the one hand, they may have dissuaded some men from pursuing sex with 'underage' girls to the benefit of those girls. On the other, historians like Mary Odem and Stephen Robertson have shown that they were also used by parents and judges to coerce men into marrying the girls they had victimised, sometimes against the wishes of the girls themselves, so concerned were parents and judges about girls being 'ruined'. Historians have also shown that even in cases where everyone admitted that sex had taken place, if judges and juries did not perceive girls as acting or appearing their age, men were often acquitted. The end result may also have been to further infantilise teenage girls who sought out sex, in the name of protecting them. Girls, unlike boys, were presumed unable to make independent decisions about their own sexual desire. This age of consent, then, insisted on girls' fundamental immaturity (Odem 1995; Robertson 2005; Shah 2011; Wood 2005).

Two other statutory ages – that of marriage and majority – worked in the opposite direction, forcing girls prematurely into adulthood. In the case of marriage, lawmakers set girls' minimum marriageable ages below that of boys in almost all colonies, later states, because they believed that girls' only real qualification for the institution was the achievement of puberty. Boys, by contrast, needed to be old enough to support a wife before they could marry; their labour (or their wages) were also generally seen as more valuable in their homes than that of their sisters, meaning that parents might want to keep sons at home longer than daughters. While lawmakers were concerned about girls (and some boys) marrying against their fathers' wishes, they passed parental consent laws to attempt to block that scenario from occurring. In some colonies and states, these laws stipulated particular punishments only for men who married girls below certain ages in an attempt to gain their fortunes; the concern was about the inheritance, not the well-being of the daughter. Even parental consent laws were age-differentiated in most colonies (later states), parents' rights to block their daughters from marrying expiring at 18 instead of 21 for their sons. Only in the 1970s in most states did lawmakers equalise the age of marriage for girls and boys, generally setting 18 as the minimum without consent (Syrett 2016).

As critics from the 19th century onward have noted, these differentiated marriage ages have meant that boys were more likely to have grown into

men by the time they married, whereas girls might still literally be girls at the time they became wives (Syrett 2016; Smith 1851). Lawmakers used the legal device of age to protect young people from the harm that they presumed came from early marriage, but – unlike with age-of-consent-to-sex laws – decided that girls needed less protection than boys did, largely because they had such outsized faith in the transformative powers of the institution of marriage itself. Girls essentially had their childhood shortened by these laws, moving seamlessly from dependent in one household (their father's) to dependent in another (their husband's). The marriage of minors in American history was not a statistical anomaly. While we only have reliable numbers in a handful of locations beginning in the mid-19th century, these numbers demonstrate how common the phenomenon was. In Massachusetts, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Kentucky, between 6.5% (Kentucky) and 1.72% (Massachusetts) of grooms were below the age of 20, whereas 22.5% (Massachusetts) and 42.03% (Kentucky) of brides were. At the turn of the century, between 5 and 10% of girls aged 16 and 17 were already married when the census taker came to their doors in 1900, 1910, and 1920. And while the marriage of minors dropped dramatically following a high in the 1950s, estimates for a ten-year period beginning in the year 2000 are that approximately 250,000 minors married in the United States, the vast majority of them girls. The legal consequence of marrying as a minor is emancipation from parents, which in many respects transforms a girl into an adult. Even though most states now have gender-neutral minimum marriageable ages, exceptions to those laws tend to favour girls and cultural expectations around sex and marriage already push girls in the direction of marriage sooner than boys (*Sixteenth Report* 1858: 187; Syrett 2016: 147–148; Tsui, Nolan, and Amico 2017).

The age of majority worked in similar ways to the variable minimum marriageable age. Throughout much of the 19th and 20th centuries, men and women had different ages of majority in 21 states in the US, almost half the total, primarily those in the Midwest and West. This meant that they legally became adults at different ages. While men's age of majority, following English common law, was 21, women's was lowered to age 18 in those states by legislators who made the age of majority the same as the parental consent age for marriage in order to facilitate eligible young women's unions (Syrett 2015; Syrett 2016). These differential ages of majority effectively created differently gendered versions of adult citizens (Kerber 1998; Welke 2010). Women in the affected states were adults also for the purposes of contract, inheritance, and legal emancipation at the age of 18, their brothers not until age 21. Different ages of majority also affected child support, as parents – and usually this was an issue for children of divorced couples, but the principle applied for kids of intact marriages as well – were responsible for supporting their minor male children for three years longer than their minor female children.

In concert with lower ages for the end of indentures and lower marriageable age minimums, differential ages of majority were one of the ways that legislators constructed different, albeit contradictory, gendered versions of adulthood that denied girls some of the protections and benefits of childhood as they were forced into adulthood three years earlier than men. Paradoxically, 18-year-old adult women did gain some privileges sooner than their brothers, but largely in ways that reinforced the primacy of male adulthood and its ties to full citizenship. These differences in the age of majority – and the laws that stemmed from them – were in force in the United States until the mid-1970s, when many states equalised their ages of majority, and when the Supreme Court found them unconstitutional in two relatively understudied cases hinging on the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, *Stanton v. Stanton* (1975) and *Craig v. Boren* (1976).

In *Stanton v. Stanton*, the one we'll consider here, the Court ruled that it was unconstitutional for a divorced Utah man to have to support his minor son until the age of 21 but his minor daughter only until the age of 18. While both cases have been studied, rightfully, in the realm of gender discrimination (Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote a plaintiff's brief on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union for the latter in which she cites the former; she was also present at the counsel table for the oral arguments before the Supreme Court for *Craig*), and the latter because of the Court's introduction of the doctrine of 'intermediate scrutiny', these cases are also clearly about age (Kerber 1998: 297; Mayeri 2011: 124, 200; Ginsburg 1975; Binion 1991; DeHart 2018: 250–252, 253–255, 261–262; Bressman 2007). The Utah Supreme Court, which had upheld the gendered distinction in child support, had done so on the basis that girls supposedly matured sooner than boys, that they married earlier than boys, and that boys were in need of longer parental support for their education. All three beliefs have a long history in the United States, but that they are enshrined in the law made them not simply normative or reflective of popular belief, but rather prescriptive. As Justice Harry Blackmun wrote for the majority,

> A child, male or female, is still a child. No longer is the female destined solely for the home and the rearing of the family, and only the male for the marketplace and the world of ideas . . . If a specified age of minority is required for the boy in order to assure him parental support while he attains his education and training, so, too, is it for the girl. To distinguish between the two on educational grounds is to be self-serving: if the female is not to be supported so long as the male, she hardly can be expected to attend school as long as he does, and bringing her education to an end earlier coincides with the role-typing society has long imposed.
>
> *(Stanton v Stanton 1975)*

As it stood, the law effectively pushed girls towards marriage sooner than their brothers by not guaranteeing them the right of child support (whether their parents were divorced or remained married) as long as boys. And the law also reinforced beliefs about the place of education in girls' lives: they were presumed not to need it because marriage, perhaps to an educated man, would take the place of any schooling they might otherwise need past high school graduation. The differential age of majority in Utah (and elsewhere) as it applied to child protection and care created differing parental obligations to boy and girl children, effectively constituting two different kinds of child citizens. And statutory age was the device that lawmakers had employed in order to do so.

In the contemporary United States there remain few laws that explicitly differentiate between girls and boys in the realm of age, though some do still exist.[7] And as we noted earlier, while almost all US citizens are able to document their age via a government-issued birth certificate, there remain certain Native Americans unable to do so, and of late many child migrants on the US-Mexico border without proof of age have been designated as adults even when they claim ages below 18, adults being both more easily deportable and cheaper to house in adult facilities. Age-based discrimination – not as we're used to thinking about it, as a matter of prejudice against older people – but instead discrimination against those unable to prove their age, thus does persist in the United States (Stevens 2019; Reiman 2019).

We would like to close by exploring, briefly, one last example related to age: contemporary law on age of marriage and activist efforts to change that law. Over the course of the 20th century, it became near universal upon the birth of a child to issue a birth certificate that documents that child's date of birth, sex, and name. To be sure, this happened first for white, middle-class babies born in hospitals. Those born at home, particularly in the rural South, or, as we have seen, on Native reservations, were far less likely to have birth certificates, at least through the 1960s. And some without them simply did not know how old they were; they lived in communities with very little interaction with state bureaucracy, and where they were evaluated by their size and capability to labour, not their chronological age. Slowly, but surely, however, the importance of the birth certificate gained traction even with the most rural and impoverished of Americans. In part this was because birth certificates became the gateway to other rights and benefits, including Social Security and the ability to gain a driver's license or a passport, both of which also function as proof of identity and of age (Landrum 2015; Pearson 2015; Pearson 2021; Schmidt 2010).

By the middle of the 20th century in most states, county clerks – the people charged with issuing marriage licenses – could ask for a birth certificate or driver's license in order to make prospective brides and grooms prove both their identity and their legal right to marry because they were over

a certain age. Foes of child marriage had long advocated for this, but in the early 20th century, there were simply too many people who didn't have government-issued proof of identity and age to make it feasible to require it of all brides and grooms. This earlier laxness around enforcing marriage law enabled countless girls and boys to marry illegally, a remarkably common practice for most of US history. The rise of the birth certificate closed off the possibility of illegal underage marriage. While children's advocates and feminists applauded the mandate to require birth certificates in order to issue marriage licenses, many lawmakers were made uneasy by an absolute ban on marriage below the age of 18, especially for girls who might be pregnant. This led most states to pass ever-more-complex marriage-age laws that usually set the absolute right to marriage at 18, and then designated a series of exceptions to that rule. These include an age (e.g. 16) above which one needed parental consent and another age (e.g. 14) above which one additionally needed judicial consent; some states also explicitly wrote laws that made exceptions for girls who are pregnant or for boys who can prove they are the fathers of pregnant girls' or women's future children. All of these laws came about not just because underage brides and grooms used to be able to simply lie in order to get married, a now-closed loophole, but also because while most lawmakers could agree in principle that marriage should be reserved for consenting adults, very few were comfortable outlawing marriage altogether if a couple were already having sex, which they believed should occur only within marriage, especially if a pregnancy could also be confirmed. This exemplifies, if nothing else, many Americans' absurdly outsize faith in the powers of marriage to transform and protect those who enter it (Syrett 2016: 259–261).

These 'exceptions laws' are the ones against which contemporary anti-child-marriage activists are rallying. This effort has primarily been led by two organisations: Unchained at Last, which advocates against all versions of forced marriage, and the Tahirih Justice Centre, which works to protect immigrant women and girls from violence. They and others have more recently joined together in the National Coalition to End Child Marriage. The organisations point to many problems for minors who marry: much higher-than-average rates of divorce, dropping out of school, teen pregnancy, mental and physical health problems, and spousal abuse. They also demonstrate that those who marry as minors are, for the period during which they remain minors, ineligible to hire a lawyer to initiate divorce proceedings or gain entry to a battered women's shelter, both of which are only possible for adults. Both groups are committed to advocating for laws that set a hard line of 18, with no exceptions.[8] While they recognise that 18 is an arbitrary number, it is also the age of legal adulthood in almost every state and makes sense for that reason alone. At the time of this writing, they have met with success in 13 states out of 50 total (Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota,

New Jersey, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington) and two territories (the US Virgin Islands and American Samoa). Other states, including Texas, have raised their minimum marriageable ages, but not all the way to 18; one common exception is to allow already emancipated minors to consent to marriage, even if below the age of 18 (Le Strat, Dubertret, and Le Foll 2011; Wahi, Zaleski, Lampe, Bevan-Hively, and Koski 2019; Unchained at Last n.d.).

The two organisations' shared position is that child marriage is, ipso facto, forced or coercive marriage because no one under the age of 18 is capable of making this decision in the first place, a position that is comparable to that we take around statutory rape. Consent is not real consent if given by 15-year-olds. Unchained At Last also emphasises that in many instances child marriage can be orchestrated by parents, where minors do not feel they have any meaningful right of refusal. There is plenty of evidence historically, however, that demonstrates that minors have seen real advantages in marriage and have entered it willingly. This has especially been the case when two minors are marrying each other or when they are separated in age by only a few years (Syrett 2016). We know that such marriages continue to happen today. The two organisations also regularly highlight cases where immigrant girls are forced into marrying men from a similar background, occasionally in the home country or through a US spousal visa program which itself has no minimum marriage age at all. This is a real problem; between 2007 and 2017, the United States approved visas for more than 5,000 adults petitioning on behalf of minor spouses and 3,000 minors petitioning on behalf of adult spouses. In the latter cases, it is highly likely that some adult was also working behind the scenes to orchestrate the process (Long 2019).

The effect of this focus on immigrant girls, however, is to make it seem as if they are the most likely to be married as minors and as if their marriages are primarily arranged or forced. While one study has found that non-white and immigrant girls are slightly more likely to marry as minors than white, native-born girls, it is also the case that rates of minor marriage are highest in the Deep South and the West. The state of Idaho has the highest rate, and Kentucky and Arkansas are not far behind (Koski and Heymann 2018; Tsui, Nolan, and Amico 2017). None of these states is home to significant immigrant populations. But when child marriage is conceived of as an immigrant problem, the consequence is to make it seem as if immigrants are more likely than native-born Americans to either be ignorant of the significance of chronological age or have little interest in protecting girl children from harm. Reformers certainly thought this in the 1920s, during the last widespread wave of activism to end child marriage, despite the fact that it was not true (Syrett 2016: 186–193). In this narrative the inability to recognise chronological age as a marker of development stands as a marker of cultural backwardness,

with implicitly white organisations like Unchained and Tahirih working to protect brown immigrant children in the United States, even though Unchained's services are actually open to any underage or forced bride. In other words, this is a matter of perception rather than a stated policy of either organisation (Tambe 2019; Tambe 2020; Syrett 2016).

This is clearly a different issue from the one we have spent most of this chapter discussing – cultural perceptions of chronological age rather than the ways that lawmakers have used age to differentiate childhood from adulthood – but we think what unites the two issues is how race and gender are implicated in both. Since its rise as a means of apportioning rights and responsibilities in the early modern period, chronological age has never been simply the neutral marker of time since birth that many regard it as being. Instead both the discourses that surround age norms and the laws that use age to protect or privilege children are inflected with understandings of gender and race.

Notes

1* Portions of this chapter were previously published as Corinne T. Field and Nicholas L. Syrett, 'Age and the Construction of Gendered and Raced Citizenship in the United States', *American Historical Review* 125:2 (April 2020): 438–450 and are reprinted here by permission of Oxford University Press.
2 Anna Beverly, Declaration for Widow's Pension, July 31, 1890; affidavit of Fannie Woods, August 1, 1890; affidavit of James Riley and Jackson Baker, August 1, 1890, Civil War Pension File of Hudson Beverly, 8th U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery [hereafter USCHA], Record Group 15, Records of the Department of Veterans Administration, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. [hereafter RG 15], from the Black Virginians in Blue database, forthcoming from the John L. Nau III Center for Civil War History, http://naucenter.as.virginia.edu/digital-projects [hereafter Pension File of Hudson Beverly].
3 Affidavit of A.C. Mayer Jr., Justice of the Peace for Caldwell County, Kentucky [n.d., filed October 14, 1891]; affidavit of Amy D. Mitchusson, June 24, 1894, Pension File of Hudson Beverly.
4 Affidavit of Leanna Beverly, February 15, 1897; see also affidavits of Leanna Beverly, March 13, 1897, and November 27, 1897, Pension File of Hudson Beverly.
5 Widow's Pension, Leanna Beverly, approved for admission, December 13, 1897, Pension File of Hudson Beverly.
6 Edward Beverly, Declaration for Children under Sixteen Years of Age, February 10, 1899; Norman Beverly, Original Pension of Minor Children, approved for admission, September 27, 1899; Minor of Hudson Beverly, Pensioner Dropped, April 13, 1902, Pension File of Hudson Beverly.
7 Arkansas, Mississippi, Ohio, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island all maintain differential marriage ages by sex.
8 Full disclosure: one of us, Nicholas Syrett, has worked with these organisations, primarily by submitting testimony to state legislatures that advocates for raising the minimum marriageable age and/or removing loopholes to those minimum marriageable ages that allow minors to marry.

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2

'IS SHE A CHILD?' EMERGENCE OF CHRONOLOGICAL AGE IN EARLY COLONIAL BENGAL

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Philippe Aries' (1965) pathbreaking *Centuries of Childhood* has come under critical scrutiny for some time, on grounds of misinterpreted or overstretched reading of historical evidence. But the work certainly denaturalised – and historicised – the domain of childhood. It alerted us to its constructedness and its relatively late emergence as a distinct and rather special conceptual sphere.

My chapter is in two parts. The first briefly touches on female childhood in pre-colonial cultural traditions in Bengal. The second part tracks its legal makings in widow immolation (*sati*) debates in early colonial times.[1] I focus, particularly, on how the colonial state – as advised by Brahman ritual and scriptural scholars – tried to classify phases in the girl's pre-pubescent life: to find out when the 'female' becomes an infant, a child, a young girl, or a woman.

The problem of calculating chronological age was a typically modern one. It emerged with debates on the deaths of child widows[2] and went through various ramifications throughout the colonial era. Under Act XL of 1858, for instance, a Hindu man could attain the age of majority at 16, when he was allowed to inherit property. He could also authorise his soon-to-be child widow on his deathbed to adopt a son, though she might well be a child herself.[3] The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1891, in contrast, considered 12 to be the minimum age of consent for women, within as well as outside the conjugal connection. Adulthood, or the end of childhood, therefore, did not have a singular definition. Life cycle phases were, moreover, necessarily relational: as Tambe's work shows,[4] girlhood drew its valences from womanhood, and – I would add – vice versa.

It is important to remember how entirely the colonial state depended on Hindu religious texts whenever it intervened in the ritual sphere or in intimate or social relationships: notwithstanding the rhetoric of civilising mission. As

early as 1772, Warren Hasting's Judicial Plan had mandated that everything to do with Indian marriage, divorce, caste, inheritance, adoption, and succession would be governed by Hindu and Muslim scripture and customary practices, as advised by court-appointed Brahman pandits and maulvis. Meant primarily for court conduct, the Plan effectively closed down colonial legal innovation in this entire sphere. Personal laws stood in sharp contrast, therefore, to criminal laws, which were substantially Anglicised and codified by the 1860s (Fisch 1983; Singha 1998). It might seem that the criminalisation of immolations in 1829–30 cancelled the logics of both personal and criminal laws, the latter being still largely governed by pre-colonial Islamic laws. However, even abolition was based squarely on a Brahmanical reinterpretation of scripture that Rammohun Roy – with his widely acknowledged mastery of sacred texts – put forward. Significantly, whenever Baptist missionaries or colonial officials argued for abolition, they, too, used Hindu scripture to defend their position.

Lauren Benton has discussed the tradition of legal pluralism or 'multicentric legal orders' in colonised countries where indigenous authorities managed to carve out a significant space for themselves within the legal norms and the judicial space (Benton 2001). India, however, acquired those spaces at the inception of colonial governance without any noticeable struggles.

The promise made by the Plan of 1772 was subsequently confirmed by a royal edict, an imperial proclamation and by policy statements from several colonial administrators. Even though pandits and maulvis were replaced by a solid body of precedents in the 1860s, the application of scripture and custom continued unabated for the rest of the colonial era. Indian faith remained the paramount source of personal laws, even if it offended British moral sensibilities, and legal change had to be derived from alternative Brahmanical readings of sacred texts (Derrett 1999).[5]

The Judicial Plan had acknowledged the paramouncy of written scripture. A revised Plan of 1776, drafted by Governor-General Hastings and Law Member E. Impey, added protection to the 'usages and manners of the people' as well (Travers 2010).

All this considerably compounded difficulties for the state. If governmentality presumes the production of knowledge systems that relate to the governed population (Foucault 1994; Aries Philippe 1965),[6] a Western ruling apparatus had to abide by Indian sacred knowledge for administering the social and religious lives of its subjects: creating a peculiar arena of cross cultural (mis)understandings.

I

Several scholars have looked at the child-figure in the sacred iconography of the Holy Family.[7] A whole universe of emotional, visual, and literary

imaginings around the divine infant became similarly central to the two prominent devotional traditions among early modern Bengali Hindus: Shaktas and Vaisnavs. Sixteenth-century orthodox lawgiver Raghunandan had prescribed the adoration of the infant Krishna – incarnation of Lord Vishnu, preserver of creation – as especially appropriate for 'low' caste Shudras (Bandyopadhyay 1961). But fist-sized idols of the baby Krishna (*balagopal*, sometimes also called *narugopal*) are still very common in all Bengali household shrines: depicting a crawling infant who holds up a stolen candy in one hand, and smiles with bewitching naughtiness. Hagiographic texts on Chaitanya, the 16th-century Krishna-possessed saint,[8] devoted long passages to his childhood on rather similar lines: his enchanting beauty, his mischievous pranks, and his early miraculous powers. Interestingly, the holy infant was worshipped as a small icon in domestic shrines, he never acquired a sculptured form in temples (Sarkar 2014).

The holy female child, however, had a literary, rather than an iconic, embodiment among *Shakta* devotees, or worshippers of the female divine principle. She was not found in temples or shrines but lived in popular poetry and songs. From the 18th century, Bengali Shaktas developed a genre of devotional songs which were dedicated to Uma or Gauri, consort of Lord Shiva, destroyer of creation. Interestingly, scripture advised that the perfect age to marry off daughters is before she is nine. Before that threshold, marriage is *Gauridaan* – tantamount to the gift of the goddess Gauri herself. After that, it is *Kanyadaan*, or the gift of a virgin. *Gauridaan* earns her family and lineage sumptuous merits in afterlife.

In *agamani* songs, composed by Ramprasad, Bharatchandra, Kamalakanta, and several other literary giants (Sen 1901), Uma's mother longs for her married daughter all the year round. Uma comes home for a few days every year and is worshipped as Durga, the resplendent demon-slayer. But the songs celebrate her as a very young daughter briefly restored to her mother. Time passes far too quickly for both and the joy of reunion is shot through with the dread of imminent loss. The songs make no reference to Uma's miracle-making abilities, which both child Krishna and Chaitanya possess. They describe her as a miniaturised adult, just as the infant Christ appears in much of early iconography. She is a little woman of incomparable beauty and charm but her figure evokes grief rather than delight: grief that mandatory patrilocality and infant marriage for daughters inflict on mothers.

The genre drifted into the popular domain of impromptu public poetical compositions in the 19th century: Ram Basu or Dasarathi Ray moved their audiences to tears as they lamented the much-missed divine daughter (De 1962). Their verses focused exclusively on the mother's longing. We should remember that, given the very early age at which most Bengali Hindu girls were married off till at least the early 20th century, many women in their

late 20s would simultaneously be daughters missing their mothers and young mothers aching for their married daughters.

There was yet another musical genre that related to female childhood – though of mortal ones. Linguistic evidence seems to suggest that they date between 18th and early 20th centuries. These were nursery rhymes and lullabies, which are, typically, women's composition. They repeat the same motif: either in the words of a little girl who pleads with her mates to have a last game with her – for 'a stranger's son is coming to take me away and I will play no more' (Mukhopadhyay 1899); or in the voice of a child-wife who runs away from a cruel matrimonial home, only to be dragged back there;[9] or in the murmuring of a mother as she rocks her baby daughter's cradle: 'The groom will arrive very soon, he will take you away from me forever'(Mukhopadhyay 1899).

When Hindu women began to publish their work from mid and late 19th century, many vividly recalled the excruciating anguish of leaving their familiar world for the home of a stranger. Rashsundari Debi, who was sent off to a distant matrimonial home at the age of 12, clung to her mother before the parting: 'I went straight into my mother's arms, weeping: Mother, why did you give me away to a stranger?'(Debi 1876).

That enduring strain of sorrow entered reformist discourses in the 19th century. Identical sentiments, even words, suffused modern reformer Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar's 1850 tract on the evils of child marriage.[10] He repeated them in his tirade against the savage discipline of enforced widowhood for upper-caste Hindu widows – even for infant widows who had not consummated the marriage. When he sent a draft bill to legalise widow remarriage to the Legislative Council, legislator Grant eloquently described 'a little prattling girl of five years old, taken from her dolls and her toys . . . into widowhood'[11] as the strongest justification for legalising remarriage. His words did have a long lineage in Indian sentiments.

The royal estate of Krishnagore rigorously enforced *Smarta* orthodoxy over much of Bengal in the 18th century, under Maharaja Krishnachandra Ray. Ray was particularly uncompromising about the discipline of *nirjala ekadasi* for widows, even infant ones: the fortnightly fast without a drop of water for 24 hours at a stretch. When Rajballabh, a financial powerhouse from the Baidya caste, tried to get a verdict from Brahman authorities in favour of the remarriage of virgin and infant widows, he was defeated by Krishnachandra (Ray 1991). In 1845, the issue reappeared, when a man from a 'clean' Shudra rank tried to persuade pandits to allow a second marriage for virgin child widows. The British India Society corresponded with the orthodox Dharma Sabha on the matter and the orthodoxy once again firmly countermanded the suggestion (Majumdar 1947).

Anecdotal tales about Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, who campaigned hard in favour of remarriage, attribute his zeal to child widows he had personally

known. According to one version, he had a playmate of 13 or 14 who was a widow. When he found her fasting on the *ekadasi* day, he understood what child widows have to suffer and pledged to remove their distress. When he published his long article on the problems of child marriage (*Balyabibaher Dosh*) in *Shrabashubhakari Patrika* in 1850, he focused particularly on the pathos of infant and child widows, even though he refused to restrict remarriage to child widows alone. In fact, he could have mobilised the consent of quite a large segment of pandits had he done so (Mitra 1975).

It was not colonial discourses, then, that depicted the interrupted and stolen childhood of Indian women as a source of great pain. Nor was it the invention of reformers who sought to modernise Hindu gender. The conviction was anchored in the lived – and powerfully articulated – habitus of Hindu women. That habitus could also, at times, mandate the death by burning of child widows.

II

Bengalis, as we saw, had a distinctive notion of female childhood in pre-colonial times. But when does the girl mutate from infancy to childhood – and thence to womanhood? Ritualised deaths of children thrust these questions upon early colonial administration and age began to be quantified on two related registers: the minimum age at which the widow could be allowed to burn and the minimum age of the orphan whom she could leave behind her. If biopolitics, in Foucault's definition, involves the governance of living individuals who constitute the population, the 'governmentalisation' of the modern state, in a sense, began with counting the ages of women about to die – *thanatopolis*, to use Foucault's words. Several instruments of governmentality, too, were simultaneously forged and honed in the process, especially the statistical or numerical imperative and the policing of death (Foucault 1988).

As late as the 1891 Census, the number of married Hindu women per ten thousand in the 0–9 age group was 678 for north Bengal: 692 for east Bengal and 788 for west Bengal. Hindu widows in that age group were 40 per 10,000 in the north, 37 in the east, and 40 again in the west. Their number climbed sharply in the 10–14 age bracket: 423 in the north, 348 in the east, and 429 in the west. Muslim figures for corresponding age brackets were less than half of that (O'Donnell 1893).

A considerable number of Hindu widows in Bengal were immolated when they were 4 or 8 years of age. The state counted immolations only over 13 years, between 1815 and 1828. But these annual police lists recorded only those burnings which were notified to the police. Many, especially in the remote hinterland, were not counted at all.[12] Between 1815 and 1820, in the Calcutta Division alone, 62 child widows were immolated.[13]

Lata Mani, whose pioneering work on colonial immolations has set the seal on post-colonial feminist histories in many ways, has accused Indian reformers and the state for disregarding the will of widows who genuinely wanted to burn. That, she argues, represented them as infants who were incapable of thinking for themselves (Mani 1989). One does wonder, though, if these children were genuinely capable of thinking.

No lists were kept for pre-colonial immolations, nor did immolations happen according to an accredited body of scriptural directions. They happened anyhow, at any age, among all kinds of castes who were not permitted by sacred texts to practice the rite, and without verifying the widow's consent to burn through an established procedure.[14] For the first three decades of colonial rule, the same permissiveness continued to reign (Sarkar 2013). But the status quo was sometimes interrupted by the occasional official reluctance, by missionary abolitionist campaigns in India and Britain, and by a few Brahman reformers who offered objections on grounds of scriptural irregularities. They pushed the state to consult renowned *pandits* about the textual guidelines for proper immolations. For the first time, therefore, Brahman scholars had to scour various *shastras* to dig them out. That they took quite some time to do so goes to show that such texts were rarely – or never – consulted before immolations. The slow and reluctant bureaucratisation of the religious rite can best be gauged if we track the process.

The ritual format prescribed that the widow indicates her decision to burn to her family immediately after her husband's death. She then iterates a pledge – *sankalp* – before the priest, which becomes immediately immutable. After that, she falls silent and the family represents her at every subsequent step of the rite.[15] The burning occurs in front of a large crowd, which is promised much merit in afterlife if they watch the spectacle. In rarest of cases, therefore, would a very young girl try to outface determined family, priestly, and community consensus. To my surprise, I discovered that dissent was not that uncommon, given all the odds.

An early case came up in 1797. The acting magistrate of Midnapore wrote to Governor General Shore: 'A child by name Kumly, intended sacrificing herself with her husband'. 'She being scarcely nine years of age'. He felt himself duty-bound to prevent it.

This was the first time that an immolation had actually been stopped by a colonial official. The act gains in significance since it unwittingly coupled age with consent: the magistrate assuming that the two must necessarily be intertwined in such a momentous decision as death by burning. The ritual form, however, had left her consent embedded in the recitation of the pledge rather than in her age or her mental ability to comprehend the meaning of what the pledge entailed. The letter skilfully juxtaposes two motifs – her 'intention' and her being 'scarcely nine'. Infancy seemed to cancel out consent or, at least, put it under a question mark. Governor General Shore, however,

objected to the magistrate's action: He could use all his powers of persuasion to prevent an immolation, he was told, but he must never stop it.[16]

Complications, nonetheless, ensued with the problem of coercion of child wives. In 1805, J.R. Elphinstone, acting magistrate of Zillah Bihar, referred a new case to George Dowdeswell, secretary of the Judicial Department. The *darogah* or chief of a police station from Gya district, had reported the imminent immolation of a 12-year-old from the *buniya*, or trader caste. Remarkably, her friends secretly informed him that her relatives were forcing her to burn. When the *darogah* went to the site, he found her 'in a perfect state of stupefaction or intoxication'. The magistrate stopped the immolation and reported: 'the girl and her friends are extremely grateful for my interposition'. He asked for further instructions.[17]

If Kumly's infancy had put her consent in a dubious category, this case underlined the problem of forcing a child to burn to death. At least, it insisted the state should know more about who could, and who could not, become a *sati*, rather than allow, without sufficient information, full license to families to burn unwilling children. Dowdeswell asked the Registrar of the Sadr Nizamat Adawlutt – highest criminal court – to consult pandits on what constitutes an appropriate *sati*.

Pandits issued their *bewastha*, or verdict, in 1805. They specified the four main *varnas* – Brahmins, Khatris, Bues, and Soodur – who were entitled to immolation. Widows must not be pregnant, nor with infant children, nor 'in a state of uncleanness' – i.e. not immediately after childbirth, nor while menstruating. Nor should they be 'under the age of puberty'. No drugs or intoxicant must be used and the woman must be willing to burn. They did not clarify how her willingness could be cross-checked beyond what the family and the priest told them. The state, however, sat on the instructions for almost another decade before it issued some firm directives to magistrates and the police to act on them.

No exact minimum age was specified in the 1805 verdict except for the rather vague physical condition of puberty: which was something that no policeman could possibly verify. Age, in any case, was a notoriously slippery substance. As no mechanism for the registration of births developed till the late 1880s, family memory alone had to be tapped to ensure that she was, genuinely, of age. But how many families remembered the birth of girls? Police reports show that they even forgot the proper names of the *satis*. Family memory, moreover, was strategic. The question of ascertaining her age came up only after the family had already decided to go along with the immolation, expecting enormous ritual benefits from her death. Scripture assured them that her burning releases her paternal, maternal, and matrimonial families from all sins and guarantees a place in heaven for her and her husband for millions of years.

Moreover, only family women knew if and when she had reached puberty – but they were never consulted. The new age-related prohibition was, in any case, so little known that infant burnings continued well after the government had issued its circulars. The police recorded several burnings of widows of four or eight without comments or objections: Obviously, they had done nothing to stop them. In a strange episode, an eight-year-old girl, scolded by her aunt for playing too long outside, threatened to become a *sati*. The news of her husband's death arrived almost immediately – and a *sati* she was made (Ward 1818).[18] Angry words, flung at her aunt, were taken as the pledge, and there could be no turning back.

The British asked if scripture specified an exact minimum age in place of the fuzzy and incalculable notion of pre-pubescence. Guided by pandits, they issued a further set of instructions on 17 April 1813, which stipulated that *satis* had to be at least 16 years of age. But before the issue could be sorted out, infancy and childhood came to plague the authorities in a different way. According to pandits, the widow could not abandon an infant to become an orphan. But who exactly is an infant?

On 18 December 1813, Sir George Nugent, Vice President in Council, forwarded a letter from the Magistrate of Burdwan to the Nizamut Adawlutt.[19] On 28 October 1813, the magistrate had reported that the widow of an inhabitant of Khundghose, named Ochub Singh, 'by cast a Caet', wanted to be a *sati*. She had three children, one of them aged two and a half. Though the *darogah* had prohibited it and stationed 'two Hindoo *burkandazes*' at her home, the family managed to force through the burning. The magistrate detained ten of her male relatives. He asked if they should be sent up for trial at the court of circuit or 'whether I have sufficient authority to punish them myself'. He wanted more information on 'what specific age of child is considered to be a legal objection to the matter of becoming a suttee'. The term 'legal' referred to Hindu scriptural law.

Turnbull replied on 9 December, 1813:

> [I]t was not intended by instructions circulated on 29 April last, to authorise any interference on the part of the *darogahs* or other officers of police, to prevent the performance of the ceremony of suttee in the ground of . . . having infant children; and you are accordingly desired to issue the strictest injunctions to your police officers, prohibiting their interference on such occasions.

Bayley responded in great anger and frustration on 18 December. He referred to the copy of instructions in 'Persian and Bengalee language and their translation in English', which were meant to be circulated among magistrates and police officers: where a widow with a 'child of tender years was

expressly forbidden by *shaster* [sic]' and police officers were asked to inter-fere if conditions were violated.

> I have discharged the prisoners whom I had held to bail, but I have taken the liberty of suspending the execution of the orders of the court with regard to the instructions I am directed to issue to police officers. The pub-lic and official abrogation of this very material part of the instructions of the court will weaken the hands of the police officers in carrying into effect the remaining part of the instructions.[20]

The exchange is instructive. It underlines a deep self-division within the state apparatus, a section of which dared not act on its own orders. The incoherence reveals a contradiction between the magistrate who works on the ground, dealing with concrete cases of burning, and the higher authorities who are distanced from their actual supervision.

Bayley counted the incidents of immolation in his district which had been invalidated on grounds of the orphan's age. Between 1811 and 1812, the district had seen as many as 114 immolations: 'and there can be little doubt that many other cases may have occurred which have not come to my knowl-edge'. He cited one in particular which involved the widow of an opulent man in the town. The rajah and other important town dignitaries urged him to endorse the immolation, even though she had an infant child. Following court instructions, however, Bayley had managed to avert that, even though arrangements had already been made for the immolation and eager crowds had rallied around. 'I confess that I should feel deep regret if the court were to annul an order which has already produced such beneficial effects'.

His outburst finally prompted more queries about the orphan's age. In April 1813, pandits were asked to specify 'the particular age to which a child must have arrived before its mother becomes a legal subject for a suttee'. By this time, they could provide more details: 'A child is termed "*bala*" whose age is under that prescribed for the performance of the (*choorakuran*) cer-emony of shaving the head, perforating the ear, etc. The third year is fixed, according to all authorities, as the period for this ceremony'. They cited scrip-tural sources: *Nirnay Sindhu* defines the *bala* as a child of up to three years of age, and Brihaspati says the mother of *bala* cannot be a *suttee*.[21]

At the same time, they also referred to Raghunanadan's's *Shuddhi Tattwa*, which cancels or qualifies the immunity: 'A woman having a child whose sustenance can be provided by another person is free to become a suttee'.[22] Raghunandan's reasoning is difficult to follow. The mother of an infant is granted immunity from burning in order to bring up the child, unless some-one else is prepared to undertake the task. But no provision is made for the orphan above the age of three. Who could tell if the guardian would actually live up to the promise once the mother was gone? Was a child above three,

moreover, seriously expected to bring herself up? Nonetheless, we do obtain a scriptural definition of infancy and childhood for the first time.

The circulars were not formal laws though they were meant to be obeyed. They were advisories to magistrates and policemen, spelling out what scripture or Hindu law allows or forbids them to do. They were often flagrantly violated: not just by families but also by European judges and magistrates. As yet, the child *sati* had far less immunity in the eyes of the state than did customary beliefs and expectations. I present a trial where a child was immolated against her will, to demonstrate the extent of impunity that community norms enjoyed under the Company state.

A case was lodged first at the Sessions Court at Gorruckpore and then moved up to the Nizamut Adawlutt at Fort William in Calcutta in February 1822.[23] Seetloo, a Brahman, had died away from home, and his widow, Houmulia, 'about fourteen years of age', and staying with her natal family, swore the ritual pledge. Her father being away, her uncle, Sheolal, was in charge of the immolation. Neither the local police nor the magistrate had bothered to check her consent before she died or to verify if she had willingly taken the pledge. The Nizamut Adawlutt, however, decided 'to presume that it was so'. We are not told why they presumed thus. Since she was a Brahman and since in all probability this was *anumarana* which was forbidden to Brahman widows,[24] this was, in any case, an invalid decision. It was doubly illicit because the widow was clearly underage – the immolation occurring well after a precise minimum age had been specified by the 1813 verdict, and confirmed yet again in 1815.

When the flames began to blaze in earnest, the girl leapt out of the pyre. She was seized by her uncle and thrust back: 'much burnt and her clothes quite consumed . . . She again sprang from the pile and running to a well hard by, laid herself down in the watercourse, weeping bitterly. Sheolal now took a sheet . . . and spreading it on the ground, desired her to seat herself upon it'.

'No, she said, she would not do this; he would once again carry her to the fire, and she would not submit to this; she would quit her family and live by beggary'. Her uncle swore by the holy waters of the Ganga that she would be spared and taken back home. She then sat on the sheet and was bundled up. Then she was thrown back into the flames.

'The wretched victim once more made an effort to save herself; when at the instigation of the rest, the Moosulman Bhuraichee, approached near enough to reach her with his sword and cut her throat; the head fell back and she was released from further trial by death'. It was not clear what exactly caused the death: Was it the Muslim, obligingly assisting, and being allowed to assist, at a Hindu rite, or was it the several bouts of burning that had already done her in?

A case was brought against Bhuraichee, Sheolal, and Bhichook, all of whom had resisted her escape at different points. They were charged with

wilful murder, while Roosa was charged with being an accessory and Huree-pal and Ijrail were charged with 'being present and attending the same'. The event was witnessed by 200 other people who did nothing to help Houmulia. They were not charged with any crime.

Judges were divided. The circuit judge had called it murder: 'I verily believe I but echo the wishes and expectations of nineteen twentieth of the Hindoos when I urge death as the requital of this atrocity'. His criticism related to an individual case and not to the rite as such. Significantly, he presents his judgement as the verdict of the Hindu community, although, judging from the response of the crowd and the family, there was little reason to do so.

Chief Judge W. Leycester pronounced that Sheolal and Bhuraichee should be executed – the uncle for throwing her repeatedly into the fire and the Muslim for possibly being responsible for the actual death blow.

Second Judge C. Smith, however, held very a different opinion. 'None of the prisoners', he said, 'should be sentenced capitally or even to perpetual imprisonment. The Suttee, in the first instance, appears to be voluntary . . . the girl ascended the pile and laid herself down . . . without force. The fact of subsequent violence may be fabricated and exaggerated . . . I think the uncle Sheolal who could have no malice towards his niece, and who seems to have acted under the impression of the indelible disgrace that would accrue to the family if the Suttee, once begun, should not be completed is an object of pity rather than of punishment'.

There is no stigmatisation, then, of the uncle or the family. Judge Smith assumed that the uncle, by the mere fact of being an uncle, could bear no malice nor have a personal stake in the immolation. The family is an object of pity, but not so the girl, however, since she changed her mind as she began to burn. The police had blatantly violated the rules of *sati* by not confirming her assent and by not ascertaining her age. They were not taken to task. Several incommensurate cultural and moral horizons get strangely fused here: Hindu and Muslim, European judge, and Hindu hardliners.

What is most significant about the case is that nobody even mentioned the age of the girl at the trial.

Let us focus on yet another small story to dramatise the complexities of age. For three days between 29 and 31 December 1816, public roads in three contiguous districts of Bengal saw a bizarre funeral procession, playing hide and seek with government agents across district boundaries, and carrying the corpse of Shiboo Chunder Dutta. Next to him and his relatives, walked his widow Digumburee. The man had died the day before and the widow had – so it was said – promised to burn.[25]

The corpse was first brought to Sulkea, located in the Suburbs of Calcutta district, for cremation. The family told the local police that she was 11 years and 8 months in age – very definitely an underage widow. Magistrate Eliot, therefore, forbade the immolation on grounds of 'her tender age'.

The funeral procession then turned towards the Chitpore cremation ground where, again, Eliot blocked their entry. The local Darogah now reported that her age was around 14, but this, too, made her underage. The girl was then taken back home by her father, but at two at night, was smuggled out to Kossipore where the Darogah found them 'sitting concealed under a shed' at Surmongolah Ghat or river bank. Burning being foiled by the discovery, they now changed course and went to the Bankhbazar Cremation Ghat in Calcutta Town where immolations were, in any case, forbidden. Eliot hastened to inform Magistrate Blaquerie about her age, and he, too, prevented the burning.

The procession now moved into Ariadhee, in the district of the 24 Pergunnas. Magistrate Sage was informed by Eliot about the details of the case, and he, too, issued a *perwannah*, or order, forbidding the immolation. But then he unexpectedly issued a second *perwannah*. If she was above 12, he said, the immolation should take place.[26]

Local Hindu notables strongly urged Sage to allow the immolation – especially Madan Dutt and Rajah Rajkissen, the latter from the Shobhabazar Raj estate whose scion Radhakanto Deb would later lead the orthodoxy against abolition. So did his own Hindu peon who said that after four days of fasting, the girl would surely die soon, of starvation and grief. It was better to let her die of burning and fulfil her sacred pledge instead.

Sage made no effort to meet the girl himself and he made up his mind about her age and consent on the basis of the information his Hindu subordinates, pandits, and local notables conveyed to him. He chose to overlook the anomalies in their several depositions. His own pandit had advised him that immolation was scripturally prescribed to widows above the age of 12 – even though an official circular had already specified the legitimate age as 16. 'Dreading the consequences' of her death before she could obey the pledge, Sage withdrew the earlier prohibition. After days of high drama and tension that had gripped the streets of three different districts, Digamburee was finally burnt.[27]

Opinion had varied enormously about her age. The acting superintendent of police of the lower provinces reported that her correct age would be around 12 or 13, though one witness put it at 11. 'I have forborne to take the evidence of the father of the girl', wrote the superintendent, 'as he would thereby have been reduced to . . . confessing himself accessory to an act which has been declared illegal or of being guilty of perjury'. The officer, therefore, was keen to protect the father, who had violated the law to ensure that his underage daughter burnt to death. Every age count, nonetheless, was below the ceiling that pandits had stipulated.

We conceive of the colonial state as a monolithic entity. It is important to underline the very diverse stances taken by different officials in this instance. Eliot, magistrate of suburbs of Calcutta, stated in his deposition that he had

heard from the *mohurree* at the Sulkea police station that Digumburee was about 13. 'But the peculiar manner in which he spoke, and his agitated state at the moment convinced me that he had not stated the fact'. So Eliot spoke 'harshly' to him, and he confessed that she was under 12. Eliot threatened him for concealing the facts and forbade the immolation. He then received written applications from 'important natives' – 'Ramdololl, a man of immense wealth' came to intercede. Eliot and Blaquiere were unmoved.[28]

A bureaucratic procedure had emerged for counting the exact age of the would-be sati and the state was supposed to act on that. But the procedure, as we saw, was observed mainly in the breach. On the other hand, however imperfect and uncertain her immunity from death was, the little girl was, nonetheless, the first formal recipient of an absolute entitlement to life, notional though it was, as Humoulia's – and of many others' – death makes evident. If scripture enabled this – for without some citations from it, nothing could have been done – then the colonial regulatory apparatus rewrote the scriptural condition as a legal entitlement. At the same time, we find that the letter of a legal regulation did not dictate practice for a deeply divided state apparatus. Colonial officials wanted to abide by what sacred texts and Brahmanical authorities advised them to do: they also wanted to appease community sentiments. Its own orders, therefore, had a marginal status – easily waived, sometimes totally forgotten.

III

Immolations were, eventually criminalised, even though the state took more than half a century to do so – in Bengal under Regulation XV11 of 1829 of the Bengal Code, in Madras under Regulation 1 of 1830, and in Bombay under Regulation XVI of 1830. The regulations were almost identical in all cases, except in Bombay where abettors were punishable by fine and/or imprisonment with a limitation up to ten years, whereas in Bengal and Madras, the prison term was left to the court's discretion. All regulations defined abetting as culpable homicide and laid the blame on those who organised the immolations.[29] The law relied on the scriptural citations that several missionaries, colonial officials and, eventually, Rammohun Roy, a Brahman scholar, had mobilised against immolation. Roy had pointed out that in all sacred texts, the widow walks unbound to the burning pyre: whereas in practice she is bound hand and feet and then tied to the husband's corpse, and then to the pyre. Then she is covered with logs, held down firmly under their weight, and set on fire. It was plain and simple murder, he said. It was not, moreover, a standalone act or an aberration but was the culmination of female lives – as he represented them – crippled by gross injustice.[30]

The matter of her age was resuscitated in 1837. Article 298 of the draft Penal Code of 1837 had specified that if the widow was under 12, however

'ripe' she may be 'in body and mind', abettors would be deemed guilty of outright murder. In other words, her presumed consent would not be taken seriously on account of her immature age. The draft came under review in 1846 under law commissioners, one of the aims of the scrutiny being a narrowing down of judicial discretion (Law Commissioners to the President of the Council of India 1846).

The penalty now seemed too harsh and unfair. A.D. Campbell observed that women reach puberty very early in India. The overwriting of her consent below the age of 12, therefore, 'appears to me a mistake'. The Code confounds 'a person under 12 years of age with *incapacitated infancy*' (emphasis mine). He made three significant points. First, her consent to her death should be sovereign, no matter what her age – even in a context where her consent is not sought on any other matter, most noticeably, for her marriage. Second, since female puberty occurs early in India, it may happen much before she is 12, so she should be ready to die at any age. Third, the onset of her puberty alone, irrespective of her other mental and physical developments, would signify non 'incapacitated' maturity.

The issue of consent – and not only female consent – was reopened in a general context when the draft code of 1837 gave certain definitions of age. Clause 31 had specified that 'intelligent consent' alone should count legally: 'a consent given by a person who is {able} to understand the nature and consequences of that to which he gives consent'. Clause 69 pegged the notion of intelligent consent to a precise age – consent cannot exist under any circumstances before the person is 12. Clause 70 further amplified it with illustrative material. If a child under 12 has a guardian, a surgeon cannot perform a life-threatening operation even if he wants it, unless 'he is capable of giving an intelligent consent'. If he consents intelligently, then the surgeon can operate on the basis of the child's words alone.[31]

An exact age count – though not a practical alternative, given that births were not registered till much later – takes consent away from a loose and amorphous presumption of intelligence which does not specify what would, apart from biological puberty, prove the ability to gauge the consequences of an action. Nor does it explain the presumed organic connection between puberty and intelligence. The colonial predicament was, therefore, acute and the draft Code tried to partially resolve it by resorting to a specific age count. Interestingly, the state, at no point, offered its own markers of age but relied on scripture and pandits to determine that.

Clause 298 of the draft code, drafted shortly after the abolition, had been confident enough to define child immolations as murder, irrespective of the consent of children. Ten years later, many more doubts had set in. The willingness to punish immolations with maximal severity – if only in the case of child widows – had given way to an acknowledgement of her mature intelligence below the threshold of 12.

Enumerated age did create a new boundary: Before a certain age, the girl is a legal person, subjected to state law rather than to community governance. We may call this a ruse: The colonial state used this to reel in a certain group of persons as its legal subjects, pulling them away from the reign of Indian sacred norms. Or we may call it a fragile and tenuous protection for children's lives, which the state awarded on the advice of the Indian religious authorities – but which it did not try to live up to when faced with community insistence.

The supposed protection, too, was framed in contradictions. Within a day of her reaching the stipulated age of 12, the widow would lose state protection and her abettors would go unpunished. This was a conundrum which recurred at the end of the century when the new legal age of consent prohibited sexual cohabitation for girls below 12. Many who opposed the bill were quick to point out the anomaly.[32]

The century of social reform ended the way it began – with a minimal age of consent that sought to block the rape of a child wife by prohibiting sexual intercourse before she reaches 12. The Penal Code had earlier defined intercourse with girls below 10 as rape. Outraged orthodox Hindus now clamoured that this violated a fundamental life cycle rite for wives, which was supposed to commence within 16 days of menarche. They argued that all Indian girls reached that age by 10. The state, guided, as always, by liberal Hindu scholars, nervously pleaded that the rite was a symbolic one: It did not prescribe an actual and active conjugal sexual life.[33]

Colonial rule had pegged the lives and deaths of women to scriptural commands and customary regulations. Between the two fell the shadow of community norms and practice which seemed to carry greater weight than both.

Notes

1 Though they do not focus on the issues that I raise here, there is a considerable body of work on immolations. See in particular, Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1998; Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, 'The Subject of Sati: Pain and Death in the Contemporary Discourse on Sati', in Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Post Modernism*, Routledge, New York and London, 1993; Andrea Major, ed., *Sati: A Historical Anthology*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2007.
2 Ishita Pande argues that Phulmonee's death brought to the fore the state of Indian child wives. However, the beginnings actually lay with the death by burning of child widows, almost a century earlier. See Pande, *Sex, Law and the Politics of Age: Child Marriage in India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020, p. 32.
3 Tambe, A. (2019); ibid., p. 91.
4 See also Padma Anagol, 'Historicising Child Sexual Abuse in Early Modern and Modern India: Patriarchal Norms, Violence and the Agency of Child Wives and Young Women in Institution of Child Marriage', *South Asian Studies*, September 2020.

5 See also Archana Parashar, *The Family in Law*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017.
6 See also Theresa Kenney, *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2012.
7 See for instance, Emil Bock, *The Childhood of Jesus: The Unknown Years*, Floris Books, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK, 2007.
8 Some devotional sects worship him as an incarnation of Krishna.
9 Cited in Rabindranath Tagore, *Loksahitya, Rabindra Rachanabali*, Vol. 13, Centenary Edition, Vishwabharati Publications, Calcutta, 1958.
10 Vidyasagar, *Balyabibaher Dosh*, See Brian. A Hatcher, trans., *Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Hindu Widow Remarriage*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2012, p. 12.
11 17 November 1855, Legislative Assembly Proceedings.
12 See T. Sarkar, 'Holy Fire Eaters', in *Rebels, Wives, Saints: Designing Selves and Nations in Colonial Times*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet and Seagull, New York, 2009.
13 Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, Vol. XX, 1826–27, p. 17.
14 On a whole range of inappropriate immolations, see Tanika Sarkar, 'Something Like Rights? Faith, Law and Widow Immolation Debates in Colonial Bengal', *Economic and Social History Review*, July–September 2012, Vol. XLIX, No. 3.
15 Pandit Shoobee Rai Shastry's response of 2 June 1817, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, Vol. 28, 1821 (No 9) No 5 – Extract from the Progs of NA, 25 June 1817.
16 Extract, Bengal Judicial Consultations, 19 May 1797; ibid., p 23.
17 Extract, Bengal Judicial Consultations, 7 February 1805; ibid.
18 William Ward, *A View of the History, Literature and Religion of the Hindoos*, 2nd Edition, Mission Press, London, 1818, pp. 235–246.
19 Bengal Judicial Consultations, No. 6 (Criminal), of 4 October 1814, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1821.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Cases before the Nizamut Adawlut between the years 1821 and 1824, arising out of illegal suttees: Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, East India Affairs; ordered by the House of Commons, 25 March 1830.
24 Concremation or *sahamaran* was the more typical form of immolation where the wife burnt with the husband's corpse. If he died at a distant place, non-Brahman widows could perform *anumaran* where they burnt alone.
25 Bengal Judicial Consultations, 21 March 1817: letter signed by W.B. Bailey, Secretary, Government, House of Commons Papers, 1821, pp. 44–46.
26 Letter from Eliot to W. Blunt, police superintendent, 26 March 1817; J.W. Sage's letter to Blunt, 31 March 1817, appending *arzee* of Darogah of Ariadhee, dated 31 December 1817. Ibid., pp. 46–49.
27 W. Blunt to Bayly, 18 April 1817, Extract, Bengal Judicial Consultations, 25 April 1817, ibid.
28 Letter from Eliot to Blunt, 26 March 1817, ibid.
29 The dividing line between murder and culpable homicide – finally entered into the Penal Code in 1860 but discussed in earlier drafts – rests on intention and cold-blooded planning. If death accrues when both factors are present, it is murder, but it is culpable homicide when a person kills in the heat of the moment without prior plan or intention.
30 Rammohun Roy, *The Second Conference between an advocate and An Opponent*, Calcutta, 1820, included in *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, Part 1, ed. Kalidas Nag and Debajyoti Burman, Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Calcutta, 1945, pp. 118–119.

31 Ibid., p. 48.
32 On the controversies, see Tanika Sarkar, 'Intimate Violence in Bengal: A Death, a Trial and a Law', *Law and History Review*, Cambridge University Press, April 2020.
33 Ibid. Also, Padma Anagol, op cit. For a very different perspective, see Ishita Pande, *Sex, Law and the Politics of Age: Child Marriage in India, 1891–1937*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020.

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3

AGE AND MARRIAGE

Problems of Girlhood in Colonial and
Post-colonial Bengal

Samita Sen

In this 21st century, a renewed focus on eradicating child marriage world-wide has drawn attention to the persistence of underage marriage in the Indian sub-continent, along with other less developed countries of the Global South. In the literature on development, child marriage is associated with South Asia and Africa, even though scholars have drawn attention to its prevalence, historically and contemporaneously, in parts of Europe and the Americas, especially the USA (John 2021; Syrett 2016). Campaigners justify the focus on South Asia (and Africa) on grounds of scale. More than 40% of the world's child marriages take place in India, and in some regions of India, child marriage prevalence still exceeds 60%. These are widely known and disseminated facts. These numbers produced and reiterated at multiple fora help to construct arguments about an unbroken cultural continuity in marriage systems in these countries. These perceptions are reinforced by the complex genealogies of child marriage debates reaching back to two centuries, inextricably bound with India's encounter with Western modernity. A long view of a persistent culture of child marriage disregards the simple fact of a quite steep upward trajectory in the age of marriage. The 'problem' of child marriage is not that of a static age of marriage so much as a failure of the rise in the actual age of marriage to match the much steeper rise in the legal age of marriage. The decline in child marriage has been uneven, and it must be understood in the context of wider changes in the marriage system.

The legal trajectory is now well known. In 1891, age of consent in marriage was raised amidst huge controversy from 10 to 12; in 1929, equally controversially, age of marriage was raised for women to 14 and for men to 18 years; in 1949, for women to 15 years and for men to 20 years; in 1978, for women to 18 years and for men to 21 years. These ages have remained

the same since then; a new initiative for upward revision in women's age to be equalised with men's at 21 years was taken only recently but has not led to any change in law.

In this long period of a century and a half, the actual age of marriage has repeatedly failed to rise to the legal age of marriage. Indeed, the scale of the mismatch argues serious dissonance between legislation and executive branches of government. Historians have shown that orthodox opposition to the first major law raising the age of marriage, the Child Marriage Restraint Act (often referred to as the Sarda Act) of 1929, was so strong that the colonial government in Delhi instructed provincial officials not to enforce the law. Vocal opposition, however, dissipated over the 20th century. When in 1978 the independent Indian governments passed a new law, there was hardly any opposition. By then two changes had defanged the child marriage controversy: First, the new elite had abandoned child marriage in favour of sending daughters to school; second, child marriage had become associated with poverty and a regime of high demographic growth. The eradication of child marriage as a goal of modernisation, development, population control, and nation-building found near-unanimous acceptance at policy tables. Curiously though, despite lack of public opposition, the post-colonial state, like its colonial predecessor, has held back from giving child marriage laws any teeth. The age of marriage continues to rise but unevenly across regions, classes, and castes. In large swathes of the population, the actual age of marriage remains below the legal age. Almost half of India's marriages continue to be illegal, since the brides are below the age of 18 years.

This chapter takes these two changes (rather than persistence) in patterns of child marriage as the starting point. The first section will discuss some of the longer-term issues regarding legal definitions which have produced problems, such as 'child marriage'. By creating a box and labelling it 'child marriage', we have not engaged sufficiently with a key development, i.e. a very real increase in age of marriage. Infant marriage, of those below the age of 12 years, is quite rare now. The numerically largest component of legally defined child marriage is teenage marriages in the age range of 15–17 years. Many observers have opted for the term 'early' rather than 'child' marriage to describe this phenomenon (Nirantar Trust 2015). It needs to be recognised that the average age at marriage for women has risen from about 12 in the late 19th century to nearly 22 in the early 21st. We have assumed that this is 'normal' – modernisation means that child marriage gives way to adult marriage. It may be helpful, however, to explore what this means and some of its consequences. The second and third sections will discuss some of the changes wrought in the marriage system, drawing from a study in West Bengal.

Let me say a few words about the study, which was conducted in West Bengal in 2016–2018. In a field dominated by sophisticated quantitative analyses, we chose to conduct a qualitative study, based on in-depth interviews of

a small group of people who had experienced a child marriage in their family in the last five years. We chose three villages each in six rural districts (Birbhum, South 24 Parganas, Jalpaiguri, Purba Medinipur, Purulia, and Murshidabad) and three localities in Kolkata. This gave us 368 interviews. We also organised one focus group discussion of about 30 persons in each district, including schoolteachers, ICDS members, SHG members, health workers, child grooms and brides, parents of child grooms and brides, prospective child/early grooms and brides, NGO workers, and Panchayat members. The bulk of our respondents turned out to be from landless or land-poor households. Our respondents include underage brides (in a few cases underage boys who have been married as well), mothers (in a few cases fathers and/or grandparents), and mothers-in-law of underage brides. There was an attempt to capture intergenerational change, and this was facilitated by talking to parents and grandparents of underage brides and grooms.[1]

Legislating Age in the 19th Century: State, Marriage, and Labour

The issue of age – the nature of the category, technologies of determination and modes of recording – was, of course, central to the question not only of child marriage but a plethora of laws in the late 19th century, which hinged on consent and capacity. We know from scholarship from across the world that not only is the term 'child' very slippery, but there are also wide dissonances between its social and legal expression. Further, different laws for different purposes use different ages to define a 'child'. Despite such confusion, the construction of the child/adult binary continues to draw on a discourse of 'nature' and biology. The making of the social and legal artifact of age in colonial India in the context of gender and sexuality is the subject of a brilliant book by Ishita Pande. She argues that in India the child is rendered autoptic in the late 19th century through colonial governmentality and international law, marking a sharp shift from biological to digital age (Pande 2020). The legal foundation was framed by two measures in the late 18th century – registration of births and deaths and fixation of an age of majority. In this section, I will take a brief look at two laws in the 1870s – a law for compulsory registration of births and deaths in Bengal, which enabled the legal determination of age, and a law which defined the period of minority, i.e. the legal child. I will explore some of the implications of these laws for India's marriage system and labour arrangements. I will discuss too some of the contradictions written into categorical distinctions based upon age in this period.

   The passing of the Age of Majority Act (Act IX of 1875) presents some curious features. A detailed discussion of this act cannot be undertaken in the brief purview of this chapter, but three issues need attention. First, the rather muted debates around this act show that Hindu and Islamic law had

very specific digital ages for majority; the innovation of the act was not the specification of a digital age but the raising of the age of majority from 15/16 to 18. It follows perhaps from this that there was no significant discussion about how age was to be determined, though a second strand of discussion addressed the mode of calculating age. Third, the initial debates about the act were conducted as though it would affect only men; as the debate progressed and its gender implications began to surface, the relationship between majority and marriage became its most serious impediment.

The context for this law was the conflicts and disputes arising from changes in the law of succession and the East India Company's revenue regulations. Bengal Regulation XXVI of 1793 and Madras Regulation V of 1804 had already extended the age of majority of proprietors of land for the purpose of revenue payment to 18 years. Further, Acts XL of 1858 and XX of 1864 had reaffirmed minority prior to age of 18. The new legislation was proposed to remove the 'confusion and uncertainty' regarding the age at which a person could enter a binding contract (the law on contracts having been passed in 1872). Officials argued that this was in line with social trends, especially in modern education. Figures from the Madras presidency in 1871–1872 indicated that 50–60% candidates passed matriculation after 18 years. It was argued further that raising the existing age of majority in Hindu and Muslim law had only civil and no religious implications.[2]

The age of majority in both Hindu and Muslim law were specifically anchored to a digital age. According to text, custom and usage, in Hindu law, 16 years was the age of majority.[3] The variation in practice only underlines the precision of digital age – in Bengal, majority commenced at the completion of 15 years, from year 16; in the rest of India, this was interpreted to commence at the completion of 16 years. The much-cited Sanskrit aphorism ran thus – up to the age of 5, nurture the child; discipline him for the next 10 years; and after the 16th year the son should be treated as a friend.[4] Among Hindus, the ideal of *chaturashrama* – four life stages – are based loosely on age, with reference to both biological and digital age.[5] Brahminical scriptures set a digital age of 8 rather than only a biological pre-pubertal stage for *gauridaan* (gift of the goddess; the purest form of marriage).[6] In Islamic law, the maxim was the age of puberty, in case of both men and women; further, this was not a matter open to investigation by family, community or the state: 'their declaration of their own puberty, at a probable season, must be credited'. Despite such a provision to enable establishment of biological age, lawmakers specified digital alternatives for age of puberty and/or majority. According to some commentators, in traditional Islamic law and usage, puberty was deemed to commence at age 9 for girls and 12 for boys. According to Hanifa school, men attained majority at 18 years and women at 17 years after the completion of puberty; according to other interpretations, men attained majority at 19 years, yet other authorities stated

that both men and women were to be declared adults at age 15.[7] Officers writing from Burma affirmed that Buddhist law also considered age 16 years to be the age of majority.[8] For our purpose in this chapter, the two significant takeaways are: First, authorities in Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist law pinpointed with great accuracy the precise digital age prescribed for age of majority, and second, there was no anxiety about providing evidence of age.

This latter suggests that age may not have been that difficult to determine. Is this because of the existence of horoscopes or astrological charts? We know very little regarding the spread and density of such practices. We do know that among some social groups, horoscopes were crucial at the time of marriage and remain so. The compatibility of the charts of the bride and the groom influenced, even determined, marriage decisions. Indeed, among Hindus, astrological matching powered discourses of the sacramental nature of marriage as well as that of its indissolubility. For all we know, however, horoscopes were more prevalent among higher orders of society, who could afford to pay to have them drawn. The second question is about how the charts were drawn – they purport to record not only the day and date of birth but also its very moment. In the absence of the measuring instruments, such as clocks, it is not clear how the precise moment of birth was recorded. We know little regarding the saturation of skill and technology for precise time determination. It is in this context that I note the lack of anxiety expressed about determination of age in discussions of the bill. The only brief discussion in this regard pertained to the adoption of the Gregorian calendar to compute age, following the Indian Limitation Act of 1871. The act included examples of how the age was to be calculated, which assumed the existence of an accurately recorded date of birth.

On the whole, there was no great opposition to the measure. From the inception, government emphasised that this was a 'civil' measure and did not have any religious implication. A range of British official and 'native' non-official opinion pointed out, however, that this change did impact marriage. On the one hand, marriage could be said to confer on the groom the status of 'head of household' with the implication that minority ceases; on the other hand, especially for Hindus, marriage did not involve 'consent' and parental control continued well after marriage. This was not the case in Muslim practice, where marriage was a contract and required the consent of both the parties. Puberty, marriage, and adulthood were linked in traditional practice. Saunders, resident of the Hyderabad court, expressed some puzzlement about the need to raise the age of majority.[9] The chief commissioner of the central provinces, J.W. Neill, zeroed in on the elephant in the room: In a regime of varying personal laws, why was uniformity desirable in the age of majority? Why could not Hindus and Muslims continue with their own ages of majority at 15 or 16 years, while Europeans adhered to their established practice of 21 years?[10] Stronger objections on this score came from

the north-western provinces: A mere desire for symmetry was considered insufficient ground for such a significant legislation. Charles Elliott reported that the age of majority was regarded as 'quasi-religious', affecting marriage, divorce, and dower, particularly among Muslims.[11] C.D. Fields, the legal expert, pointed out that in English law, following Roman law, different ages (linked with puberty) for different capacities were specified. Moreover, he brought in the question of gender. Was age of majority to be the same for men and women, which was not the case in Roman law? In Islamic law, some schools prescribed the same age of majority for men and women, but in Hindu law, there appeared to be no precedent for an age of majority for women.[12] He suggested: 'it might perhaps be sufficient to legislate for majority for the purpose of contracts other than contracts of marriage'.[13] Others agreed,[14] and this view was adopted. The act incorporated three clauses of exception – the first excluded marriage, divorce, dower, and adoption; the second, 'religion or religious rites and usages'; and the third, anyone attaining majority before the act is passed. Thus, the act became more explicitly 'civil', averting conflicts with provisions in personal laws. It did not, however, exclude women.

These discussions were not just hypothetical – two controversies over age of marriage were raging at that time. Act III of 1872 was passed because of intense lobbying by the Brahmos, led by Keshab Chandra Sen. It enabled a civil law of marriage to be availed by those not following any of the established regimes of personal law. This law introduced the notion of a minimum age of marriage, fixing it at 14 years for women. The modes and age of marriage became the cause of not one but two major schisms in the Brahmo movement. A year after this, Huchi, a young Christian convert in Bangalore, challenged the legality of enforcing child marriage on women. Huchi's baptism had been delayed until the age of 14 years. Her parents, to pre-empt baptism, married her off to her cousin. She ran away, got baptised, and attempted to set aside her marriage since it was conducted when she was a minor and despite her expressed objections. She lost the case, as did Rukhmabai, facing a suit of restitution of conjugality in a child marriage in the Bombay High Court a decade later (Sen 2009). These cases played a significant role in placing child marriage on a solid foundation in colonial law. Government's legal experts warned that in a Hindu marriage, the question of consent, and therefore of majority, of the woman played no role at all. That is to say, in legal terms, all women were 'children' with respect to marriage, whatever their age. These pronouncements complicated the legal definition of child marriage, but such views were not undisputed. In the debates preceding the Act of 1866, the Native Converts Marriage Dissolution Act, William Muir (Scottish Orientalist in Bengal Civil Service) had argued strongly against the penal enforcement of child marriages (the Indian Penal Code was being discussed at the same time). He suggested that, regardless of Hindu doctrine,

marriage be treated as a contract and child marriages as 'simple betrothal'. Sir Henry S. Maine, regarded with good reason as the chief architect of British Indian law, argued the opposite. He insisted that child marriage was valid and could not be 'downgraded' to a betrothal. Sir E.C. Bayley (then home secretary) argued further that a full-fledged marriage could not be reduced to a mere promise. Hindu marriage was a sacrament and, therefore, indissoluble, according to these legal experts, and this included child marriage.[15] In the 19th century, in colonial Hindu law, ages of the parties to a marriage had no bearing on its legal validity.

As successive laws specified age, there were concerns about bureaucratic processes of its determination. There had been sporadic efforts to register births and deaths in the 18th century. A compulsory registration of births and deaths was introduced first in Calcutta by Act VI of 1864. By Act IV of 1873, the Bengal government extended the measure into rural areas to ascertain the ratio of births and deaths. They did not wish to introduce any elaborate or expensive mechanism or cause public inconvenience. The act merely empowered the government to enforce these measures in particular areas. The idea was to obtain statistics of births and deaths from a few select districts, which could be extrapolated for the whole province. When presenting the bill, the government was confident that a 'law-abiding' (even 'law-loving') Bengali population would fall in line with this modest measure and registration would be universalised quite soon.[16] In 1886, the provision for registration was extended to the whole of the country but on a voluntary basis. It now included registration of marriage and provided for verification and certification. This step back from compulsory registration requires more investigation. It is curious that colonial governmentality drew back from administrative processes to record age, despite the clutch of age-related laws. Despite the links made between compulsory registration and management of population, the colonial state remained hesitant about such bureaucratic interventions. These contradictions of colonial biopolitics continued to bedevil legal and judicial processes well into independence. The registration of births and deaths in India was made compulsory by an act in 1969. We are still debating universal and compulsory marriage registration.

I pointed out some years ago that the 1890s was an important decade for defining childhood by age. The highly controversial age of consent law and an amendment to the Factories Act, which raised the age defining child workers, were passed in the same year, 1891.[17] In fact, they were passed one after the other and have now been connected and explored by two scholars. These discussions point towards the 'child' being produced within the discursive intersection of education, labour, and marriage. Ishita Pande (2020) argues that by the law of consent, age was attached to the female body. Moreover, discussions about marriage and sexuality invoked passions that labouring children did not. Capitalist competition fuelled the discussion on

age of children in factories – the government being pressured by British mill-owners to equalise labour costs and entrepreneurs in India advancing arguments based on climate and culture to reap the benefits of cheap juvenile labour. She also points out that 'childhood' in much of labour legislation (as in the legislation on majority) was that of male subjects (Pande 2020). It is a mistake, however, to think that age could be denaturalised in the context of the factory. The need to implement and operationalise laws regarding child labour required precision in the determination of age and gave rise to multiple and controversial regimes of certification. Aditya Sarkar gives us thick descriptions of the administrative incoherence resulting from the failure of medico-legal solutions (bones, teeth, etc.) tried in the Bombay cotton mills. The 'child' was based on biology, but there was no biological clarity in the determination of the category. Sarkar argues that age as an objective criterion assumed that technologies of measurement would be perfected in future, a continually deferred assumption, as we shall see (Sarkar 2018).

Looking at the factory child through a gender lens has proved particularly challenging. One of the very few identifiable 'girls' in a cotton mill is Bhimi Luckha, who was interviewed by the Indian Factory Commission (1890), and her testimony is recounted by Sarkar (p. 180).[18] By and large, however, there was a conflation of 'women and children'. Female workers were almost always 'women' and 'children' were male. The conflation persisted despite, as Emma Alexander (2009) points out, quite distinct task divisions between women and children in most factories. Despite complex and changing legal definitions and the paraphernalia of certification, age remained fuzzy in the factory until the 1930s, when more effective measures were taken to eliminate child labour. Three issues, frequently discussed in labour history, need reiteration in this context: First, there was widespread contravention of restrictions in the employment of children, with the complicity of the state's inspection system; second, there was an informal family economy in operation in the factory, with women (occasionally men) bringing their children into factories, who were sometimes but not always paid a separate wage; and third, female workers, falling roughly in the ages defined as 'child', were sometimes mothers bringing their children into the factory with them.

While there has been some study of factory children, we know little about how age may have played a role in other labouring contexts. Even more than the factory, labour migration to plantations, both overseas and within the country, attracted state regulation. From the 1830s, a labyrinthine complex of laws and rules, central and provincial, grew around plantation labour. This superstructure was based on the definition of an 'emigrant' – a person above the age of 16 years. This age qualification has not been given much attention in the literature on plantation labour, which is now quite a rich corpus, even though so much is said about 'kidnapping' as a major abuse in recruitment practices. As in case of the factory, this age qualification was also subject to

certification, which was, in most situations, routine and casual. In disputes over recruitment, however, certification acquired critical significance. I have elsewhere discussed the Sohri case (Sen 2010) – but not how age determination inflected the resolution of the case. Let me take this opportunity to briefly reprise the case from the perspective of age. On 3 March 1882, a woman named Sukwaro of village Sorju lodged a complaint that her daughter Sohri had been abducted the previous night. The case turned on the determination of the girl's age. The civil surgeon examined her when she came down from Assam for the trial, and testified that she was '16 or 17, at any rate not under 16'. He could not, however, be certain. His opinion was 'founded on the girl's general appearance, on the conformation of her body, and on a deduction from her statement that she had shown physical signs of puberty'. On further questioning, he admitted that the appearances described by him were not inconsistent with the mother's claim that she was considerably below 16. The girl, Sohri, had previously been examined by the civil surgeon as an intending emigrant, under the name 'Mangri', and Dr Swaine had estimated her to be 20 years. She was thus registered as an emigrant, not as a dependent, as would have been the case had she been judged less than 16 years. The lawyers for the accused argued that the civil surgeon's certificate was entirely conclusive as to age, but the substantial discrepancy cast doubt on the certificates as 'proof'.[19]

The mother, also unable to provide any 'proof', was positive that that Sohri was no more than 12 years old. As was to be expected, 'her general knowledge of dates is extremely vague, her ignorance of these is greater than would appear from her recorded answers, some of which though positive in form, were in reality more or less conjectural'. The other witness, a resident of the same village, Bodhi, could offer no special reason for remembering the date of Sohri's birth. Sohri, who ran away from her mother and was a witness hostile to the prosecution, indirectly confirmed her mother's assertion, admitting that she did not begin to menstruate till about six months ago or, at furthest, eighteen months ago. According to colonial medical jurisprudence, this would place her in the 12–13 age group.[20] However, this corroboration of the mother's evidence did not invalidate the medical testimony. The Deputy Commissioner, A.W.B. Power, concluded that the question of 'whether she is a minor or not' remained 'open to considerable doubt'.[21]

The emigration bureaucracy was not unused to the complexity of age determination. Reports from the 1870s show that medical examiners had no great success with ascertaining age, especially in the case of women. In 1872, the medical inspector F.N. Macnamara had argued that medical examination of women was especially difficult, since 'they cannot of course be stripped for it as are the men'.[22] Dr Swaine too pointed out the pitfalls of trying to certify women's age: They 'as a rule will not submit to any examination, and will scarcely even uncover their faces'. It was difficult, he wrote, to make any

estimate, 'without making a more searching examination', which he believed would lead to their refusal to present themselves for certification.[23]

These difficulties notwithstanding, the difference between 12 and 20 years was a considerable one. Swaine was unable to confirm whether the woman he had examined as Mangri was in fact Sohri, the woman in the case, but he gave himself two escape routes. He argued, first, that others were sometimes substituted at the time of examination. Power agreed that it was not uncommon practice to hire another woman for a day or two to represent doubtful cases before the medical and the registering officers. In this case, however, the girl, Sohri, appeared to have been a 'willing' recruit and, Power believed, had presented herself before the medical and registering officers. He, however, agreed that it was 'exceedingly difficult to judge a native woman's age, when all but her face is wrapped up in loose clothing'.[24] Swaine claimed also that 'the same person' came to him 'for examination two or three times under different names' and that even in such cases there could be 'a discrepancy of three years' given the difficulty of judging the ages of 'natives'.[25] Power, who could not recall any specific instance of a person having been presented for medical examination more than once under different names,[26] agreed that the civil surgeon's opinion on ages could not be conclusive.[27] The very large variance in medical opinion on age was at odds with precision required by law. Officers agreed, moreover, that determination of age for the purpose of separating 'dependents' from 'labourers' could not be treated as 'proof' in a criminal case. Sohri was not only registered under a false name but as the wife of the garden sardar, Dhansai Kharwar, compounding criminal liability. It was acknowledged that she cohabited with Dhansai, but what was to be the proof of marriage?[28] If no marriage had taken place, Dhansai Kharwar could be prosecuted for rape. The contradictions of the Sohri case encompass the problem of proof of marriage in the absence of registration and the wide discrepancies resulting from medico-legal processes of certification. These contradictions resonated in cases of emigration disputes up to the 1920s.

The hesitation to register marriages, which enabled a large volume of marriages to continue to be legally underage, coupled with the lack of implementation of registration of births and deaths, which prevented clear determination of digital age, rendered meaningless many hard-fought legislative victories on behalf of the child in colonial and post-colonial India. The gap between making laws based on age and enabling certification of age remained glaring throughout 20th century and into the 21st. Even today, establishing age in a court of law remains a complex process.[29]

Rising Age of Marriage: An Elite Girlhood in the 20th Century

If the 1870s were a major turning point in the evolving technology of age in colonial India, the 1970s decade, a century later, was the landmark for

age of marriage in post-colonial India. Once again, there was a convergence of two sets of government initiatives – first, as already mentioned, a law in 1969 made registration of births and deaths compulsory, and second, an amendment to the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) in 1978 increased the marriageable age for girls to 18 years. The context was a clear pattern of rising age of marriage, especially for women. Ashwini Tambe (2019), in her pioneering study of the history of the category of girlhood, shows that age of marriage rose from an average of 12.54 in 1891 to 17.2 in 1971.

Notwithstanding the rise in the average age of marriage, large numbers of women continued to marry young. Mary E. John (2021) has shown how quantitative studies have veered between measuring incidence and prevalence and questioned whether such terminology is useful to understand marriage trends. Our survey confirms the basic finding that at present the concentration of 'child' marriage is in the immediately pre-adult age group (Singh and Vennam 2016; NCPCR 2017). Thus, both propositions discussed are true: There is steady increase in the age of marriage, but many women still marry below the legal age of 18 years. I reiterate the point made at the start of this chapter – that there is now very little by way of 'child' marriage – what we see is better described as early marriage. At the close of the 20th century, only 12% of Indian women who married before age 20 were younger than 15 at the time of marriage (Nirantar Trust 2015, p. 7). Thus, the widely prevalent legal 'child' marriage is, in effect, adolescent marriage.

This rise in age of marriage, however slow and halting, has innovated modern girlhood. Taslima Nasrin (1999, 2001), controversial Bangladeshi feminist writer in exile published the first volume of a planned seven-volume autobiography in 1999. She called it *Amar Meyebela* (*My Girlhood*). The translation conveys nothing of the nature of the intervention she made with the title. She coined the word *meyebela*. In Bangla, *chhelebela* or *chhotobela* were the words used commonly for childhood. While *chhoto*, meaning "small" or "young", is gender-neutral, the word *chhele* is also the word for boy and, as in the case of many other such words, is awarded universal application. Nasrin's title was a statement against this practice and to assert a claim for a gendered girlhood. This has led many (including this author elsewhere) to argue that there was no word for girlhood in Bangla. This is both true and not. It is true because there was no word in circulation or common usage. There are common everyday appellations for young boys and girls – for instance, *khoka* for boys and *khuku* for girls. These are widely used and often adopted as nicknames, but they do not lend themselves to the description of a life-stage. The strongest refutation of an absence of a word for girlhood lies in the extra-ordinary rich store of *tatsama* words (in or derived from Sanskrit) since there is a specific name for a girl in every year of her life until 16 years. The transition from childhood to womanhood, compared to lunar cycle of days is measured in years – and in many cases the

names for girls and moon are used synonymously. I wish to draw particular attention to this digital age. Though commentators in the 19th century argued that there was no precedent for an age of majority for women in Hindu law, there seems to be some gender consonance regarding age 16 as a transition to adulthood. The issues of different calendars, lunar versus solar cycles, and how these complicated modes of calculating age were not raised in discussions on childhood/child marriage in the 19th century and have not attracted scholarly attention. The overwhelming evidence of marriage and motherhood well before the age of 16 by modern reckoning has perhaps rendered such matters of detail somewhat superfluous.

As many scholars have noted, the construction of childhood that followed the encounter with colonial modernity was predominantly focused on boys (Mukhopadhyay 2019; Bandyopadhyay 2015; Kakar 1978). India is not unique in this regard; there has been a lack of awareness of the girl-child, even in the historical literature on social reform in the 19th century. In her highly acclaimed book on girlhood, Ruby Lal (2013) discusses how social and legal categories were collapsed. Legally, women were considered perpetual minors in Hindu law and for many purposes even in English and British Indian law. Even though in many parts of India, both boys and girls were married early, girls married younger. A girl passed to womanhood at marriage, which could be at a very young age, as low as seven or eight. This tension between girl and woman imbues many social and discursive spaces.

These generalised historical statements covering quite long periods of time need to be contextualised, differentiated, and re-examined. We know that there were two contradictory trends among the elite in colonial India. The 'traditional elite', whose wealth may have been based on business or land, perceived their economic interest to be premised on existing structures of family, marriage, property, and inheritance. They were thus hugely resistant to colonial legal intervention and the British often acquiesced with their demands by championing quiet change in the direction of Brahminical orthodoxy. I have argued elsewhere that 19th-century British administrators, faced with social change in their own country, appreciated the mailed fist of Indian patriarchy (Sen 2021).

At the same time, among another group of the elite – for example, the *bhadralok* in Bengal – a very different process was underway. They were the primary agents of social reform and the condition of women, especially the Hindu marriage system, was intensely debated for more than a century. Beginning with the debates over *sati* and widow remarriage, a spotlight was shone on child marriage. Several historians have addressed these issues, mapping the creation of a 'new patriarchy', the rise of cultural nationalism, which reconstituted the role of women in the family and, by extension, the nation.[30] These led to intense debates over child marriage and girls' education. From mid-19th century, questions of childhood, as well as youth, were framed in

terms of the competing advantages of marriage and education. These became connected to questions of class formation, early marriage being perceived (increasingly) as a hindrance to educational progress, professionalisation, and the making of the colonial service elite. The education of boys (grooms) necessitated that of girls (brides). The crux of B.B. Malabari's appeal in 1884 was that men should finish their education before marriage. If they did so, however, uneducated child brides became ineligible for men with college degrees. The notion of 'companionate marriage', increasingly nuclear and mobile families, prompted the growth and spread of female education. These processes of colonial capitalism and modernity tore at everyday practices of family, giving rise to a second spate of social reforms in the 20th century, with renewed controversy over marriage, divorce, and inheritance (Newbigin 2013; Chatterjee 2021). At the heart of social reform debates – both in the 19th and 20th century – was the question of child marriage. In 1891, proto-nationalists had proudly proclaimed culture to be more important than the lives of child-brides; by 1928, nationalists were forced to revisit the 'evil' of 'baby marriage' (Pande 2020; Sinha 2006). The passing of the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) was still controversial, but it won the support of educated and organised women, who were the beneficiaries of the first social reform movement. For women from such social groups, institutional education helped to defer marriage and expand physical horizons, incorporating new liminal spaces such as the school.

Historians have argued that while, among the new elite, the urban salaried, and professional groups, girls were being sent to school and age of marriage was rising, among intermediate agricultural castes, age of marriage was declining and widowhood increasing. Ishita and Deepita Chakravarty have examined the caste dimension of age of marriage and incidence of widowhood to challenge this consensus. There were crucial shifts, such as from bride price to dowry, but age of marriage and incidence of widowhood remained constant in the colonial period and long after. They argue that a 'microscopic minority' among the intermediate and lower castes, who accessed modern education, discussed increasing social restrictions as a strategy of gaining respectability, but the numbers (from the census, chiefly) indicate that there was no widespread adoption of such strategies (Chakravarty and Chakravarty 2022). Thus, as the legal age of marriage rose, continuity in marriage patterns among poorer sections of the population translated into high (or higher) incidence of child marriage.

In the 19th century, the British spoke of infant marriage. Females were infants and, after marriage, married women, *bou* (wife).[31] There was no in-between girlhood. Tambe argues that, by the 1920s, adulthood was deferred well beyond puberty for girls as well as boys – creating a space for girlhood. She draws a connection with the rise, in the international context, of the notion of 'adolescence', a stage between childhood and adulthood,

that came into circulation with the intervention of G. Stanley Hall in 1904.[32] These developments in the USA also focused on boys rather than girls, but the upward creep of the age of marriage led to the construction of a girlhood, analogous but not quite synonymous with boyhood/childhood in different parts of the world, and this did not exclude India. It was in the 1960s and '70s, however, as Tambe (2019, pp. 35–41) shows, that a social consensus (among the elite, of course) emerged regarding adolescence as a special stage in life.[33]

In the Indian context, the first attempt at an in-between legal category was in labour legislation rather than in an elite context. A 'young person' category, between ages 12 and 16, between child and adult worker with specific restrictions as to hours of work and rest was suggested during the Factories Act 1881. This was abandoned at the time of the passing of the act in favour of revising the working conditions of children. During the amendments of 1891, the category was reconsidered but not introduced. During the latter decades of the 19th century, the categories 'child' and 'young person' were hotly debated in the context of the factory. Some were in favour of defining the child as aged 7 to 9 years and young persons as 10 to 14 years; others suggested lower (from 8 years) or higher (from 12 years) limits for the latter category. In 1908, the enquiry of the commission that led to the legislation in 1911 restricting hours of work of adult male workers made a strong argument about raising the age of children to be allowed to work in the factory and the creation of a new category of 'young persons', from 14 to 17 years, aligned with the age of majority. Despite legislation on age of majority in 1873, capacity and consent continued to be hotly debated at every stage of labour legislation – influenced no doubt by international discussions regarding adolescence.[34] In these debates, as in many debates about children in factories, the assumption was of male workers. In the 1930s, work by children below 14 years was prohibited in factories. Even today, 'young persons' between ages 14 and 18 can be employed at a range of occupations, excluding only those that are considered 'dangerous and hazardous'. In labour legislation, despite changes in definitions of age over a century and a half, there has been stability in the understanding of a stage in-between childhood and adulthood – a category of youth or adolescence with capacity for labour more akin to the adult than the child.

Within these shifting contexts, the 1978 amendment raising the age of marriage for women to 18 years was a significant move. Unlike in the case of previous legislative interventions in age of marriage, however, there was little controversy regarding this change in law. The 1978 amendment is significant because it legally aligned majority with marriage and, thus, consent with contract. As Tambe (2018) points out, by the 1960s and '70s, the social category of adolescence was more clearly articulated and separated from adulthood. More influentially than law, school education gave definition to

girlhood. Initially bitterly controversial though it was, by the 1960s, gender norms changed sufficiently to accommodate urban middle-class girls going to school (Sen 2002). This meant, inevitably, the deferment of marriage from childhood to adolescence.

The state's approach to the question of child marriage changed as it declined among the elite. The British were hesitant to intervene in a custom that cut across communities and appeared near-universal. By the 1970s, the post-colonial state was able to undertake legislative change in age of marriage without much opposition. Once educated middle classes abandoned child marriage, there was little hesitation in envisaging punitive prohibition for the rest of the population. Child marriage, no longer a problem of the 'self' of the writing classes but of the 'other', that is, the working classes (and/ or the rural poor), was transformed from an issue of culture and difference to a policy consensus on development and modernity (Sen and Ghosh 2021a).

At present, child marriage is associated with the poor and especially the rural poor. It is noteworthy, however, that age of marriage remains below the legal minimum among a wide cross-section of rural society, not only the poor. Equally, there is rampant underage marriage among the urban poor. Despite some misdirection, the 'problem' of child marriage has become associated with poverty. Notably, however, the post-colonial Indian state too has adopted a cautious approach. This is most evident in the failures of the compulsory registration provision of the Act of 1969. The whole edifice of child protection laws and policy, including those related to marriage, remains on shifting sand until there is precise and accurate technology for age certification. The state has been ready with beneficial schemes to persuade the poor to delay marriage of daughters, and some of these have yielded positive results, but it has hesitated to give punitive teeth to laws that directly intervene in the marriage system. There have been attempts to strengthen the law, but implementation and enforcement remains hesitant, one could say, largely absent.

Marriage, Education, and Labour: Girlhood in Rural Bengal in the Twenty-First Century

There is, as mentioned earlier, little by way of actual child marriage in India in the 21st century. Only 3% of girls and 1.6% of boys of the age group 10 to 14 are married. By 2011, the average marriage rose to 26 for men and 22.2 for women. Copious quantitative studies have shown, however, that close to half the population still marry below the legally permitted age. Also dramatically, in the period after the last decennial census, two rounds of national family household surveys show that West Bengal has moved to number one from number seven in the child marriage league table (Chakravarty 2021; John 2021). While, nationally, the share of women aged 20–24 who married

before turning 18 has declined from 27 to 23% from NFHS4 to NFHS5, in West Bengal and Bihar, the proportion of women in underage marriage have been more or less constant at about 40%. However, even in these states, legally underage teenagers rather than very young children populate the statistics of child marriage.

The key finding from our research is that there are increasingly larger cohorts of unmarried adolescent girls in Bengal's countryside. The question of a female adolescence must be seen, in the context of the poor in rural West Bengal, as in the case of the middle classes three generations ago, in relationship with school education. In the last two decades, we have seen the institutionalisation of the 'right to education', which has led state governments to provide free primary and secondary education, usually up to Class VIII. The drop-out rate is highest at this point, which is about age 14–15 years. It is when school education stops being free that families withdraw daughters. This is in fit with a concentration of brides in the 15–18 years age group.

The spread of schooling rather than registration has provided the framework for age determination. Among younger, school-going children and adolescents, we found an awareness of digital age and some documentation provided by schools. Among older age groups, those who had no schooling or only schooling up to primary level, age as a number is less relevant to everyday life. They needed an exact age only for the panchayat or for medical reasons. Certainly, exact age is not relevant for marriage. Very few marriages are registered in rural West Bengal (Chowdhury and Mutsuddi 2021). In recent years, there have been two major projects (both hugely expensive) to record age, as minor ramifications of the Indian state's grand visions of surveillance. The state has favoured these one-time projects rather than a routine and ongoing registration apparatus. The voter ID card (officially the Electronic Photo Identity Card, or EPIC) was introduced in 1993 as an identity proof for elections, but it is also used for address and age proof. Yet the card records the age as given by the individual. Given that the state does not enforce mandatory birth registration, it cannot insist upon franchise being conditional on age certification. The ambition of population mapping was vastly augmented by the Aadhaar programme begun in 2009, which collects and stores biometric data. There have been attempts to popularise the Aadhaar card by linking it to a range of services and benefit payments. The programme was given legislative backing in 2016 but the Supreme Court rejected attempts to make it 'compulsory' in 2018. There have been huge and ongoing controversy not only over Aadhaar but also other initiatives, such as National Population Register and National Register of Citizens. One of the deepest ironies underlying these initiatives is the wholesale neglect of the basic bureaucratic foundation of mapping population – a sine qua non of modern governmentality, one would have thought – the registration of births, deaths, and marriages.

NFHS3 (2005–2006) reported that birth registration (for under five years) in West Bengal was overall 75.8% and that in rural areas 73.02%. Thus, age as a modern tool of governmentality has improved but is yet to be universal. Our experience in the field (2016–2018) was a stark reminder of continuing issues with age determination. Since we were investigating child marriage, age was an important part of our enquiries. We received a range of responses, especially from middle-aged and older respondents: some said, write whatever you like; some, especially women, gave us related dates such as the eldest child's age or year of marriage or school-leaving; some went hunting for this or that card/document; and some turned to other members of the family for enlightenment. The recourse to cards/documents did not produce authoritative results. Nor was the problem always with older respondents. In one household, the mother-in-law Kakali said, 'It is difficult to say our original age'. Her daughter-in-law gave a prompt reply when asked, saying that she was 20 years but, a few minutes later, spoke of herself as 21 years. Anjali, when asked about her present age, said, 'I have turned around 18, I think'. One of her relatives said she was older since she had been married for six years and her child was already five years. In response, she said, 'then it must be so'. Quite often, there was wide disparity between the age respondents gave us and that recorded in the documents. A mother and son laughingly flashed their Aadhaar cards at us – the son was older than the mother by the ages given in the cards. They had not cared to have it corrected because it did not matter. Many of our respondents have not bothered to acquire any of these cards, despite the promised rewards. These cards involve complex bureaucratic procedures, and there are more important demands on their time (Chowdhury and Mutsuddi 2021).[35]

Moreover, there is brisk business in fraudulent identity documents. Pallab Pal, who works in the Namkhana Registration Office in South 24 Parganas, explained that parents simply change their minor daughter's date of birth to legalise marriages. Thus, a girl of not more than 11 years was married off by her parents by faking her Aadhaar card, which gave her age as nearly 18. Sonali confessed that she was married before she turned 18, and her father spend a lot of money to get her marriage registered.

With the rise in the age of marriage and the spread of free schooling, there is now the extension of girlhood in rural West Bengal, among the poor as well as middle classes. Unlike among the middle classes, however, adolescent girls are not absorbed in schools. At about age 15, when free school education ceases, many of them are withdrawn from school. These unmarried girls, if they have dropped out of school, have nothing to do; they have no ascribed social role. They are not allowed the same freedom as boys, who roam in public, play, and access many kinds of occupations and amusements.

These processes have been reinforced by the lack of employment for women in West Bengal. There is both continuity and change in colonial economic

processes. Historians have noted the persistence of an ideology of domesticity invisibilising women's work in Bengal. In the last few decades, the crisis in agriculture and the general lack of employment opportunities have kept women trapped even more in domesticity. The coordinates of domestic femininity continue to subsume the economic activities women undertake within the household – such as artisanal activity or piece-rated production and labour in the family farm. These processes are extended to wage labour, given women's increasing involvement in paid agricultural work. As a result, there is greater control of wives and early induction of women into wifehood. The imperative for early marriage for women lies in the performance of domesticity, which is not only the chief and most significant expression of femininity, but also a capacious category within which may be fitted the ever-expanding labouring needs of the household. The natal home is not the site of disciplinary regulation; the site of women's work is the marital household, which is fashioned by a combination of early marriage, village exogamy, virilocality, patriarchy, and generational structures of female authority. The ideology of domesticity that overburdens the young bride applies in the reverse to unmarried young women. Contrary to conventional belief, even in poor families, many mothers seek to protect young girls from back-breaking manual work. In most village societies, there are social sanctions against unmarried girls being involved in public labour, while married women, whatever their age, are able to participate in the full range and diversity of rural economic activity (Sen and Ghosh 2021b).

Young unmarried women cannot (or do not) engage in paid labour, except at a very narrow range of occupations. We know, for instance, that young girls migrate to cities for live-in domestic work (Chakravary and Chakravary 2016; Sen and Sengupta 2016). They are also especially vulnerable to trafficking, but these connections need more investigation (Sen 2016). We need more exploration of gendering of the youth among the rural poor. Most young women (or girls) reported their activities as unpaid household labour. They share housework with mothers, who do often go out to work. These girls stay alone at home for long parts of the day. They may look after younger siblings, but with increasingly smaller families, this is not very demanding. According to parents and grandparents, they spend a lot of their time in indoor entertainment. It is difficult to say how far this is amplified by disapproval, but TV and mobile phone seem to be the crucial 'timepass'. And these have become the new villains of the village. Girls are able to access new ideas and information, which prompt them to challenge social restrictions sanctified by tradition, such as strict norms of gender segregation and taboos associated with pre-marital sex. These are big questions, which we cannot address in the limited purview of this chapter. I will address, briefly, one consequence of the new girlhood in the countryside – an unprecedented attempt by young girls to assert agency in marriage.

Let me start with a caveat. There is no quantitative evidence to support the view that teenage elopements are on the rise. Of our 323 respondents in seven districts, there were 28 marriages by elopements (which is 8.6%), though many respondents reported other members of the family having eloped. According to older respondents, while child marriage by parental arrangement is declining, elopement by underage couples (often both girls and boys being underage) is rising. There is, however, a strong and widespread perception that there is a rise in elopements by underage girls and boys. I wish to underline two aspects of what we encountered in the field. First, our respondents believe, with reason, that the rise in the age of marriage is responsible for the rise in elopements. This is clearly not only a perception attributable to parental disapproval. In a period when girls were married before they could exercise their agency, there was less scope for elopements. Young married women may have eloped, but we have only episodic information of such incidents. Second, the (perception of) high incidence of elopement is looping back to parents preferring early marriage. Some parents, who wanted their children to pursue education, have reluctantly agreed to elopement marriages or felt impelled to pre-empt such marriages. There is thus a combination of parental arrangement and (dangers of) self-choice in patterns of early marriage in rural Bengal today.

By and large, society remains invested in maintaining control of women via arranged marriages. The state has been complicit in such a social project with selective enforcement of progressive legislation (Tambe 2019, pp. 63–64). Indeed, the literature on marriage is replete with extreme and violent sanctions against couples transgressing caste (endogamy) and gotra (exogamy) rules, or even just exercising choice in marriage. Prem Chowdhry found in rural Haryana that marriages without consent of parents even if within rules of endogamy and exogamy were not accepted (Chowdhry 2009, 2011). Chakravarti shows how such marriages are criminalised in North India (Chakravarti 2005). In criminalisation of elopements, the state plays the role of an overarching patriarch.[36] There seems to be far greater intergenerational adjustment in marriage decisions in rural West Bengal. While there is, as may be expected, considerable marital violence and a few instances of violence in natal homes, we encountered nothing like the gruesome cases of 'honour killings' reported in the media or police complaints of rape in case of elopements by underage girls.

Till now, marriages have been driven mostly by norms and preferences of parents, but the current debate between love and arranged marriages is not wholly on generational lines. One group of parents continues to believe that daughters must defer to parental choice in marriage. One mother of a teenage daughter gave us the conventional view: 'A daughter has to accept what parents decide in the matter of marriage, it is a question of honour'. There is, however, a more tolerant view as well. Many parents are indulgent about

'love' and even elopements. In fact, very few parents are either violent or litigious. In most cases, parents not only accept elopements but also arrange a 'social marriage' (literal translation of *samajik biye*) with usual rituals/dowry. Pushpa Patra is a domestic worker in Mumbai, the primary earner in the family. Her eldest daughter eloped with a man from a higher caste while still quite young. She brought her back home and gave her a 'social marriage', which involved quantities of gold jewellery as well as other gifts. Many other respondents reported post-elopement social marriages involving all the accoutrements of conventional marriage – gold, gifts, dowry, and expensive feasting.

Sometimes, if parents are presented with a strong enough case, they accept 'love' and arrange the marriage, so there is no need of elopement. In a few cases, acceptance comes more slowly, sometimes after marriage and/or childbirth. In most cases, however, there is acceptance. Elopements by unmarried girls are transgressive but do not carry the same opprobrium as earlier. In an earlier study, we had seen that young middle-class men and women, especially in urban areas, accept arranged marriage as an inevitable reality, despite a strong ideological swing for 'love'. These compromises have been called 'arranged love marriage' (Sen and Sengupta 2016; Mukhopadhyay 2011; Uberoi 2006). The process appears somewhat different in rural Bengal. Parents are still committed to arranged marriages; children use elopements as a way of forcing their parents' hands to allow them a choice of partners. From the point of view of the couple eloping, their decision is sometimes a form of resistance against arranged marriage. Knowing that if they wait, they will be forced into arranged marriages, young men and women prefer self-choice marriages. The young are very conscious that it is their joint decision. Lilufa Bibi ran away and married when she was 16. Her mother-in-law was telling us that because of TV, girls have become prone to elopement. Lilufa intervened at this point to ask: 'Women do not run away themselves, what about the men who run away with them? Is your son not to blame as well? Why is it seen as the problem only of the girl and not the boy as well?' To this the mother-in-law gave no answer. There is willingness among young men and women to take drastic steps such as elopements. We heard from a wide range of respondents that marriage is the only socially legitimate channel for expression of sexual desire, which compels the young to elope. There is perhaps also an increasing investment in 'love' and coupledom, which harbingers democratisation of the family, vis-a-vis earlier imageries of gender segregated and age-hierarchised families. We need more research on whether popular media has popularised love and romance among the young.

Young women sometimes find the surveillance of the natal family suffocating and seek (paradoxically) autonomy in marriage. Parents blame the spread of education, awareness, and exposure for greater assertiveness on the part of young women. Almost all respondents considered the mobile

phone responsible for enabling girls to establish contact in a larger social circle, pursue relationships, and coordinate elopements. It is blamed both as a cause and a logistic support. We need more research to understand the impact of new information and communication technology.[37] The mobile phone is the focus of generational tension since parents and grandparents depend on the young to mediate this new technology. The increasing importance of the electronic dissemination of information has disrupted traditional knowledge systems and its field of power. This is particularly significant for young girls, since mobile phones enable them to overcome the limits placed on their physical mobility.

The older generations in village society are having to adjust to changing social boundaries. They accept (even if some strongly disapprove) that young women cannot be held so closely to the home. They accept that girls now access new social worlds through physical spaces such as schools and through technologies, such as mobile phones. Unable to impose gender segregation as of yore, they also accept the inevitability of 'love'. Sunita Das was 14 years old when she eloped and married. The marriage was within the same caste, so neither set of parents objected. The interviewer asked her how long she knew the man she ran away with. Her mother was amused at the question and replied wryly, 'Of course they knew each other. Would she run away with someone she had just met?' The mother is 37 years old; she had an arranged marriage when she was 20–21 years, she was a higher-caste woman given in marriage into a scheduled caste family, she works on the family farm, she does not approve of child marriage, and she had no intention of giving her daughter in marriage at such a young age. She accepted the *fait accompli* with grace, however: 'What can we do?' she asks us. 'After they run away, we preferred to organise a wedding. Otherwise, there is too much uncertainty for the girl'. We heard a similar story about Laila Bibi, who eloped and married at 15. Her parents arranged a social marriage. Her mother told us: 'We are parents, guardians, we cannot accept the scandal. We solved the problem in a couple of days among ourselves. . . . Suppose, we complain to the police or file a case in court, both the children would have suffered. At that time, we were forced to compromise'.

Dowry plays a major role in the economy of love marriages. There is a great deal written about the difficulty of daughter's marriage because of dowry. Many parents argue that they choose to marry off their daughters before the legal age to avoid escalation of dowry payment. Equally, however, the difficulty of providing dowry also delay efforts to arrange marriages. When parents accept an elopement and organise a 'social marriage', dowry and/or gifts are expected, but these conventions can be quite elastic. At one end of the spectrum, tolerance of elopement or self-choice marriages might be driven by dowry considerations. In case of Sunita's marriage, no dowry was demanded or paid. Some parents, discussing the difficulty of providing dowry, stopped

just short of suggesting that they would be relieved if their daughters married of their own choice or even eloped (Sen and Sengupta 2016). When parents disapprove of a love match, they do not pay dowry. Indeed, elopement marriages are helping brides and their families to push back against the dowry system. Sabitri Sarkar eloped and married. Her mother told us quietly that she thinks Sabitri ran away to save her poor father the burden of a dowry. By a convoluted logic then, dowry difficulty can prompt early marriage by adolescent women out of their own choice. Sabitri was abused for not bringing a dowry, but dowry violence in love marriages is not inevitable. Sajani Das (16 years old at the time of the interview) married her sister's husband's brother out of their own choice. A hefty dowry was negotiated but could not be paid. Rama Roy married for love when she was 17, six years prior to when we met her. Her parents had been unable to pay the promised dowry. Sajani and Rama did not face violence. Thus, age at marriage is causally linked to dowry in contradictory ways. The rise in elopements and self-choice marriages, which do not allow parents the same power to bargain and negotiate as in arranged marriages, helps to mitigate dowry, but not always. On occasion, the bride's family may be forced to pay more to ensure that the marriage does take place.

Usually, in cases of elopements, parents insist on marriage. This is more difficult if rules of caste and community endogamy are breached but there is pragmatic acceptance of most transgressions. When Papri, from a scheduled caste (Hindu) family ran away with a Muslim boy, her parents did not accept the marriage, but his mother did. Within the limits of our field experience, we found parents less tolerant of inter-community than inter-caste marriages. Indeed, a most salutary discovery was that many younger respondents were unable to give us their caste names. They had to ask senior members of the family. They are aware of governmental categories – general, SC and OBC – but do not know the name of their caste. This argues a loosening hold of caste. The sanction against inter-caste marriage varies by district. The most prominent in this respect was 24 Parganas, where class rather than caste appears to be more influential in marriage decisions. I will limit myself to two illustrations from this district. Sarala Giri gave us some radical views on marriage and dowry: She married twice, both times by her own choice. She has two daughters from her second marriage, and both have had inter-caste love marriages, without ritual or ceremony. According to her, caste and community no longer matters in marriage. Sumana Panja, from a high-caste educated family, eloped with a man from a low-caste *sabar* family and married in a temple. Her husband works in Singapore and earns well. There has been no familial objection to the marriage.

It has been argued that 'child marriage' should not be addressed as a problem in isolation but as part of a compulsory system of familial exchange of women, characterised by caste endogamy and structured by transactions such as dowry.

While the persistence of this marriage system in South Asia is quite remarkable, we need also to be more sensitive to local change and variation. Let me end with a brief report of a field visit to Pakhiralay in South 24 Parganas in October 2017. Pakhiralay is the gateway to Sunderbans. Pakhiralay and Rangabelia are two contiguous villages, which can only be reached by crossing three rivers, Matla and Hogla (which have bridges) and Bidyadhari (which does not yet have a bridge). There was a great demand for brides, but daughters of the village married elsewhere. Women from neighbouring villages did not wish to cross three rivers to marry into these remote villages. The poor access to health and maternity services, local respondents told us, put off prospective brides. One of our respondents said that weddings of sons had become more expensive than that of daughters. Others said that arranged marriages had become rare because the desperate young were marrying out of hand at increasingly lower ages. Everybody we met in this village told us that dowry had ceased to exist. This is an outlier, of course, but underlines how local conditions can impact the marriage system even in a short period of time. Such cases render the child marriage story far more complex than articulated in policy discourses.

Conclusion

Taking a long view of child marriage – from late 19th century to early 21st – gives us two legislative moments, when bureaucratic determination of age became linked with age at marriage. Thus, there were connected developments both in the legal construction of the 'child' and in the state's approach to marriage before majority. In the 1870s, the colonial state allowed, even affirmed, the participation of legal minors in production and reproduction, that is, in work and marriage. In the colonial period, efforts to raise age at marriage faced storms of protest from social conservatives and nationalists. In the 1970s, when the elite moved away from child marriage, the Indian state, driven by demographic concerns, was able to commit more unambiguously to adult marriage. There were efforts towards obtaining 'vital statistics' of the population along with raising minimum age of marriage to majority. Despite public consensus against child marriage in discourses of modernity and development, however, the post-colonial state was as chary of enforcing civil registration as it was of preventing child marriage.

Through social change, particularly modern schooling and new configurations of class, age of marriage did rise steeply over the twentieth century. By the 21st century, *child* marriage had given way to *early* marriage, that is, marriage of girls in their mid-teens and boys in their late teens. This is legally child marriage since rise in actual age of marriage has been slower than the upward revision in the legal minimum age of marriage. Despite a steep rise in the median age of marriage, there continues to be an enormous number of legally underage marriages.

With the slow upward creep in age of marriage, there has been the creation of a female adolescence. The process started among the urban middle classes in the 20th century, when women began to experience a longer adolescence in-between infancy and adulthood. A similar female adolescence has now extended to rural society with the actualisation of the right to education in the 21st century. The new freedoms of school, along with the rapid roll-out of new information and communication technology, has enabled adolescent teenage girls and boys to meet, resulting in self-choice marriages. If the young fear that parents will not be willing, there are elopements. Thus, in a curious paradox, the decline in child marriage by parental arrangement leads to a rise in self-choice underage marriage. However, love marriages are evidence of adolescent girls asserting agency. While this can take the rather drastic and sometimes risky form of elopements, it can also lead daughters to invoke the law against parents forcing unwilling underage daughters into marriage. To frame the question as one of 'persistence' of child marriage overlooks such fundamental changes in its social practice. We must locate child marriage within the dynamic complex of the productive and reproductive relations encapsulated in the marriage system.

Notes

1 The research project was undertaken in collaboration with the American Jewish World Service. I thank the team that helped with the study, especially the fieldwork: Deepita Chakravarty, Seema Chatterjee, Anindita Ghosh, Utsarjana Mutsuddi, Ishita Chowdhury, Biswajit Hajam, and Rubina Khatun. A larger group, including local NGOs, was involved at various field sites, my thanks to all fieldworkers. All names of respondents have been changed to protect privacy.

2 It is perhaps one of the few non-official Bills of such great significance to have passed in this period. The bill was brought by 'Vijayaram Raj of Vizianagram'. This was Pusapati Vijayarama Gajapati Raju III, who died in 1879. India Office Library and Records, British Library, London [henceforth IOLR], Political and Judicial Department, L/PJ/5/19.

3 The proposer, Raja of Vizianagaram, argued that the age was a mistake made in the process of translation by British codifiers. The scriptures can be quoted for many purposes. See Pande (2020), pp. 52–56.

4 IOLR, Political and Judicial Department, L/PJ/5/19. Letter from C.D. Field to Junior Secretary to the Government of Bengal, 19 June 1873.

5 National Archives of India, New Delhi [henceforth NAI] Home department, Public branch, February 1875, A 59–60. Memorial regarding the provision of the Majority Act (IX of 1875).

6 Interestingly, Blackstone allowed a female of 7 to be betrothed or given in marriage (Book 1 Chapter 17). Legal mandate for marriageable age seems to have been more or less at similar levels in many parts of the world at that time.

7 IOLR, Political and Judicial Department, L/PJ/5/19. Abdul Latif, Secretary to Muhammedan Literary Society, Calcutta, to Officiating Secretary to Government of Bengal, 24 September 1873.

8 Judicial Commissioner to Officiating Chief Commissioner, British Burma, 4 December 1873. Ibid.

9 Letter from C.B. Saunders, Resident, Hyderabad Court, to Secretary, Government of India, 20 May 1873. Ibid.

10 Letter from Officiating Secretary of Chief Commissioner, Central Provinces, to Secretary, Government of India, 18 July 1873. Ibid.

11 Letter from Secretary to the Government, North-Western Provinces, to Government of India, 26 September 1873. Ibid.

12 There are several schools within Islamic law in which this is not the case. For instance, for some Shias, age of majority for women in 9 years while it is 15 years for men. Some fascinating cases have been presented in these discussions, especially raising the question of mother's custody over daughters.

13 Letter from C.D. Field to Junior Secretary to Government of Bengal, 19 June 1873. Ibid.

14 NAI, Home department, Public branch, February 1875, A 59–60. Memorial regarding the provision of the Majority Act (IX of 1875).

15 NAI, Home Department, Ecclesiastical Branch, August 1881, A15–17.

16 IOLR, Political and Judicial Department, L/PJ/5/107. IOLR, Political and Judicial Department, L/PJ/6/170. Some other cities had separate provisions for compulsory registration. Both Bombay and Madras passed separate legislation to enforce registration.

17 First presented a paper at a workshop entitled 'Transnational Labour, Transnational Methods', University of Toronto, 8–14 June 2008. A much-revised version was published in 2021 (Sen 2021).

18 Her age is given as 10 or 11 years and she is not married. Also see Report of the Indian Factory Commission, 1890, p. 44.

19 Note by A.W.B. Power, Deputy Commissioner, 31 May 1882. WBSA, General Department, Inland Emigration, July 1882, A1–7.

20 The authority cited in this case was the Chever's Medical Jurisprudence (Edition 1870, pp. 671–672) stating that in India it was very exceptional for menstruation to be delayed beyond the 13th year.

21 Decision signed by A.W.B. Power, Deputy Commissioner of Lohardangga, 1 June 1882, WBSA, General Department, Inland Emigration, July 1882, A1–7.

22 From F.N. Macnamara, Medical Inspector of Labourers, to the Superintendent of Labour Transport, 6 April 1872. WBSA, General Department, Emigration Branch, April 1872, A 7–99.

23 From F.R. Swaine, Esq., M.B. Civil Surgeon, Lohardangga to the Deputy Commissioner, Lohardangga, No 140, Ranchee, 19 June 1882, WBSA, General Department, Inland Emigration, July 1882, A1–7. There are similar accounts of difficulties of determining age of women in Bombay cotton mills (Sarkar 2018, pp. 190–195).

24 Note by A.W.B. Power. WBSA, General Department, Inland Emigration, July 1882, A1–7.

25 Swaine to the Deputy Commissioner. Ibid.

26 From A.W.B. Power, Deputy Commissioner, Lohardangga to the Commissioner of Chota Nagpore, No.976G, Ranchee, the 19 June 1882. WBSA, General Department, Inland Emigration, July 1882, A1–7.

27 Note by A.W.B. Power. Ibid.

28 From J. Ware Edgar, Officiating Commissioner of Chota Nagpore to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, General Department, No. 293 Cr, Ranchee, 21 June 1882. [File 20-1-6]. Ibid.

29 In December 2020, Jyoti Singh was raped and killed by five men. It became known as the Nirbhaya case. One of the men 'proved' that he was a few months short of 18 years by producing a certificate from his village school, was tried as a juvenile, and was released after three years causing enormous controversy. There have been

other such cases – with heinous offenders 'proving' juvenile status through myriad kinds of documentation.

30 There is a huge literature on this. Perhaps the best critical summary can be obtained in Sarkar (2000). For a specific perspective on child marriage, see John (2021).

31 In South 24 Parganas particularly, all adult women are addressed as *bou* (wife) on the assumption that they must be married. It is virtually synonymous for women.

32 There is increasing interest in 'youth' as a social category (overlapping with adolescence but without the medico-legal resonance); see, for instance, Tom Wilkinson, 'Youth Movements and Mobilisation in Postcolonial India, c. 1930–1970s', PhD Dissertation, London School of Economics, 2022.

33 This is also the period of the emergence of the 'second' feminist movement. It is feminist scholars who began the discussion on the girl-child. In this phase of the feminist movement, the focus was on marriage but in relation to dowry and violence rather than age at marriage.

34 See Reports of Bombay Factory Commission (1885); Indian Factory Commission (1890); and Morison (1908).

35 With the introduction of more welfare schemes, there is now a greater demand for documentation. In fact, politicians and activists often help groups to obtain the various 'cards' they need as a first step in mobilisation.

36 There have been many high-profile reports of violent reprisals from family and community in case of elopements in other parts of India, especially north India. For discussion of various aspects of the question with a focus on north India, see Mody (2008) and Sadana (2018).

37 In this very new field, there are, somewhat surprisingly, two excellent papers on how domestic workers use mobile phones. See Wilks (2021) and Malhotra and Ling (2020).

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4

REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD AND THE STATE IN KERALA

J. Devika

Introduction

This chapter attempts a preliminary historical sketch of the regimes of childhood in Malayali society – by regimes of childhood, I mean the specific, historically shaped network of rules, norms, ideas, practices, procedures, and institutions that implicitly or explicitly govern childhood. Childhood and the child were, no doubt, central to Malayali society as a project of the late 19th and 20th centuries. Childhood was first a goal to be actualised, first, by younger members of the bourgeois class, but later, they became available to other classes too.[1] I focus on the late 19th/early to mid-20th century to the present, in which this society transitioned from being poor, largely agricultural, and relatively marginal to post-independence India to a rich, globalised, migration-dependent region.

Feminist research on Kerala has largely noted continuities in patriarchy between these times – for example, the persistence of reproductive responsibilities that hamper women's entry into labour markets (George, 2013) – but there has also effort to make sense of the shifts in the patriarchal framework and its effects (Devika, 2019). However, much less attention has been paid to childhood in Malayali patriarchy – to the ideas and understandings of the child and childhood as well as to practices of childcare and childrearing and the instruction of children, the agencies held responsible for these, the overseeing authorities, and the lived lives of children, which together constitute specific 'regimes of childhood'. This is curious, because a host of changes, including the post-demographic transition environment, the rise of economic and social inequalities, the shift away from private to public schooling, the entry of the global discourse of child rights, and so, on have visible impact

on children's everyday lives in Kerala. The limited but insightful social science literature on children in Kerala in earlier decades often focused on child labour (for example, Nieuwenhuys, 199, 1995); there is a slim body of work that focuses on adolescent issues (for example, Mathew, 2005), but most of this does not assume critical distance from the global construction of childhood circulating through NGOs and government agencies, with some exceptions (for example, Sancho, 2012).

I have argued elsewhere for more careful and focused research into the socio-economic shifts that constitute the 'post-demographic transition' scenario in Kerala (Devika, 2008b). In such a context, the young human is much closer to a kind of 'raw material' that mothers are expected to work on in 'child-crafting' through which they are to be shaped into docile skilled labour for the global job markets. I have also pointed out the intensification of age as an axis of patriarchal power and how the struggles of youth have opened a new front in the anti-patriarchal struggles that questions binary gender itself (Devika, 2019, 2021). Extending this further to children, I suggest that the shape of emergent patriarchy in Kerala was, and is, such that the centrality of the politics of childhood to it is hard to miss. However, this is not to say that the framework of 'women versus children' in questions of power and interest is best to make sense of emergent patriarchy. Rather, we may need a greater grasp of 'the socio-political, structurally elaborated positions that constitute and constrain relations between women and children' (Burman, 2018, p. 12). Recent work on the intensification of child care which sets up women's interests against those of their children has pointed to how late capitalism and austerity has familised all the more the provision of needs of communities, even as compulsory schooling and early years education mandated on a global scale puts women and children 'at odds in relation to social reproduction, which they may have previously carried out together' (Rosen and Twamley, 2018, pp. 12–13). In this chapter, I do not make such a full-scale inquiry. Rather, I attempt what may be a tentative, preliminary sketch of the different regimes of childhood in 20th- and 21st-century Malayali society, and the 'broad social processes that in their interaction come to constitute – rather than deliberately aim to constitute – social practices that define childhood' (Alanen, 1988, p. 64) that may be necessary for this larger investigation.

Secondly, such historical inquiry is crucial to avoid nostalgia in analyses of the contemporary politics of childhood. Such lapses make it impossible to maintain critical self-distance from the regimes of childhood – for, usually, this nostalgia is for a certain, dated, Eurocentric vision of childhood, attributed to former times, evident, for example, in David Elkind's popular book on the 'hurried child' (1981) and Indian versions of that argument (for example, Kumar, 2006).

Thirdly, the symbolic politics of childhood has been long recognised as inextricably intertwined with the politics of gender. Indeed, it makes children

'convenient symbols for our better selves, and we use them to make points, make laws, win elections' (Fass and Mason, 2000, p. 1). Shulamith Firestone's insights into the inevitability of the inclusion of the struggle for children's liberation in the feminist revolution – of how the oppression of children and the constant infantilisation of women by patriarchal authorities (Zehavi, 2018) point in that direction – was an early cue about how tracking the vicissitudes of the symbolic politics of childhood may yield insight about the changing shapes of gender itself. In examining the shifts and transformations of the social construct of childhood, I also make an attempt to follow these transformations in Malayali society.

This chapter consists of two sections, followed by a conclusion. The next section of this paper dwells upon the Malayali regimes of childhood that were shaped in and through social and community reformism and nationalism in the late 19th and 20th century. I pay special attention 'responsible parenting' and 'romantic childhood', drawing upon a variety of writings from the period. The section that follows dwells on the extent of change in the late-20th-to-early-21st-century Malayali society. The conclusion offers a summary of the arguments and further reflections on the questions raised earlier.

I

The reform of family life, conjugality, and childcare were central themes in the early speech and writing by 19th-century missionaries and others on the civilising mission in Malayali society. 'Correct parenting' as the missionaries imagined it was hailed as both a sign of civilisation and the path to it. It set up parents as primary socialisers of children and primarily committed to family life. Also, children were expected to stay completely obedient to such parents. In other words, the entire burden of raising the child was placed on the shoulder of the parents – biological parents bound together by conjugal marriage. These ideas, flowed of course, from Europe, filtered through colonialism and British liberalism. Historians of childhood in Europe note that the idea of the child as a delicate vessel made or marred by parents, in whose upbringing the state would have to take a keen interest and active role through reforming the family, was quite familiar among the privileged classes at least (Heywood, 2001; Stearns, 2006).

It was not easy to transplant these ideas to 19th-century Malayali society (as has been noted for other non-Western societies (Brockliss, 2016). An abundance of progeny was generally welcomed in Malayali society then, given that death rates were high, and an agrarian society needed a large number of hands and landed families needed heirs. The socialisation of children was performed, for the caste-oppressor-classes, in joint families, matrilineal or patrilineal; among the caste-oppressed, children were raised in the

community and in spaces of labour, and natal alienation was common as Dalit children were considered to be the property of the mother's master (Mohan, 2015). However, the missionaries and the agencies of the modernising kingdom of Travancore advanced this parent-centred model of socialisation and childcare – 'responsible parenting' – as a natural and gendered obligation of parents. It required a great deal of energy from the parents, especially the mother (Devika, 2007) as the child was considered a nature-ordained investment that parents are obliged to make, the shapeless mass which they would shape through correct parenting. The by-now familiar triangular configuration between childhood as non-social, family as its appropriate context, and socialisation as the process[2] was becoming familiar (Alanen, 1988). In turn, the child was to be valued not just for being the heir or labour but also as the best means of ensuring the longevity of the marital union.[3]

Further, the child was to be the point of connection between the emergent paternalistic modern state – of Travancore – and the family, since responsible parenting was meant to shape industrious and docile citizens. As the dewan of Travancore, T. Madava Row (Madhava Rao), remarked in his tract 'Hints on the Training of Native Children' (1889), not just the family but also the nation needed healthy and disciplined children. The family was to be the training ground on which the child encountered non-coercive political power that fostered life through the enlightened father. 'The child must be informed time to time that a just government takes care of all the people in the same way as a father cares for his children', he wrote (p. 60). Corporal punishment, widely remembered in autobiographies as common in homes and traditional schools, was to be minimised. The circular issued by Alfred Sealy, who was the director of education in Kochi in 1890, limits the power to inflict it to the highest authority:

> No corporal punishment is to be inflicted on a pupil in any class of a Sircar school except by the Headmaster of the school, or at his express order and in his presence. Teachers stand in the place of parents to their pupils and kind and encouraging words are generally better than blows to make boys work.
>
> *(Sealy, 1890)*

These ideas were advanced through a great many vehicles, including speeches and writings of missionaries, modern educators, colonial officials, newly educated local elites, social and community reformers, school curricula, popular press, novels, government publications, and so on, and they gained velocity and reach through the expanding network of modern institutions focused on society and culture in 19th- and 20th-century Malayali society (Devika, 2007, 2008a). Besides, the child was also central to the new imagination of gender that began to thrive in these times. It was viewed as

a kernel from which gendered identities could be nurtured. Though with roots in bodily sex, gender was viewed as ultimately a social achievement, to be perfected through socialisation. The perfect upbringing of a child, therefore, also included shaping a properly gendered subjectivity by nurturing the capacities, dispositions, talents, etc. ostensibly given by bodily sex. So a 'failed' adult – someone who could not occupy their prescribed social space, i.e. the domestic or the public – was someone who failed to develop their essential potential for gender, masculine or feminine.

It is important to stress how central responsible parenting was to the subsequent public discussions on child-rearing in 20th-century Kerala. It was the ground on which much discussion about limiting the numbers of children in families, part of the larger discussion on population control and national development in post-independence India, turned, serving both those who approved of fewer children and their opponents. For instance, Rev. Mathen's 19th-century criticism of matrilineal life was not an argument for lesser progeny, but rather the opposite. In advocating conjugal families and marital fidelity, he implicitly pointed to these as the fundamental condition for steady parental investment in children: 'Children born to couples living in mutual fidelity are found to be strong and healthy, but the offspring of those who lead a loose and stray life are mostly weak and sick' (Mathen, 1865, p. 351). More than a hundred years later, in 1970, a pro-abortion lawyer, K.I. Nainan, justified abortion with the argument that parents would not invest in a child from an unwanted pregnancy, and the result may be an anti-social child.[4] The child-as-essential-potential appears too as the ground for the arguments of those who argued in favour of raising the female age of marriage as a birth control measure, and their opponents. An illustrative instance is a debate on this in the *Malayala Manorama* in 1970, in which an article by an opponent of the move who believed that it would lead to girls straying and men becoming disinterested invited a spate of responses, some approving of it and others rejecting it. The arguments of both opponents and supporters of raising the female age of marriage hinge upon the girl's fulfilment of the responsibilities of a housewife, understood as a gendered ability needed for the proper socialisation of citizens for the modern nation.[5] That responsible parenting meant responsibility not just to the child but also to the nation and the state was by now commonsense, clearly.

Child-socialising, then, was undoubtedly a gendered and gendering activity. The new mother-craft was all about gaining the skills to keep the child's body healthy and to shape its internality and it was clearly defined as the exact opposite of existent socialising practices followed by mothers which were roundly condemned for example, in the late 19th-century Malayalam novels (Devika, 2007). For example, in *Meenakshi* (1890), at the beginning of the novel, the eponymous heroine is a girl of 12 who is working towards attaining feminine perfection with the diligent efforts of her guardians. They

are said to have raised her affectionately from infancy closely supervising her interactions with others and not permitting the 'unnecessary recreations and socialization that some other girls are sometimes allowed' (Nair, 1890/1990, p. 77). She was also educated by senior and serious men and sent to school to learn English and needlework. Meenakshi's mother tells her sisters:

> When it comes to girls, they must be taught proper reserve and modesty. Don't let them go hang and play on the necks of strangers. For that, the parents need to be sensible. Secondly, the men of the house should keep their eyes and ears open. Don't get them into marriage alliances with some thug or other. And if they see some waywardness that must be suppressed immediately.
>
> *(p. 67)*

Meenakshi attains the man of her choice four years later. This concern continued to be voiced in 1932, this time espoused by birth-control advocates, who claimed,

> It may be possible to admit that the earlier animal-like motherly affection expressed in kisses and cuddles with little concern for hygiene, nutrition etc. has decreased with birth control. Today's mother who has limited the numbers of her children is striving very hard to provide them with favourable circumstances as far as she can.
>
> *(The* Mahila*, 1932, p. 373)*

The aim of it was to foster dispositions, inculcate skills, deemed appropriate to the sexes (conceived in binary terms) without the two familiar practices in child-rearing: violent physical disciplining and *vatsalyam*, or indulgent mutual affection (more about the latter later). Not surprisingly, a huge volume of discourse was devoted in these decades to discussing how education in general, and female education in particular, could be revised to help particularly sexed infants grow into properly gendered individuals, whose perfection would be discernible in their ability to conform to ideal masculine or feminine subjectivities and heteronormativity.

But even as this was to become the overwhelming commonsense about the child and childhood in 20th-century Malayali society, echoes of the romantic conception of childhood were also heard, especially by the 1930s and after, times in which internal critiques of rationalising and individualising social reform developed. The child as predating all the divisions of the world, as the fullness that adulthood loses but which it must strive to recover, does appear, for example, in the writings of early female literary authors Balamani Amma and Lalitambika Antharjanam. Balamani Amma's work displays the tensions between responsible parenting and romantic childhood (Devika, 2007). Thus

even as she shares the vision of the child as an inimitable, exceptional entity, she is also filled with anxiety as a mother, about being in charge of what is also the nucleus of a future human. Writing in 1951 about the mechanical regimen children were being subjected to, she observed:

> The old-timers insist: only children raised by the stick will thrive . . . The new reformers who treat those old-timers with contempt, on the other hand, are insistent in the name of discipline that each movement of the child should be assigned a particular time and yield a particular advantage . . . Many of those who are overly concerned about the health and education of children do not realize the truth that only health that is built upon happiness is lasting, and that in a slavish mind, education does not shed light but merely produces smoke.
>
> *(Amma, 1951, pp. 26–27)*

Unlike in responsible parenting, in romantic childhood, biological foundationalism is not always the rule when gender is represented. The feminine gender is projected as an irresistible tendency that blooms by itself early in the female child, while the boy has to grow up. As a proposed regime of childhood, romantic childhood became popular in the 1950s through the work of great Malayalam poets like Akkitham and Vailoppilly, but it was the work of a relatively minor poet, K.S.K. Thalikkulam, a story-poem titled 'Ammuvinte Aattinkutti' (Ammu's Kid Goat), which became its most endearing voice.[6] In it, eight-year-old Ammu's selfless love for her 'child', a kid goat whom she has named Kuttan, finally wins over the heart of the landlord who had bought him to be slaughtered for a wedding feast when she hands him her only valuable possession, a gold neck-chain, to buy Kuttan back. Ammu's love for Kuttan is praised for being impeccably maternal. Her 'child' plays lovable pranks, while her affection is constant love admixed with admonishment (Thalikkulam, 1963, p. 43). But Ammu's love is so powerful that it not only reverses the landlord's purchase of Kuttan but also effects an ethical transformation in the landlord, who proclaims that no meat will be served at all at the wedding feast (p. 48)

That is, the qualities deemed feminine in social reformist discourse – altruism, the disposition towards loving care and sacrifice for loved ones, patience, the ability to transform others through tears, entreaties, emotion, and gentleness – seem to be already present in Ammu; she is already perfectly womanly at the age of eight. This is a child who needs no raising. The other female child-protagonists in this collection of poems (Malathy and Padmini) too display flawlessly feminine qualities and these include a disposition to be of help to all in the family (Thalikkulam, 1963, pp. 31–32; 36). Both these girls are described as the recipients of the unconditional and indulgent love felt towards children – *vatsalyam* – of their mothers (which differs from the

emotional framework of responsible parenting, which requires more distance, especially physical, as Balamani Amma implies),[7] which seems to make their inherently womanly nature bloom and thrive. All these little girls are depicted as going to school, but school seems to play little role in perfecting their abundant femininity.

These 'little women' offer a sharp contrast with other children who are subjects of Thalikkulam's other child-centred poems in the same volume – for example, 'Vaasuvinte Jolitthirakku' (Vasu's Busy Schedule). Vaasu is a little boy engrossed in play – dragging the palm-frond-bull around, parading his toy elephant, 'selling' all the mud-pies, playing father-mother with his little female playmate Janukkutty. The poet's exaggerated ire berates the mother, who tells Vaasu to do his lessons, when he has so many important tasks to finish. The poet then points out that Vaasu alone lives in his little world of pure joy, one where there exists no divide between the real and the unreal, one that older people can only watch and enjoy only from the outside (Thalikkulam, 1963, pp. 33–34). Unlike Vaasu, the three girls engage in what may well be labour, which, however, seems to be rooted in the delightful and unself-conscious blooming of femininity in and through a female child. The little boy, then, is pre- or non-social and has to grow into a man, but the little girl is already a woman (even Ammu's sister, the four-year-old Jaanu, is already caring for her sister's 'son', the kid goat).

But another reading of these poems that describe child-women would probably make us see Ammu as the older sibling in a tenant farm-household with traditional child-raising practices (there is reference to the harsh punishment meted out to her by her father angered by the damage the goat does to his crops) who shares labour responsibilities with adults, helping with the care of farm animals, who juggles school and work, and who negotiates independently and successfully with other adults for her own ends; Malathy, as the child who already contributes to domestic labour at the age of eight, is entrusted with responsibilities for the care of the elderly and younger siblings, and respected for it, and Padmini is the child who is already confident enough to offer care to an indigent elderly stranger on her own.

In short, the romantic conception of childhood does not disempower female children even as they are ensconced within a heteronormative order; indeed, they seem to possess agency, value, and respect through their ability to exercise 'gentle power', which, unlike in responsible parenting, is not instrumentalised to the ends of the nation-state in its project of shaping industrious citizens. It is no coincidence that though 'Ammuvinte Aattinkutty' is set in an unequal scenario characterised by tenant-landlord relations, the poems in it also gestured towards a society animated by the anti-caste and compassionate values of Sreenarayana Guru. It seems to rely on the revaluation of the feminine, retaining the modern identification of women with the 'gentle power' of love, care, and patience (Devika, 2007), but elevating it, raising the feminine

as the fount of the Sreenarayaneeya value of *anukampa*, or deep compassion, that emboldens its possessor to challenge authority and both demand and elicit an ethical response from them (as Ammu does, from the landlord). It also revalues the traditional form of adult-child love, *vatsalyam*, as the mode of parental interaction with children and emphasises non-violence.

The state and caste/community is conspicuously absent in 'Ammuvinte Aatinkutti'. In the 1950s, the romanticised Indian nation is a presence in the discourse of romantic childhood. But it needs to be asked if romantic childhood ever was a full-fledged regime in itself, or merely resistance to responsible parenting – this calls for further research.

II

'Ammuvinte Attinkutti' was written in the immediate post-independence decade in which, as Sriprakash et al. (2019) point out, the newly constituted nation sought to free itself both from the legacy of the coloniser's infantilising, as well as the denigration of Indian children by colonial culture and rule. In Kerala, the later part of the 20th century coincided with a period in which an intense discourse on population control spanning decades finally culminated in the shaming of large families (Devika, 2008b). In the mid-20th century decades in which a leftist national-popular imagination became hegemonic in Kerala, material circumstances that favoured the physical and social well-being of children were established – which led to great improvements in child health and access to schooling, as well as the basic social security for stable families (Mannathukaren, 2021). Also, in the course of the 20th century, birth rates fell. By the 21st century, these developments had peaked. School enrolment continued to rise in Kerala until the fall in birth rates led to a decline in enrolment in absolute terms (Planning Commission of India, 2008, p. 40). The proportion of children in Kerala's population fell from 42.6 in 1961 to 23, 4 in 2011, and infant mortality rate, from 80 in the 1960s to 6 in 2017 (Rajan and Misra, 2017, p. 4). According to the Kerala Migration Survey of 2017, 85.6% of families in Kerala have no children aged below four. The gradual shift of children from the workforce to schools in this period increased the costs incurred for each child while increasing the value of each, confirming a more or less universal post-demographic transition pattern (Mahadevan and Sumangala, 1987). Recent research points to very significant changes: for example, the undisputed dominance of the nuclear family form compared to the 1960s, women's entry into higher education in unprecedented numbers, increasing childcare burdens on women, and rising aspirations to upward mobility through employment and education of children in families cutting across class, caste, and community lines (Osella and Osella, 2000; den Uyl, 1995; Thampi, 2007; Arun, 2018; Chua, 2014; Devika, 2019). With many decades of migration by (mostly) Malayali

men for work to the Gulf countries starting from the early 1970s, Kerala had become a heavily migration-dependent society and economy by the 21st century (Rajan and Misra, 2017, p. 12). This has led to heavy inflow of resources to families, which invested them in 'safe' options (like house construction), prestige consumption (like marriages), and educating their children to ensure their entry into the global job markets. Average per capita consumption expenditure in Kerala, which was below the national average in the late 1970s, rose 41% above the national average by the close of the century (Kannan and Hari, 2002, p. 201).

Most importantly, the late 20th century saw the arrival of the highly individualising and Eurocentric discourse of child rights into India and Kerala[8] (Balagopalan, 2002; Raman, 2000), as well as the transformation of the local state from a welfare-oriented developmentalist state to a neoliberalised and governance-oriented state, with impacts on the conception and practice of public welfare. Welfare was responsibilised through the ideology of self-help, with individualised welfare handouts becoming prominent in the state's welfare measures. The community itself was now understood in liberal terms, as the collection of individual families (Devika, 2016). With rising incomes and falling family size, in the 1990s, the removal of children from paid work and their universal enrolment in school were fast becoming reality. In the 1980s, researchers found children working, and being counted as workers, in traditional industries such as coir (Gulati, 1980; Nieuwenhuys, 1994, 1995), and they also found that gender hierarchies structured the work performed by boys and girls, orienting the boys into income-generating work outside the home, and girls, towards domestic production and reproduction (Nieuwenhuys, 1994).[9] Nieuwenhuys found that the condemnation of child labour as harmful to the child ended up justifying the rampant exploitation of children in family-based work (1994, pp. 204–205); she also questioned the opposition between schooling and child labour from her fieldwork that covered periods from the 1970s to the 1990s. However, by the 1990s, in popular Malayalam press, even indigent families and communities in which teenagers worked for family survival received universal condemnation. For example, teenage girls of Kerala's impoverished fisher communities were now working in prawn-curing factories in faraway Gujarat and other places. Though research among them revealed that the decision to migrate was theirs, that they had to convince their parents, and that they enjoyed working and living with their peers away from home, the public discussion on their migration often projected it as a form of child trafficking (Nieuwenhuys, 1995).[10] Towards the end of the 1990s and the new millennium, media sensationalisation of sex-trafficking of teenage girls facilitated a strongly protectionist interpretation of child rights (Sreekumar, 2009; Devika, 2009). Survivors of these crimes were projected as unrepentant pleasure-seekers or innocent children trapped by unscrupulous men. Pubescent girls were never really

accepted as 'children'. Whenever the teenage girl survivor of the crime was faulted for being sexually depraved, she was also pushed out of childhood. But both kinds of 'depravity' seemed to invite the state's corrective measures.

These changes seem to have brought into being two regimes of childhood which shade into each other but still have distinct features. The first of these is what could be called the 'aspirational regime' of the Malayali middle class, in which the child is a resource that parents 'own', or may use to their own ends (in practice, if not in letter), which they seek to mould into forms that bring prestige and upward mobility to their families (Sancho, 2012, p. 110). If in responsible parenting of the early 20th century the child was the meeting point between the parents/nuclear family and the state, belonging to both, and demanding particular kinds of attention from both, in the aspirational regime, the shaping of children's inner worlds, mental and physical skills, and dispositions is now predominantly a family enterprise, aimed at primarily family upward mobility, with the state assuming the role of a mere facilitator. Meanwhile, the highly individualising discourse of global child rights had, by now, become all-pervasive in the state policy aimed at children and informed deeply the institutional network of child network that came to be formed here from the 1990s. The contradictions in the global child rights discourse – the fact that 'although children are afforded basic rights by virtue of their humanity, children's rights legislation has been from the outset geared towards protecting the special status of childhood' (Shanahan, 2007, p. 417) – seems utterly visible. The target to the child governance network has been largely the children of the poor. This forms the core of a fourth regime of childhood which may be called the regime of child governance. This overlaps significantly with the third, for example, in that both are centred upon an understanding of the child as mouldable material for family upward mobility and upon aspirations. But if the third is shaped by parental authority, it is the paternal authority of the neoliberalised and securitising state that shapes the fourth. And as Leya Mathew (2016) points out, the aspirations of the middle classes and the poor are not on the same ethical plane. Mathew notes in her work on the oppressed-caste mothers in the Pathanamthitta district in Kerala that these women's aspiring for their children is an ethical practice aimed at escaping historically continuing caste humiliation, which is quite different from the higher-/middle-caste and class ambition to further consolidate their advantages (Mathew, 2016). These aspirations, she points out, evoke irritation anger, even disgust, among others, unlike the aspirations of the middle classes.

David Sancho's ethnography (2012) focuses closely the aspirational regime of childhood pursued by middle-class families that were recently upwardly mobile, from migration or technical education (Sancho, 2012, pp. 109–110). In this group, family upward mobility was a project planned essentially by parents and executed by both parents and the child. It is framed by the

discourse of the 'self-sacrificing parent' and the 'dutiful progeny'. This discourse continues to present this joint project as the self-chosen venture of the child, and "authoritarian and intensive craft-like parenting is both imposed and disguised through idioms and stereotypes about the modern Indian family and youth, which portray modern parents as detached and highlight youth's supposed individual freedom and thirst for success" (Sancho, 2012, pp. 130–132).[11]

Sancho also notes that the aspirational regime is gendered even if the discourse of youth ambition seems to be gender-neutral. Individual aspirations are placed on both girls and boys, but this rarely affects the well-entrenched gendered expectations that they carry from infancy: Boys are to be oriented to the world *outside*, specifically, the market, while girls are expected to recognise the *inner* world, i.e. the home and the community (of caste and religion), as their 'natural' space, and so are to be oriented towards marriage (Sancho, 2012, pp. 120–121), and so girls' educational choices and career preferences are shaped in accordance with their future expectations in the family that they may marry into (Sancho, 2012, p. 121). However, compared to responsible parenting, the female child is 'thinly' gendered – gender is understood as necessary but essentially a social construction, not something that has biological roots. The child has to grow up to respect it, but it may be set aside temporarily to make way for aspirations of upward mobility.

Children who are subject to the regime of child governance, however, largely belong to the lower middle class and the poor, who use the state school system (Ortiz et al., 2013; Chacko, 2019; Mathew, 2016) and study in the Malayalam medium. If the parents project themselves as 'mere facilitators' while actually setting the terms of the conversation in the aspirational regime of childhood, in the child governance regime, the state claims to be a facilitator but also provides the horizon of aspirations within which the child may be permitted to choose. As Ortiz et al. point out, while the local government network creates spaces for children and provides them with resources, planning that will draw children from all classes and spaces which will make children active participants and not passive beneficiaries are still distant (Ortiz et al., 2013, p. 42). Also, as Mary Ann Chacko shows in her ethnographic inquiry into the Kerala Police's much-lauded student cadet programme, the programme claims to be completely gender-neutral and meant to empower girls (who are more often than not from lower middle-class or very disadvantaged social and familial backgrounds), but the female empowerment it achieves is 'ambivalent and conditional', highly individualised and demanding of a certain 'disciplined femininity'. Also, it 'ironically sanctified masculine privilege and externally-endowed protection' (Chacko, 2019, p. 14). Similar inconsistency seems to exist between the Kerala Police's community policing aimed at children, which promises participation, empowerment, and protection for vulnerable children,[12] and the appalling violence

that marks some police interventions aimed at precisely lower-middle class or poor teenagers, especially boys. The ones directed against ostensibly 'wayward' youngsters have been often moralistic and violent, often involving caning and crude corporeal humiliation (like the chopping of the styled hair of truant male students in a 2015 police operation code-named 'Operation Vidyalaya').[13] Besides, children of the lower-middle class and the poor who can only afford government schools and Malayalam medium education bear a disproportionate share of the burdens of perpetuating Malayali linguistic identity and becoming good citizens and 'humans' through state-funded Malayalam medium schools (Mathew, 2016, p. 88).

Nevertheless, the child who is amenable to moulding through the hard work of parents seems to be an idea shared between the two regimes. Naturally, 'failed children' are a constant concern in public discourse, and both middle-class families and child governance try to tackle it constantly. As far as the child-subject of the middle-class aspirational regime is concerned, there is very tight adult control on what may count as agency: Enthusiasm for a high-flying career is conceded as agential, while choosing a partner or wanting to have sex would be a sure sign of 'failure'. Adults maintain this dividing line with a host of practices, for example, by controlling exclusively the boundary between adulthood and childhood and letting children talk while setting the terms of the conversation, both revealing the extent of children's powerlessness vis-à-vis adults (Dunne and Kelley, 2002). And when the middle-class child 'fails' (i.e. to live up to parental expectations), the blame is often put on parental overprotection and overindulgence – a surfeit of consumption – which makes children weak and incapable of overcoming challenges and disappointments. Consumption, especially, is blamed when young female students 'stray', which is sometimes a code word to describe teenage girls' effort to secure some consumptive agency (Lukose, 2005). This argument comes up commonly in discussions of rising child suicides in Kerala especially among the middle classes (for example, Chua, 2014). But as Chua notes, the response has been not to abandon consumerist aspirations but to 'immunise' children to such self-destructive tendencies, fortify their agential capacities through therapy and other methods, and further bolster their confidence (Chua, 2014, p. 177).

The 'failed' underprivileged child is the target of child governance through by NGOs, local governments, and other agencies, and is expected to develop 'proper' agential capacity through these. The 'failures' of the oppressed-caste working-class teenager are immediately attributed to 'distorted agency', directly attributed often to under-parenting, a failure of the family, and even the aspirations they may have for the child (Mathew, 2016). But common to both sides of the divide, the blame is attributed to individual parents or families and structural inadequacies and pressures are mostly ignored in the public discourse of childhood now. For example, there is evidence that schooling

for the poorest is still ridden with caste-stigma, such that these institutions are referred to derogatorily, with oppressive caste names attached – *para/ pelapallikkoodam* – and that the education provided here does not enable students to escape social oppression and economic denigration (for instance, Mathew, 2016). And even when there is considerable concern about the 'hurried childhood' (Elkind, 1981) of present-day middle-class children in the Malayalam public sphere, the structural conditions that turn them into raw material for child-crafting are hardly criticised.

Poignantly enough, among both the better-off and the worse-off, domestic violence, even physical violence, against them is involved, as recent studies show (Sancho, 2012; Mathew, 2016; Kumar et al., 2019). A study based on nearly 7,000 samples in a city in Kerala revealed that child abuse was rampant – the one-year prevalence of abuse of any form was nearly 90%. Despite all the effort to protect children from sexual abuse, it seems highly prevalent; nearly 20% of the sample reported lifetime sexual abuse (which was the least compared to other forms of abuse) and boys reported more abuse than girls (Kumar et al., 2019). However, this violence rarely produces outrage; public discourse is inflamed only by the most shocking cases of sexual and other physical violence that results in severe damage to the child's body or its death.[14] Incidents of the severe physical abuse/murder of young children by their caregivers, especially mothers, form some of the most frequently appearing lurid and moralising news reporting in present-day Kerala.[15]

These arguments are well-illustrated in two recent events that provoked considerable public discussion. The arbitrary shifting of the boundary of childhood in cases of sexual crime against two socially oppressed and economically underprivileged female children, aged 13 and 8, has been quite naked in the recent case of atrocious violence against two Dalit girls in the Palakkad district of Kerala in 2017, which culminated in their alleged murder. The acquittal secured by the three accused persons in 2019 caused a public uproar against alleged political interference and police bias in favour of the accused. The police seemed to have failed at every step in delivering justice to the children and their parents who are construction workers. The state's machinery for the delivery of children's rights seemed to have failed too – the chairman of the district Child Welfare Committee had appeared as a lawyer earlier for one of the accused.[16] The Justice for Walayar Kids committee has accused the investigating officer M.J. Sojan of making public comments that the children had 'enjoyed sexual harassment' and has demanded his arrest.[17] This atrocious comment reveals that the sexualisation of female child victims of crime from underprivileged social backgrounds in public discourse, which has now a history of nearly two decades (starting with the infamous sex-trafficking cases of the turn of the millennium), is still an ongoing story. Meanwhile, the media coverage that

sought to play up the children's innocence and vulnerability only confirmed the observations made in research on the disempowerment of the female child that the protectionist reading of the child rights discourse effects that subtly shifts the blame on to the shoulders of the parents, on their alleged neglect. The widespread public discussion has not had an impact on the government; meanwhile, it seems to foster the 'politics of pity', seeming to confirm Claudia Aradau's observation about the evocation of human rights in the securitisation of human trafficking: 'if human rights have become the rights of those who are too weak or too oppressed to actualize and enact them, they are not "their" rights. They are deprived of political agency; the only rights are our rights to practice pity and humanitarian interventions' (2004, p. 259)

The other incident that was passionately debated in Kerala and India was the suicide of a hardworking, dedicated, high-performing first-year undergraduate student at IIT Chennai, 18-year-old Fathima Latheef, who claimed in her suicide note that she was driven to it by the discrimination she suffered on grounds of her religious affiliation from teachers and others.[18] The reasons for her death have been widely debated; of interest here, however, is the manner in which she provided an occasion for the articulation of the ideal child of the middle-class aspirational regime of childhood. One reason that the outrage over her death was especially pronounced was because she did not fit into the familiar versions of the 'failed child' but was the eminently successful one – diligently pursuing her studies, possessing extremely well-developed academic abilities, securing high rates of success in exams and extracurricular activities, with clear goals and sustained effort, free from the attractions of consumerism and other distractions typical of teenagers, fully devoted to her family.[19] Her parents made it amply clear that they were fully supportive of their child's ambitions. Fathima's father was vocal about what he perceived was the callous indifference of the educational institution towards her daughter; it was widely called an 'institutional murder'. There was widespread protest. One wonders what the public response would have been if Fathima had not been such a perfect fit for the ideal child of Kerala's middle-class aspirational regimes? Would there have been the same outpouring of sympathy? Also, by exiting her childhood 'successfully', i.e. by entering a prime institution of knowledge and setting her sights on a prestigious career unmindful of the concerns about marriage and family that her Malayali peers normally encounter, Fathima seems to have benefitted from the 'thin' conception of gender as a social construction that may be temporarily suspended, and escaped sexualisation in her death (her desire, they said, was channelled entirely into intellectual preoccupations). But it is evident that her life and death were indeed assessed in gendered terms, albeit implicitly. She also fitted well into the 'happiness assemblages formed around and through girl power', and

therefore, her suicide immediately mobilised many around the discourse of the empowered girl,[20] especially the empowered Muslim girl (Lesko et al., 2015, p. 38; Khoja-Moolji, 2018; Caputo, 2018); her cry against Islamophobia on campus made her suicide an important message to all concerned about the unrelenting attack on Indian Muslims by the Hindutva regime. What if she was neither of these? What if she had not spoken at all about the reasons for her suicide? In 2004, public outrage was roused by the very public suicide of Rajani S. Anand, a 19-year-old Dalit student of engineering (a 'merit student') who killed herself when there was no more hope of financial support for her studies. This death, too, could qualify to be considered an 'institutional murder'. This victim, too, could claim to have exited childhood 'successfully', aspiring to a career in engineering and trying hard to mobilise the resources to stay in education. But the discourse of the empowered achiever-child was hardly invoked in Rajani's case, though one could argue that she was as ambitious and able to overcome societal constraints of gender in her life choices. There were strong public protests in this case too. But Rajani could not escape intense sexualisation: Questions were raised about her character, and the government was accused of ordering a virginity test on her body (Devika, 2009, p. 32).

Finally, a fifth regime of childhood, one that views the child, especially the Muslim child, as a 'security risk' seems emergent from recent police action against youth suspected of 'Maoism'. In a recent case which has generated enormous public outrage, the Kerala Police arrested two youths on the charge of Maoism, imposing the draconian UAPA provisions.[21] The claim made by the police that the boys were under surveillance over the past five years, when they were high school students,[22] appeared preposterous to many, but may well be intelligible within this new regime of childhood. However, this 'securitised child regime', if it becomes full-blown, might be a regression to colonial times in which the colonial government was found the Indian child to be potentially seditious and a source of constant anxiety (Topdar, 2015).

Conclusion

In the discussion thus far, I have recounted the different 'regimes of childhood', with different degrees of success in actualisation, from the mid-19th century to contemporary Malayali society. Each of these relied upon a certain conception of the child and childhood with different consequences for children; each of these is gendered, again, with different inflections and consequences. Of these, two belong largely to the 20th century, and the third and the fourth to contemporary Kerala, deployed on children of different social classes. They coincide with very different moments of social transformation and refer to different conceptions of the state. The first of these, proposed

in/for modernising Travancore of the late 19th century but readily adapted to post-independence India, was responsible parenting, which conceived of the child as a nucleus of potential in which parents were to invest in through maintaining a steady marriage and a stable, properly gendered family and household; it focused on shaping the child's essential internality without much physical punishment and turning it into an industrious (and properly gendered) subject of value to the nation and relied upon a biological foundationalist understanding of gender. The second regime proposed, romantic childhood, was perhaps more of critique of the rationalising responsible parenting regime that was dominant in major social and community reformisms of the time. It signalled, however, not so much to a really existing political formation, as an imagined ideal society of the future.

The third, the aspirational regime of childhood, is dominant in contemporary Kerala, especially among the Malayali middle classes. There is a visible inconsistency in it between the manner in which children are treated and the ways in which the child is projected. While the child is treated as raw material for 'child-crafting' for parents – with no essential properties, unlike in responsible parenting – to serve the upward mobility of families in a socially conservative, if migration-dependent, society, it is also projected as already-agential, ambitious, and oriented towards an upwardly mobile life, which a self-sacrificing parent must encourage. Though it is a gendered regime, gender is a 'thin' presence in it, so for women, it can be set apart temporarily for advancement in career.

The fourth regime, child governance, which overlaps with the third, targets lower-middle-class and poor children. It deploys the global discourse of child rights; its political horizon is the neoliberal state, playing the role of the facilitator, providing support to children to maximise their agential capacities through trainings and space-making (like the adolescent groups and *balasabhas* mentioned in Ortiz et al., 2013, and the Kerala State Child Rights Policy, 2016). This is, however, often inadequate to level the inequalities, given that children of disadvantaged families bear the disproportionate burden of state-funded pedagogy oriented towards citizenship and not the market, which does not often build skills (Mathew, 2016). However, unlike responsible parenting, in which there was considerable caution about maintaining existing family life – initiatives that let other national or international authorities assume (presumably colonial) paternalisitic authority over local institutions were not always encouraged (Sriprakash et al., 2019, p. 354) – in the neoliberal regime shaped by the global discourse of child rights, parents who are perceived to be burdening the state with poor childcare and thereby the destruction of precious future human resources can be removed, but the structural conditions as well as the immediate needs of these families are rarely addressed. This has been especially the case of the victims of sexual violence, very frequently children of highly disadvantaged or otherwise

troubled families. As Keddel (2017) points out for child protection in New Zealand,

> Within a social investment paradigm, parents are positioned as the instrumental subjects through which children will be raised in ways that avoid future costs to the state . . . [The parents'] own vulnerabilities are viewed as non-legitimate. Children are viewed as vulnerable victims and 'damaged becomings', as the emphasis is on their future productivity.
>
> *(p. 102)*

In Kerala, the lack of adequate resources for child governance prevents this system from being developed to the full – but to the disadvantage of both the parents and children, with the vulnerability of neither lessened. Worse, the relentless sexualisation and abjection of female children of disadvantaged families seems to be unabated, as is evident from the ongoing struggle for justice for the Walayar children.

A fifth, emergent regime, the securitised child, takes aims at the teenagers and youth. There is, in it, a throwback to colonial anxieties.

Going back to a question evoked in the introduction, whether one can make better political use of 'womenandchildren' (Enloe, 1993) instead of turning towards a 'women vs. children' framework, it appears to me that the account demonstrates how tightly and closely the politics of gender and the politics of childhood are bound within specific politico-historical contexts. For example, in contemporary Kerala, the protectionist interpretation of child rights coincided with the protectionist understanding of women's strategic interests (Devika, 2009). But it is imperative to note that in all four regimes of childhood outlined earlier, the mother is positioned as the major and natural caregiver vis-a-vis the child, but the nature of the mother's power, her relation to political authority, the nature of care, and the act of giving all differ, such that a linear conception of maternal dominance over the child is not entirely tenable. If the mother was the centre of hope and the target of much development pedagogy of responsible parenting in the mid-20th century, in the contemporary deployment of child rights in Kerala, the state machinery may even penalize runaway mothers, arresting them and charging them with child neglect.[23] Also, it is evident that the story is not a journey from gendered conceptions and experiences of childhood to gender-neutral ones. The empowered achiever child of the neoliberalised Malayali middle class is not freed from gender, but the female child may set it aside temporarily and partially; as for male child, his script is clearly of the self-driven, enterprising, ambitious man making his place in the world. But the less-privileged female child has to deal with the risk of sexualisation, and the male child, with the burden of proving the benign nature of his masculinity, and both have to cope with the inconsistencies between

discourse and practice of child governance in Kerala. Clearly women's sub-ordination under modern patriarchal regimes in Kerala is not the same as children's, they are not even always parallel to each other, but it is possible to identify the points of convergence and departure. This chapter has probably thrown up more questions than answers; hopefully, they will generate further research.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 In a way similar to what Jacques Donzelot remarks about in another context (Donzelot, 1980).

2 Alanen (1988) mentions this 'triangular configuration' as the framework relied upon for too long for sociological studies of childhood.

3 For an example, see the long discussion by the CMS missionary Rev. George Mathen (1865). See Chandanappally 1992: 574.

4 K.I. Nainan, in the discussion 'Garbhacchidram Saadhukarikkaamo?' [Can Abortion Be Justified?], *MalayalaManorama*, July 5, 1970, Sunday Supplement, p.I.

5 See Elikkutty, 'PenkuttikaludeVivaahapraayamKoottaruthu' [The Age of Girls' Marriage Should Not Be Raised], *MalayalaManorama*, August 21, 1970, p. 6; Susan Abraham, Thiruvalla, 'PenkuttikaludeVivaahapraayamKoottanam' [The Age of Girls' Marriage Should be Raised].

6 Published in a collection by K.S.K. Thalikkulam in 1960 of the same name, the poem 'Ammuvinte Aatinkutty' came to be much-read among Malayalis. It was made into a film in 1978 by the well-known film director Ramu Kariat. It was extended by the well-known contemporary writer E. Santhoshkumar, in his story 'Cheruppakkaaranennanilayil Ezhuthukaarante Chhaayaachithram' [A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Man] which problematizes Ammu's abundant altruistic femininity. See Kumar 2000. Kariat's film won the award for Best Children's Film in 1979. A recent goat-rearing programme for school students in 2013 also drew upon its name.

7 In their perceptive essay on the notion of *vatsalyam* in Indian traditions, Sen and Pandit (2013) Point out that *vatsalyam* in the Bhakti tradition is 'the all-consuming desire to bless, to confer grace, to nurture and nourish' (p. 169). *Vatsalyam* here is intensely physical too. Sen and Pandit note that it was believed to translate into the following behaviours: 'inhaling the child's forehead; massaging and caressing the child's limbs like back, forehead, hands and feet; blessing and giving instructions; nourishing and nurturing through acts like serving food etc; and commanding and giving advice to the child as a form of mentoring' (p. 170). Moreover, they show that the expression of *vatsalyam* does not represent a one-way flow from adults to children (p. 172). The romantic version of childhood in many Indian languages, including Malayalam, is imbued with the *vatsalya* rasa, and Thalikkulam's poetry of/for children exemplifies this.

8 The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child arrived here in the 1990s, after the Indian government's Plan of Action for Children (1992) and the Kerala State took up plans of action focused on the child in 1995 and later 2004, adopting explicitly a rights-based approach to children's issues in 2011, setting up the institutional network and authorities for its implementation, such as the Child Welfare Committees in all districts. The Kerala State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights started functioning in 2013. The new millennium saw the passing of the Juvenile Justice Act (2001), Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (2012), the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009), and so on, which now form the framework of child governance in India today. In Kerala too, a range of institutions, from NGOs such as the Don Bosco Veedu Society, which advances a highly protectionist and familial reading of child rights, the Kerala Mahila Samakhya, meant to take up women's education, but now intervening actively in cases of child sexual abuse, and the local self-governments, to which the government functionaries of child governance were devolved, were all involved in the network of child governance. See https://dbveedu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Annual-Report-2014-2015.pdf, accessed 15 March 2020; http://14.139.60.153/bitstream/123456789/8657/1/2nd%20Joint%20Review%20Mission%20of%20Mahila%20Samakhya%20%289th%20to%2017th%20November%2C%202009%29.pdf, accessed 15 March 2020; for an account of the LSGs' measures for protection of child rights implemented with the help of the self-help groups of the Kudumbasree, see Ortiz et al. (2013).

9 Child labour was widespread in Kerala for the most of the 20th century and accounted in large measure for the profitability of such new industries as cashew and coir in the early twentieth century. See Klyuver 1923 (and other reports of that time), quoted in Nieuwenhuys (1994, pp. 179–180, 181–183), Lindberg (2001).

10 As Iversen (2006) points out, it is not as if all child labour is beneficial to the child and completely voluntary. However, the general condemnation of all child labour as equally and invariably harmful is unhelpful (p. 12).

11 Similar aspirational regimes are seen among middle classes across the country. See Kumar (2011), Donner (2006), Tuli and Chaudhary (2010), Seymour (1999). This is also a theme that arises in studies of changing family relations in India in the wake of accelerating urbanisation and globalisation. See Bhatia (2006), Uberoi (2007), Sharma (2003), Gupta and Panda (2003).

12 See for instance www.bprd.nic.in/WriteReadData/userfiles/file/201907030901335393404ACommunityPolicingInitiativeforChildren-MM-02.pdf, accessed 16 March 2020.

13 See http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/thiruvananthapuram/Low-rise-jeans-high-crime-in-Kerala-district/articleshow/7130625.cms. Also, 'Police Chop Hair of Kids Bunking Classes in Kerala', *News Minute*, January 17, 2015, http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:UD3z_CxVRJgJ:www.thenewsminute.com/keralas/645&hl=en&gl=in&strip=1&vwsrc=0, accessed 9 September 2015; www.abplive.in/incoming/2015/06/16/article620376.ece/At-least-60-students-bunk-classes-to-watch-Malayalam-blockbuster-Premam-in-Kerala-caught, accessed 9 September 2015. See also, www.thenewsminute.com/article/kerala-dalit-teen-alleged-torture-police-custody-crime-branch-submit-report-soon-69626, accessed 16 March 2020.

14 Data from the Kerala Police Department shows a steep rise in crimes against children, with POCSO cases (classified as 'Other Crimes Against Children') growing exponentially, https://keralapolice.gov.in/public-information/crime-statistics/crime-against-children, accessed 15 March 2020.

15 See, for example, www.news18.com/news/india/to-save-extramarital-affair-kerala-mother-smashes-baby-against-rocks-repeats-act-to-ensure-death-2507043.

html, accessed 15 March 2020; www.thenewsminute.com/article/kerala-mother-lover-arrested-slowly-torturing-her-2-year-old-son-death-93637,accessed 15 March 2020; www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/mother-arrested-on-charge-of-killing-toddler/article26974561.ece, accessed 15 March 2020; https://english.manoramaonline.com/news/kerala/2019/03/29/thodupuzha-child-torture-arrest.html, accessed 15 March 2020.

16 See https://indianexpress.com/article/india/kerala/walayar-minor-sisters-rape-case-everything-you-need-to-know-6096348/, accessed 15 March 2020.

17 See https://kochipost.com/2019/10/29/how-the-system-conspired-to-deny-justice-in-the-walayar-case/, accessed 15 March 2020; www.thenewsminute.com/article/punish-dysp-sojan-justice-walayar-kids-forum-demands-3rd-day-satyagraha-116748, accessed 15 March 2020.

18 See https://openthemagazine.com/features/fathima-latheef-death-on-the-campus/, accessed 15 March 2020.

19 See www.azhimukham.com/kerala/family-members-teachers-neighbours-remember-fathima-latheef-chennai-iit-student-committed-suicide-64874, accessed 15 March 2020.

20 Lesko et al. explain 'girl power' thus: 'Girl power is a progress narrative that entices, energizes, and focuses attention. It is a relational narrative in which Western (white and middle-class) ideas of agency, individualization, and ambition are "wished" on other girls. Empowered girls circulate as a form of happiness, as at-risk girls (constrained by patriarchal constraints, sexual predators, or lack of "grit")' (p. 38).

21 See www.edexlive.com/news/2019/nov/08/how-the-kerala-polices-use-of-uapa-against-two-students-has-got-kerala-raging-8980.html, accessed 17 March 2020.

22 See https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/thiruvananthapuram/dont-extol-maoists-cm-to-oppn/articleshow/73944408.cms, accessed 17 March 2020.

23 See www.thenewsminute.com/article/why-kerala-woman-was-arrested-abandoning-her-baby-despite-cradle-baby-scheme-111729, accessed 16 March 2020; https://keralakaumudi.com/en/news/news.php?id=102040&u=mother-ditches-her-child-to-marry-tik-tok-lover-ends-up-in-jail-102040, accessed 16 March 2020; https://kafila.online/2017/11/13/thoughts-on-the-continuing-assault-on-womens-rights-and-progressivist-gaslighting-in-kerala/, accessed 16 March 2020.

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5

THE TRAVELS AND APPEAL OF THE 'GIRL CHILD'

Ashwini Tambe

Introduction

The concept of 'girl child' emerged in Indian contexts in the 1980s and travelled in multidirectional ways via UN agencies, reinforcing measures undertaken in the 2010s to 'invest' in girls. In this chapter, I offer an institutional genealogy of the term, tracing how its age coordinates shifted in its trajectory from Indian demographic research to UN bureaucracies, NGO actions, corporate campaigns, and Indian state-led development initiatives.

The invention of the locution 'girl child' is an important moment in the shifting understandings of girlhood in modern India. When one considers the history of girlhood in India and elsewhere, it is clear that there is much that is not self-evident about the actual content of the category 'girl'. To start with, the legal age boundaries of who counts as a girl shifted across time. At various points in modern Indian history, the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing were legally assigned to girls below age 10, and then after 12, 15, and 18 years of age. Until recently, Indian child labour laws restricting employment under the age of 14 or 15 focused on factories and workshops and notoriously ignored domestic work, a form of obligatory and usually unpaid labour that has shrunk the life chances of countless girls, especially those who are Dalit or economically precarious. In other words, Indian law has been singularly ambiguous about when childhood ends for girls.

If we are to consider girlhood in a non-legal sense and as a cultural and discursive formation, it typically constellates qualities such as playfulness, innocence, and vulnerability. But these traits are contingent on social status. Historians note that the entitlement to play has been the prerogative of middle-class and racially dominant groups – in other words, those with the

means to provide leisure and sheltered conditions.[1] Queer theorists caution that the notion of childhood innocence generally relies on adult fortressing for its preservation: Kathryn Bond Stockton argues that childhood innocence merely inverts what are considered adult qualities of knowingness and sin and that it is a mistake to 'take innocence straight' (Stockton, 2009, p. 12). Following Lee Edelman and Jack Halberstam, Stockton stresses that the way childhood is framed says more about adults than it does about children themselves.[2] The field of US Black girlhood studies most poignantly shows how traits such as vulnerability have been denied to Black girls as a consequence of their adultification in a racist society.[3] The cultural entitlement to girlhood, in other words, is distributed in problematically unequal ways.

The 'girl child' as a term emerged in India in the 1980s at a significant point in a long history of unevenly defining girlhood. In 1920s debates about the age standards for sexual activity, vulnerability was described differently depending on whether it was marital sex under consideration: The same legislators who insisted on the minimum age of 16 and 18 years when it came to prostitution, concubinage, or even abduction held that the marriage age should remain 12. When the age of marriage was raised to 18 in the 1970s, it was less in the interest of protecting girls vulnerable to early marriage and more against the perceived threat of a population explosion; fertile girls were framed as a danger.[4] When the term 'girl child' emerged in the 1980s, it signalled an effort to invest the girl with vulnerability in the context of a panic around skewed sex ratios, as explained in detail in the following.

At first glance, there is an odd tautology within the term 'girl child'; after all, girls are, by definition, children. However, pairing 'girl' with 'child' does work of many kinds. The term 'girl child' clarifies that the child in question is specifically a girl rather than a boy, signalling also that girl children are vulnerable in gender-specific ways. It also clarifies age and not just gender. The suffix 'child' implies more specific age coordinates than the more ambiguous 'girl': women in their 20s and 30s continue to be called 'girls' long after using the word 'boy' is inappropriate for men of the same age. In India, this practice has a specific inflection in common parlance: Even women in their 20s and 30s are not described as 'women' until they actually marry. The norm of compulsory marriage conflates adulthood with married status, and a woman remains a 'girl' unless she is married. This frequent detachment of the term 'girl' from chronological age boundaries explains why, in India, demographers in the 1980s began adding 'child' to the end of the term 'girl' to specify that the term referred to young girls – frequently those under 10 years. The suffix 'child', then, reminds readers of the young age of the girls in question. The term conferred and confirmed vulnerability.

My genealogy of the term 'girl child' reveals something striking about the trajectory of institutional interest in the 'girl': from its early moorings in the problem of skewed sex ratios in India arising from violence against very

young girls via female infanticide, female foeticide, and female malnutrition, this interest grew into a more specific focus on adolescent girls. As the UN took up problems specific to what it also called 'the girl child', it placed special importance on girls undergoing puberty and adolescence. Even as this interest culminated in the 2012 UN declaration of the International Day of Girl Child, it remained shaped by a focus on adolescent girls.

Why does it matter to look more closely at the age range implied in these various knowledge projects focused on girls? It is because the incorporation of these various age groups – those in their teenage years alongside those who were newborns or toddlers – within a single category called 'girl' is itself a historically recent conceptual formation. The age boundaries of girlhood expanded significantly over the course of the 20th century, and particularly with the growing impact of the term adolescence. The concept of adolescence emerged in US psychology in the 1910s and travelled slowly to India, cemented through US Cold War soft power in expert circles of psychology and education. Many Indian languages have no precise word for categories such as 'adolescent' or, for that matter, 'teenager'. In Sanskrit-influenced languages, there are terms for youth (*taarunya/tarun/taruni* and *kumar/ kumarika*) and a male young man (*yuva*) but no terms that suggest an intermediary stage or puberty.[5] None of the terms that are used are specifically anchored by fixed age coordinates (such as 12 to 18 years) because a centring of chronological age was itself, as Ishita Pande (2020) shows, a modern construct. The closest word in use for a teenage girl in Sanskrit-based languages is *kanya*, which translates as virgin and usually connotes unmarried but nubile status. The idea of adolescence as a recognisable life stage for girls was consolidated in India only in later decades of the 20th century, especially via English-speaking journal articles in psychology, sexology, and education in the 1960s and 1970s.

The question of how girlhood, and indeed the life stages of childhood and adulthood, are imagined and demarcated has generated surprisingly less scholarship in South Asian history than it should. Perhaps the reason scholars are more comfortable focusing on problems affecting children (such as child labour) rather than historicising the category of the child is that historicising childhood risks unsettling the social consensus to protect children. Even if those who historicise the category of the child do not a priori question the principle of protecting children, the idea that protection is a socially and historically contingent mandate is deeply uncomfortable.

The invention of the locution 'girl child' in the 1980s was a significant point in the varied history of how vulnerability was assigned to girls. In sharing the genealogy of the 'girl child', I demonstrate that intellectual influences did not only flow in a centrifugal pattern radiating outwards from Anglo-American contexts. They also flowed out of India in the opposite direction. The concept of the 'girl child', travelled, I argue, from Indian contexts to UN contexts in

the late 1980s and early 1990s and spurred the later fascination with the girl as a target of development and humanitarian efforts in the 2000s and 2010s. In our time, the figure of the girl has displaced the Third World woman as the archetypal target of international development intervention, as those who study development and poverty alleviation efforts might agree. I ask how this came to be, analysing UN documents and subject indexes, tracing what I see as a discursive explosion: From a trickle of references until the early 1990s, girls drew increasing attention in the mid-1990s and gained even greater institutional stature from the mid-2000s to 2010s.

The Emergence of the 'Girl Child'

A consensus that 18 years was a meaningful age marker separating children from adults solidified around the globe in the late 1980s. Although the League of Nations and the United Nations had coordinated two intergovernmental declarations on the rights of the child in 1924 and 1959, it was only in 1989 that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) specified 18 as the age boundary.[6] This 1989 Convention also goes down in history as the most widely ratified UN treaty in history, with 196 signatories.[7] The popularity of this convention largely demonstrated a consensus that had emerged about protecting children, but it also signalled agreement on how to define a child.

Curiously, the 'child' remained scrupulously gender-neutral in the 1989 UNCRC. The treaty covers children's general rights to health, education, freedom from labour and sexual exploitation, and fair treatment before the law. Both masculine and feminine pronouns are used throughout the document in an effort to account for girls as well as boys. Yet in the immediate wake of this treaty, a new discourse distinguishing the needs of girls from boys erupted in UN circles. The figure of the girl came to occupy centre stage, and in particular the 'girl child' emerged as a key shorthand term in development and aid contexts.

If you enter 'girl child' as a search term in UN electronic databases, its first chronological appearance is in the title of a non-UN NGO conference on the human rights of the girl child held in New Delhi on 11–14 December 1989. Its next appearance is in 1990, as part of a UNICEF document titled 'Focus on the Girl Child'. Within just a few years, the term gained so much traction in UN conversations that a resolution was passed by the UN General Assembly on the Girl Child by all member states in 1995, followed by similar resolutions almost every single successive year until 2015. The 'girl child' as topic moved from being the specialisation of agencies focused on children, such as UNICEF, to being the subject of reports by the secretary-general of the UN in 2006 and the creation of an Inter-Agency Task force on the Girl Child in 2007. In a culmination of this profusion of interest, the United Nations

declared 11 October to be the International Day of the Girl Child, beginning in 2012. In other words, from a trickle of references in the late 1980s, the girl child moved to become the focus of concerted action from the late 1980s to 2015.

The term 'girl child' first emerged in South Asia, where it was in circulation before it was used in UN contexts. It grew out of a base of South Asian research on development, health, and labour: Feminist sociologists and economists were increasingly alert through the 1980s to girls' deeper vulnerability than boys to malnutrition, violence, and illiteracy.[8] Their campaigns successfully led to policy shifts, such as the government in Maharashtra's move in 1985 to make all education for girls free until the end of high school in public schools and state-aided private schools. By 1987 in New Delhi, there was a Campaign on the Rights of the Girl Child underway and a National Workshop on the Girl Child was held that year. In 1989, the term was familiar enough that it appeared in the title of an official report: the Government of India's Department of Women and Child Development produced *The Lesser Child: The Girl Child in India*, an accessible 24-page well-researched and illustrated summary of the problems girls in India faced.

The increased interest in girls in India was primarily related to a problem that demographers had noticed. For years, across swathes of northern and northwest India, boys and men far outnumbered girls and women, and they attributed it to female malnutrition and infanticide.[9] Concerns came to a head in the mid-1980s as prenatal sex-selection tests became available and were used to prevent the birth of girls. The compounded effect of female foeticide, female infanticide, and female malnourishment was a deeply imbalanced sex ratio. This problem was most famously crystallised in the phrase 'missing women' popularised by Indian economist Amartya Sen (1990); in an article in the *New York Review of Books,* he estimated that over a hundred million girls/women were missing as a result of such practices (Sen, 1990).

The growing concern about girls' impoverished life chances led to local, national, and regional advocacy. Women's groups agitated against sex-selective abortions: In 1986, the Bombay-based group of feminists and scientists Forum Against Sex Pre-Determination and Sex Pre-Selection campaigned to outlaw sex-determination tests in prenatal diagnostic technology. SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) declared 1990 the Year of the Girl Child. (SAARC was primarily focused on economic integration and forming a trade bloc, but it facilitated cooperation on other fronts, such as health and population.) At a June 1990 meeting of South Asian ministers responsible for women and development in Islamabad, Pakistan, the ministers recommended that the entire decade 1991–2000 be called the Decade of the Girl Child. In November that year at the Maldives meeting, all the South Asian heads of state endorsed that declaration (UNICEF, 1991, p. 28).

This South Asian academic and advocacy focus on the girl child travelled via the research of experts to intergovernmental organisations and multilateral financial institutions. The UN Children's Fund, or UNICEF, was a key agent in popularising this term. In 1990, the UNICEF Executive Board approved placing a priority focus on the girl child. The report of an April 1990 UNICEF meeting mentions that there was a 'stress' on 'the importance of women in development' with 'particular attention [given] to improving the situation of the girl child'. It attributes this emphasis to South Asian members, noting that countries of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) referred to their declaration of 1990 as the 'Year of the Girl Child' (UNICEF, 1990, p. 58). The 1991 UNICEF booklet called *The Girl Child: An Investment in the Future* also draws heavily on research from India: The front matter of this booklet states that it was prepared by Agnes Aidoo, the senior adviser of the Development Programme for Women who served as the UNICEF representative to Tanzania, but it also mentions that the booklet is based on an initial report by Neera Sohoni, an Indian economist who worked for UNICEF in New Delhi and New York and who later published a 1995 study called *The Burden of Girlhood* (Sohoni, 1995). Much of the research cited in the 1991 UNICEF booklet is the work of scholars in India. Among the few authors cited more than once in the book are those who focus on India: an article by Sundari Ravindran on child health in India, a book by Meera Chatterjee on the status of female children in India and a paediatric journal article by Shanti Ghosh about the girl child in SAARC countries (UNICEF, 1991). The booklet also devotes a section to highlighting the ongoing efforts to promote the girl child in South Asia under the auspices of SAARC. These details confirm that the UNICEF emphasis on the girl child emerged out of the contributions of Indian scholars and concern about the conditions that girls face in South Asia.

Distinguishing Girls' Singular Interests

The UN interest in the girl child in the 1990s was, without a doubt, an outgrowth of the general receptivity within the UN to what were understood as 'women's issues' in this period. Agencies were making forceful interventions publicising violence against women, HIV prevention, and trafficking prevention: The UN Commission on Human Rights instituted a position of a special rapporteur on violence against women in 1994, the General Assembly passed resolutions on trafficking of women starting in 1993, and there were reports on the effects of traditional practices, specifically female circumcision/genital mutilation. The 'girl' appeared in conjunction with 'women' in the titles of documents on each of these topics.

A critical ferment appears to have occurred around 1990, leading to the formation of separate UN bodies and resolutions focused specifically on the

girl child rather than the more general 'women'. This ferment is evident at the surface level when examining the classifications found in UN document indexes. The UNDOC Current Subject Index, a series of print volumes that annually classified all the reports, letters, and miscellaneous publications by UN bodies, is a meaningful source for assessing the relative importance given to a topic.[10] When a topic is found in the subject index, this indicates institutional attention to it; at the very least, it indicates the existence of documents specifically focused on that topic. The first instance of the term 'girl' appearing in the subject index is 1985; the subject indexes before this date contain no such category. A count of the number of entries under the category 'girl' following its first appearance can be instructive. The increasing number of documents with titles specifically focused on girls in the 1990s, especially in the mid-1990s, is a clear sign of an explosion of attention to this topic. The following table lists the number of entries found between 1985, when the term 'girl' first appears, and 2007, when the UNDOC Current Subject Index was discontinued. Note how the number of references jumps from 0 in 1984 to 10 in 1991 to 45 and 76 in 1995 and 1996.

Until the 1990s in this index, the subject category 'girl' had a scant few documents listed under it; the entry for 'girl' began by asking readers to search instead under 'adolescents', 'female circumcision', and 'women'. In 1985 and 1989, for instance, there is only one entry under 'girl'; in 1987, there are two entries. As points of comparison, the subject categories 'children' and 'women' in these years have at least 30 entries in addition to subcategories such as 'women's advancement' and 'women's development' or 'child labour' and 'child health'. In 1991, however, there is a sudden change: ten entries are listed under 'girl'. reflecting the higher activity focused on this issue in the prior year. In 1992 and 1993, there are nine entries, and then an even more dramatic rush of attention in the mid-1990s, with 45 and 76 entries, respectively, in 1995 and 1996; the number of entries drops a little after the mid-'90s but stays steadily high throughout the 2000s. The jump in 1996 can be attributed to the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, which facilitated the increased attention to girls; the jump can also be a result of the first General Assembly Resolution on the Girl Child in 1995. Many of the entries listed are titles of reports focused on continuing topics of research and action, such as trafficking in women and girls, and female circumcision/genital mutilation. But some are specifically focused on the girl child, particularly after 1995.

As mentioned earlier, there are no entries that use the term 'girl child' in UN documents until 1990. It was neither a subject category of its own nor in the title of any listed documents until that point. The term 'girl child' appears for the first time in 1990 in the UNDOC index listed in the title of a UNICEF document, 'Focus on the Girl Child: Implementation of UNICEF Policy'. A 1985 index entry under 'children' naming an NGO Forum on the *Female*

TABLE 5.1 Number of Entries Under 'Girl' in UNDOC Current Subject Index, 1985 Through 2007

Year	No. of Entries
1985	1
1986	5
1987	2
1988	4
1989	1
1990	4
1991	10
1992	9
1993	9
1994	10
1995	45
1996	76
1997	–
1998	73
1999	35
2000	33
2001	46
2002	62
2003	55
2004	43
2005	46
2006	29

Source: UNDOC Current Subject Index, 1985 through 2007.

Child Today (italics mine) indicates that the term 'girl child' was not yet popular in 1985 in UN circles; the more grammatically correct 'female child' was used for the conference on the topic of girls. A quick look at another UN indexing source called the UN Yearbooks, which summarise key activities by all UN agencies, also corroborates this observation; the subject index of the UN Yearbooks shows no entries under either 'girl' or 'girl child' until 1990, when there are three page references for the term 'girl child'. The term 'girl child' seems quite definitely to have been inaugurated in UN circles in, or just before, 1990.[11]

The early documents on the girl child clarify that the needs of girl children are separate from those of boys. As the 1991 UNICEF booklet *The Girl Child: An Investment in the Future* explains it, the term 'girl child' prevents us from erasing the specific needs of girls, which can occur when using the androcentric category 'child'. Presenting 'girl child' as a category separate from 'women' also underlined the point that girls had specific needs that

were not identical to those of women. Until the 1990s, UN concerns associated with girls typically fell under the umbrella of women's issues. For instance, many of the sponsors of the efforts to formulate a Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (mentioned earlier in this chapter) were groups also committed to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in the late 1970s and 1980s. The same NGOs had consultative status for both these conventions, one focused on women and the other on children.[12] Indeed, all children's issues as a category tended to be yoked to those of women. A rather literal expression of this fusing of women and children can be again seen in UNDOC indexes. Documents listed under the category 'woman' were frequently cross-referenced under 'children'. For instance, a document titled 'State of the World's Women' is referenced under 'child health' in 1985, and another titled 'Advancement of Women' is listed under the subject category 'children' in 1988. In a parallel fusing of concerns, the UN Children's Fund executive director's report is listed under 'women' in 1985. The items listed under 'girl' prior to 1990 also seem generically fused with documents pertaining to women. For example, in 1987, the two items listed under 'girls' were about the UN Decade for Women; in 1989, the single entry is about refugee and displaced women.

This porosity in the boundary between women's issues and children's issues may be conceptually understood in terms of the ideologies of maternalism shaping women's activism; women frequently took on children's issues as an extension of their normative social roles as mothers. Indeed, the women in development (WID) and the women and development approaches (WAD) of the 1970s and 1980s were able to successfully prioritise attention to women in development circles because of their shared argument that it was women who, as primary caregivers in households, secured the well-being of children – and thereby the future workforce. It is also the case that women's advocacy garnered wider political power when it cited women's responsibility for future generations. Apart from maternalism, the fact that all women (except the trans-identified) had themselves once experienced girlhood made such fluid identification across the age categories 'woman' and 'girl' possible.

It is certainly true that women's campaigning on behalf of girls has been important because girls typically have fewer opportunities for public expression and activism than women. Yet, the conflation of 'women and girls' and 'women and children' has also created a dilemma: it can contribute to women's infantilisation. Such infantilisation of women can be seen in protection-oriented laws against night work and trafficking that conflate women and children, hampering women's ability to obtain work.[13] The yoking of women to children, especially to girls, inscribes women as primarily vulnerable figures. For many reasons, then, the untethering of 'girl' from both 'boys' and 'women' and its independent articulation as 'girl child' in UN and NGO language in 1990 was a significant development. The discursive

consolidation of the girl and the increasing importance of girls as targets of attention have implications for how we understand women's movements.

The focus on girls also entailed criticism of adult women as those per-petrating problems affecting girls. In a UNICEF progress report issued in 1992 about 'the situation of the girl child', girls are singled out as victims of practices that women perpetuate – female genital cutting/circumcision/mutilation, which female community elders or midwives carry out, and female foeticide, which involve women aborting foetuses (UNICEF, 1992). Both these issues distinguished, in literal terms, girls' rights from women's rights. Although women were certainly also victims of misogynistic thinking in both these contexts, and the ideologies driving their actions were rooted in male dominance, they were nonetheless its functionaries (UNICEF, 1992, pp. 11–19). The problem of female foeticide could now be directly linked to an anti-feminist opposition to abortion, which women's advocates his-torically had struggled to legalize. The increasing attention to the problems of female foeticide and female genital cutting/circumcision/mutilation in the early 1990s can explain why advocacy for the girl was detached from wom-en's issues.

The UN Focus on Adolescent Girls

In the last section, I clarified how UN bodies began to identify girls as a sepa-rate category from women. In this section, I continue to trace UN interest in girl child, showing its turn towards focusing on adolescents. In the 1990–1992 period, UNICEF moved speedily to focus on the girl child; its executive direc-tor James P. Grant and its NGO committee took the lead in promoting girls' access to education. The UN Yearbook for 1990 mentions the UNICEF's groundbreaking World Summit for Children held at the UN headquarters, with unprecedented attendance levels – 159 governments participating and 71 heads of state present and 45 NGOs. Its culmination was the World Dec-laration and Plan of Action for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. The summit's ten-point plan of action mentions focusing on the 'girl child' *as a means* to ensure the wellbeing of mothers: 'Efforts for the enhancement of women's status had to begin with the girl child. Equal oppor-tunity should be provided for the girl child to benefit from health, nutrition, education, and other basic services to enable her to grow to her full potential' (United Nations, 1990, p. 79). Such formulations that fuse girls' interests with those of women present an interesting reversal of the logic that had conventionally been used to promote women's status: historically, women had been seen to assure the well-being of children. Instead here we see the girl child articulated as a woman-in-the-making, whose health secured that of future women, who, in turn, secured all children's futures. This formula-tion of the girl as a *key* to unlocking the problem of massive development

deficits was the preamble to the later, more corporate-driven urge to invest in adolescent girls' potential, described later. The women-in-the-making in this discourse were not newborns so much as adolescents.

The UNICEF's 1992 progress report on the girl child (mentioned in the previous section) defines 'girls' as females from birth to age 18, specifying that the age cohorts 0–5, 5–10, 11–15, and 16–18 years are meaningful for particular issues. In paying special attention to the latter two cohorts, it indicates its emphasis on girls' puberty and adolescence. This shift may be due to the different practices that were being targeted. In Africa, where girls formed a large proportion of the female population because nearly 55% of the population was under 20 years of age, the problem of female genital cutting/circumcision/mutilation, which occurred during puberty, and the issue of HIV-prevention, both targeted sexually active girls.

Even though the term 'girl child' in India might have emphasised girls who were infants or under 10 years of age, it is clear from the second UN resolution (1996) that adolescent girls were squarely at the centre of UN conversations. The third item in the 1996 resolution exhorts members to

> give attention to the rights and needs of adolescent girls, which call for special action for their protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, harmful cultural practices, teenage pregnancy and vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome and for the development of life skills and self-esteem, reaffirming that the advancement and empowerment of women throughout the life cycle must begin with the girl child at all ages.
> *(United Nations, 1990, p. 3)*

Adolescence is presented as a phase where much can go wrong and when special protections are called for. In moving swiftly from issues affecting female infants to those affecting female teens, the UN discourse effectively *compressed* the age boundaries of girlhood. In treating foeticide, malnutrition, schooling, incest, marriage, and sexual slavery in one frame, we see the consolidation of the girl child as a highly vulnerable figure, across a large age range.

In the 2000s, the 'girl' changed from being the specialisation of agencies focused on children, such as UNICEF, to being the subject of annual reports by the secretary-general of the UN. The emergence of annual special reports by the UN Secretary-General on the Girl Child after 2006 is an indication of the elevation of this topic under the stewardship of a new secretary-general, Ban Ki-Moon.[14] Ban's tenure coincided with the more general effort to publicise action on the girl child through the UN Population Fund (UNFPA)'s creation of an Inter-Agency Task Force on Adolescent Girls in 2007. This task force was created with the express goal of facilitating communication

between key UN bodies such as UNICEF, ILO, UNAIDS, UNESCO, and WHO in devising country plans that focused on the needs of adolescent girls.

For several years hence, the secretary-general's office produced annual reports with thoughtful overviews of all the work done by UN agencies in the name of girls. The reports, compiled in 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2013, are 15-to-20-page documents that summarise the actions taken on a variety of fronts – human rights and anti-violence, health, and education. The reports present a compelling portrait of the consolidation of institutional interest in girls. Each takes distinct angles, but all are striking in their citing of studies from a range of institutions: from scholarly journals, such as *Lancet* and *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, to reports by UNICEF, WHO, the International Labor Organization (ILO), and the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). The reports are also noteworthy in their clear-eyed naming of gender-blind research and male dominance as underlying problems. For example, the first secretary-general's report (2006) notes that 'official statistics tend to focus on the more visible forms of child labour where more boys are found, while undercounting the informal sector where girls are concentrated'.[15] It lists issues important to girls such as the need for 'safe spaces' that are girl-friendly support networks, and the problems of violence in educational settings, armed conflicts, and prostitution. The 2007 secretary-general's *Report on the Girl Child* clarifies its mandate in an even more forceful way: 'the specific situation of girls [is] often being concealed behind generic concepts such as "women and girls", "boys and girls" or "children" in general'. It lists several problems specific to girls: 'son preference, prenatal sex selection, female genital mutilation, early and forced marriage, early pregnancy and honour crimes' (United Nations, 2007a, p. 4). In 2007, the secretary-general also produced a separate report on forced marriage of the girl child (United Nations, 2007b).[16] This 19-page special report reviewed the many reasons for forced marriage and child marriage, noting, in particular, that they occur in places where pervasive economic insecurity combines with embedded beliefs about protecting girl's sexual honour and virginity. The report also calls for consolidating 18 years as the common universal standard for age of marriage around the world (United Nations, 2007b, p. 3). In a culmination of this interest, the UN declared 11 October to be the International Day of the Girl Child in 2012.

The shift from the South Asian focus on female foeticide, infanticide, and malnutrition (which produced imbalanced sex ratios) to issues facing adolescent girls is obviously not objectionable per se. After all, as Mary E. John points out, since the early 1990s, the focus on sex ratios in India has become 'a veritable academic and advocacy industry' and a numbers game that can lose sight of the structural male dominance that leads to son preference, such as that seem in women's lack of access to paid work (John, 2011, p. 12). But it is worth noting that sex selection and the neglect and violence towards

female infants and foetuses has not declined even if UN attention has broadened and shifted elsewhere; in fact sex ratios have continued to stay deeply skewed against girls in both India and China since the late 1980s, when the issue was raised.[17]

Investing in Girls

The 2007 UN Task Force on Adolescent Girls described earlier consolidated not only an interest in girls, but also a particular orientation towards them: its mandate was to 'invest' in girls. The idea that focusing on girls' education yielded valuable downstream social effects was not in itself new – it was of a piece with two decades of development discourse orthodoxy explaining why focusing on women was important to development agendas: Women as caregivers transmitted and extended the effects of aid rather than consuming it themselves. But with respect to girls, a specifically future-oriented financialised discourse took root in the mid-late 2000s in UN circles that directly adopted the language of investing. The term 'invest' became pervasive very quickly, and was featured even on the masthead banner of the UN Foundation's webpage about adolescent girls: 'What We Do: Investing in Adolescent Girls'.[18]

The turn towards the vocabulary of investing in girls, rather than, say, assistance, development, aid, welfare, or even nurture and protection, has several implications. To invest implies a financialisation of the target. The expectation is that the money spent will grow or, in this case, yield benefits for those beyond the target herself.[19] At its core, it takes an instrumental approach to girls, viewing the girl not so much as an end in herself but as a means to other ends.

It is easy to locate this language of investment as part of a general neoliberal climate that celebrates individuated subjects. More specifically, though, it points to the fusing of corporate funding and development efforts. The use of the term 'invest' was related to a striking turn in the UN's modus operandi – growing partnerships with private sector corporations. In 2005, the UN paired with the Nike Foundation to form the Coalition for Adolescent Girls, which grew into the Girl Effect network launched in 2008, consolidating funding from a wide range of sources such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, BRAC, Novo Foundation, and UK Aid. In the 2013 secretary-general's report, the trend towards public-private partnerships is especially clear; this report cites organisations such as the Together for Girls Initiative (which combines the forces of UN agencies and the US government and private sector members), the Global Partnership for Education (a World Bank initiative), and the UN Girls Education Initiative, which also works across sectors. The UN Foundation's *Girl Up* campaign also adopted a similar focus on investing, with the word 'investment' in its homepage description of its mission.[20]

Corporate funding imbued such campaigns with distinct vocabularies: to 'invest' implied actions that are more than charity. Rather than giving away money, investments were calculated strategies to create wealth that grows. And in this sense, the girl was a much more fruitful target of investment than the woman: There were more future years to reap dividends for social spending. This calculus rested on the presumption that girls were inevitably future reproducers, a point that several scholars such as Michelle Murphy (2013) and Kathryn Moeller (2018) have unpacked.[21] Corporate campaigns such as The Girl Effect specifically centred adolescents in their call for investing in girls. They generated a blitz of campaign banners with various versions of the idea that adolescent girls were the key to 'ending poverty for themselves and the world' and that it was specifically 12-year-old girls who would spark this revolution and 'raise the standard of living in the developing world.[22]

The Financialisation of Girls in India

The emerging consensus about 'investing' in girls in the late 2000s had an important literal corollary in state actions in India: Several state governments launched programs that channelled money directly into the hands of families where girls were born rather than into institutions focused on girls' welfare. These striking programs, called conditional cash transfer schemes (or CCTs), provided monetary incentives to impoverished families with newborn girls in order to improve the girls' life chances. Cash was transferred to families in instalments when a series of conditions were met – when families immunised, educated, and then delayed a girl's marriage past age 18. In effect, such state interventions sought to discriminate positively in favour of girls.

CCTs have been widely used in Latin America to improve child and maternal health, but an explicit focus on girls is a distinct feature of Indian programs. The *Apni Beti Apna Dhan* program in Haryana was the earliest of such measures. In the period 2007–2010, several new programs were inaugurated covering various states so that, in 2015, there were 15 different programs crossing multiple states of India, each with different names and stipulations. This spike in CCT programs oriented towards girls was consistent with the more general climate of promoting investment in girls.

Since many of these programs are currently just around a decade old, their success is still being evaluated. Some studies indicate problems with implementation: the large number of conditions that such programs stipulate (with cash transfers made at multiple micro-steps, such as after each immunisation, or after each grade in school) generate opportunities for corruption and bureaucratic delays (Krishnan, 2014, pp. 1–10). Many families spend the cash transferred at age 18 on the girl's *marriage* in the following year,

showing that government money is being used as a way to reduce the burden of marriage costs rather than imagine futures beyond marriage for girls. By delineating 18 as the age at which the cash transfers end, CCT programs very frequently direct attention to the legal age of marriage for girls, giving it an unprecedented solidity. Paradoxically, naming this age boundary can also appear to encourage families to release girls for marriage immediately after they reached the age of 19.

CCTs problematically also rely on families as the conduit of investment in girls or protection of girls. The CCTs grant parents of girls the cash transfers as the girls reach successive milestones. This practice does not necessarily increase power and autonomy for girls since parents are often the locus of the problem of arranged marriages. If cash were transferred not to parents but instead to girls at age 18 as savings deposits that only the girls could access, it would be an improvement. Similarly, if the law were to allow children to petition independently against a marriage, it could open up more avenues for challenging child marriages.

An important conclusion to be drawn from Indian state interventions in the first two decades of the 2000s is that there is political cachet to be gained from policies focused on girls. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in power from 2005–2014 initiated several CCTs and also renamed pre-existing programs; the *Sabla* scheme consolidated other adolescent programs begun earlier. The *Apni Beti Apna Dhan* program was renamed *Ladli* in this period. Such jockeying to take credit for policies means that there are clear electoral gains to be made from investing in girls. The direct cash transfers from governments can deepen already problematic patronage relationships in electoral politics; parties and elected officials can be perceived as distributors of largesse and seek to buy votes through such mechanisms. Nurturing girls, in other words, is not necessarily an end in itself, but rather a means by which political victories can be secured.

Conclusion

Reading a genealogy of the current intergovernmental, corporate, and state interest in the girl reveals a transnational trajectory for the term 'girl child', moving from Indian academic reports to the discourses of specific UN bodies such as UNICEF. I showed how interest in girls moved from a vaguely formulated concern about sex ratios to a set of highly detailed calls to action to help adolescent girls adopted by the UN General Assembly at regular annual intervals, and even more urgently voiced in reports of the chief official of the UN, the secretary-general. Changes in India in the recent past are related to this intensified commitment to girls.

This is not just an argument about changing nomenclature; important shifts in tenor have occurred. The girl child is not only a site of negative

affective attention – a tragic figure in need of urgent protection – but also a site of positive productive investment. If the discourse of population control in the 1960s and 1970s shaped policy matters measures pertaining to girls' sexual practices, in the decades that followed, this discourse was supplemented, and in some ways even supplanted, by an emphasis on investing in their education. From a biopolitical standpoint, there was a pivot in emphasis from curtailing life (through population control) to fostering life (through investing in girls). This new tenor has come about in the context of a range of institutions – corporations, intergovernmental foundations, and state governments – calling for direct and indirect investment in girls. The most striking examples of investing in girls can be found in the conditional cash transfer programs initiated in Indian states.

Without a doubt, the concerted international attention to girls has meant increasing legitimacy for girl-friendly policies within countries and even pressure for greater action. These shifts, though well intentioned, frequently miss the mark of according greater autonomy to girls. As I show, the lack of clarity about age coordinates means that different problems are being targeted under the same rubric – from female infanticide to sexual violence against adolescents. Also, girls continue to be viewed as indices of something else and a means to other goals – the development stature of the nation, the progressive social responsibility credentials of a corporation, or the cachet of a new political party in power.

My exploration also leaves us with a question for feminist practice in general: What does it mean that the 'girl' came to be articulated as an advocacy cause separate from that of 'women'? I see this development as both salutary and worrisome. In its most radical iterations, the celebration of girls carries an implicit critique of reproductive futurity and of the traditional planks of protective maternalism. But the turn to focus on the girl can also mask a capitulation to conservative critiques, such as those anti-abortion views circulating among UN delegates. Championing girls' issues conveniently allowed sidestepping of more controversial women's issues.

More generally, the girl as a figure is also a less threatening channel for contemporary feminist advocacy. The widespread use of the term 'girl power' in popular feminism of the past two decades and the massive visibility of teen figures such as Malala Yousufzai suggest that it is easier to parlay feminist ideas in the name of girls than women.[23] There are even instances where adult authors describe themselves *as* girls because the term 'girl' functions as a spirited vehicle for relaying women's issues. This trend could be symptomatic of a deference to the appeal of youthfulness or a measure of a decline in the potency of the term 'woman'. For several reasons, then, seeing girl-oriented advocacy as a stand-in for all feminism requires further probing. In centring the history and instability of category

of girlhood, we can examine how and why such shifts in feminist advocacy have occurred, with greater attentiveness to age as a category in such processes.

Notes

1 In the US in the late 19th century, as Howard Chudacoff and Peter Stearns have observed, compulsory schooling, stigmatisation of child labour, and the treatment of children as potential consumers have shaped such access to play. See Howard Chudacoff. (1989). *How old are you? Age consciousness in American culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Peter N. Stearns. (2006). *Childhood in world history*. New York: Routledge.

2 The connection between progress-oriented narratives of childhood growth and linear notions of time have been analysed fruitfully by Lee Edelman (2004). *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press and Jack Halberstam. (2005). *In a queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives*. New York: New York University Press. Both critically note that queer desire among children is rarely made visible. They develop the notion of queer temporalities that do not orient toward the goal of future reproduction; Stockton names this orientation 'growing sideways'.

3 For example, LaKisha Simmons, Marcia Chatelaine, and Nazera Sadiq Wright have carefully excavated how black girls in the late 19th century and the early and mid-20th century have been assigned qualities such as 'premature knowingness' and have been forced to feign restraint, even as they resisted cultural mandates. See LaKisha Simmons (2015). *Crescent city girls: The lives of young black women in segregated New Orleans*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; Marcia Chatelain. (2015). *South side girls: Growing up in the great migration*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press; Nazera Sadiq Wright. (2016). *Black girlhood in the nineteenth century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

4 For a detailed examination of the historical shifts in defining girlhood, please see Ashwini Tambe (2019). *Defining girlhood in India: A transnational history of sexual maturity laws*. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press.

5 I thank Janaki Nair for clarifying the Kannada term *poratana*, which refers to late boyhood, in contrast to *taarunya*, meaning youth, both of which were discussed by Kannada education reformers in the 1860s.

6 Article 1 defines a child as 'every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier'. United Nations, 'Convention on the Rights of the Child', Treaty Series, Treaties and International Agreements Registered or Filed and Recorded with the Secretariat of the United Nations, 1990, 46–61. https://goo.gl/p4eAnu.

7 For a list of signatories and the terms of their acceptance, see United Nations Treaty Collection, Convention on the Rights of the Child, New York, November 20, 1989, https://goo.gl/cjq2Gf.

8 See, for instance, the following research on the girl child by Indian academics: Meera Chatterjee. (1988). *Both age and gender against them*, mimeo. New Delhi: NIPCCD; Neera Burra (1987). *Sight unseen: Reflections on the female working child*, paper presented at the National Workshop on the Girl Child, New Delhi; Rami Chhabra et al. (1987). Health and demographic consequences of early marriage and fertility. *Social Change*, 17(3): 4–26.

9 See, for instance, Kumudini Dandekar. (1975). Why has the proportion of women in India's population been declining? *Economic and Political Weekly*, *10*(42): 1663–1667.

10 This index, like other UN sources mentioned in this chapter, can be accessed at the repository of UN documents in the Newspapers and Periodicals Room, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

11 The subject categories 'child' and 'children' are found in the UNDOC Current Subject Index through the 1980s, but they do not cross-reference 'girl' until 1991. There is a steady increase in the entries under the category 'children', particularly as 1990 approaches, when a Declaration on the Rights of the Child was organised. A new subject category appears, 'child prostitution' as an addition to Child Abuse, Child Development, Child Health, Child Labor, and Child Welfare in 1990, since prostitution was one node of the increasing official interest in girls.

12 The fusing of women's and children's issues has a long history. As an example, in its November 1949 congress in Moscow, the UN consultative group Women's International Democratic Federation established an International Day for Protection of Children, observed in many countries as Children's Day, on June 1.

13 On the history of laws concerning women and night work in India, see Janaki Nair. (1996). *Women and law in Colonial India: A social history*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

14 The UN secretary-general occupies the preeminent role in the UN bureaucracy as chairperson of the UN system, and is responsible for coordinating the chief executives of all UN organisations.

15 See p. 6 of UN ECOSOC. (2006, December 12). *The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, report of the secretary-general*, E/CN.6/2007/2.

16 The CSW spurred this focus on forced marriage at its fifty-first session in its resolution 51/3, asking all member states to prevent forced marriages of girls and asking the secretary-general to report on the implementation of this resolution.

17 Ibid., 12

18 United Nations Foundation. (2011, May 26). *Investing in Adolescent girls*. https://goo.gl/VuVVyG.

19 For a good discussion of this point, see Michelle Murphy. (2013). The girl: Mergers of feminism and finance. *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, *11*(2).

20 See Girl Up's homepage at www.girlup.org/. Accessed September 20, 2018.

21 For a critique of the instrumental dimension of girl-focused campaigns, see Murphy, ibid., and Kathryn Moeller's (2018). *The Gender Effect: Capitalism, Feminism, and the Corporate Politics of Development*. Berkeley, CA: University of California. For an analysis of how girls have been instrumentally mobilised in US military counterinsurgency campaigns, see Molly Geidel. (2018). Building the counterinsurgent girl. *Feminist Studies*, *44*(3): 635–665.

22 The short overview YouTube clip of the Girl Effect campaign makes clear this causal logic. The girl effect: The clock is ticking. (2010, September 13). *girleffect*. www.youtube.com/watch?v=1e8xgF0JtVg.

23 See, for example, the popular feminist book titles by Sophia Amoruso. (2014). *#GirlBoss*. New York: Penguin; Lena Dunham. (2014). *Not that kind of girl: A young woman tells you what she's learned*. New York: Random; Older examples include Gwendolyn Pough, Elaine Richardson and Aisha Durham (Eds.). (2007). *Home girls make some noise*. Mira Loma, CA: Parker; and Megan Seely. (2007). *Fight like a girl: How to be a fearless feminist*. New York: New York University Press.

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II
Education and Labour

6

GENDER, EDUCATION, AND CHILD LABOUR

Reflections on Ontological Issues

Rekha Pappu

1. Introduction

Several studies published at the turn of this century have persuasively argued that childhood is *constituted* by social, cultural, and institutional structures rather than being an essential feature that inheres in every child (Balagopalan, 2002, 2008; Balagopalan & Subramanian, 2003; Bissell, 2003, De Graeve, 2015; Nieuwenhuys, 2009; Raman, 2000). Childhood in these analyses is understood to be a stage in life, the meanings for which emerge from a complex of approaches taken towards it by the state, the community, international bodies, and institutions such as the family, courts, schools, market etc. Most of the studies have further demonstrated that the dominant discourse of childhood that has emerged in the West has impacted attitudes and policy approaches towards children the world over. These hegemonic notions of childhood have had a bearing in turn on the identity and experience of childhood in non-Western contexts as well.

　While it is now broadly established that there are multiple childhoods, the different childhoods have largely been examined in terms of northern and southern childhoods and childhoods of the rich and the poor. In comparison, studies of childhoods along the axis of gender are far fewer. An increasing engagement with questions arising from the intersection of age and gender are emerging only in more recent times now.[1] In a similar manner, discussions on the subject of child rights and child labour abound, but here too the approach has been largely gender-neutral with a few exceptions where a separate focus on the *girl-child* labourer is included as part of larger empirical studies on child labour.[2] This chapter, therefore, seeks to bridge the gap that exists in terms of understanding the gendered nature of childhoods, especially of childhoods that

involve work/labour. Within a context where schooling is regarded as the solution for the elimination of child labour, this chapter suggests adopting an ontological approach to study the schooling of child labourers.[3] In other words, this chapter underscores the need for understanding the process by which a child labourer *becomes* (or fails to become) a student in order to better assess the viewpoint that schooling is the panacea for child labour. It is posited that the schooling process is also one where the child acquires a gender identity through the everyday life of the school. As discussed later in the chapter, every child experiences an 'ontological split' in the process of becoming a *student* from the earlier state of being a child within a family. However, the ontological shift vis-à-vis schooling for a child labourer is bound to be a significantly different process (from that for other children) since the shift is to take place from being a child labourer to becoming a student. The process of gendering that accompanies the ontological shift is as significant and can enable an understanding of how attributes of masculinity and femininity shape the emerging identity of the student-self.[4] The scope of the present chapter though is restricted; this chapter limits itself to setting up a theoretical and methodological framework for an empirical study which will be subsequently taken up.

As part of the effort to develop a framework suited to the task, this chapter sifts through different debates and discussions to identify such aspects as are closely linked and relevant to the problematic of analysing the gendered nature of the schooling experiences of children who are also involved in labour/work. The next section thus foregrounds concerns that have been raised about approaches adopted for the study of childhoods in Third World contexts, especially of girls. The section thereafter focuses on issues related to the schooling of working children. Epistemological issues that hinder the education of children from marginalised groups, such as child labourers, is addressed in the fourth section. Pursuant to the discussions in the earlier sections, the fifth and final section provides the outline of a theoretical and methodological framework through which the ontology of schooling in the case of the child labourers, both boys and girls, can be studied.

2.   Background: Discussions and Debates of Relevance

The effort to glean an understanding of childhoods from a gendered perspective as outlined earlier needs to necessarily take into account the various concerns that have been raised in the discussion of childhoods in developing countries. Three concerns in particular stand out for their significance to the proposed task of developing the theoretical and methodological framework for a study of gendered childhoods of working/labouring children. The first concern is about representations that stereotype the girl child as always being vulnerable and in need of rescue. The second concern draws from recent arguments that more attention is paid to girls than to boys in international

policies on children. The third is the apprehension that an exclusive focus on a specific group of children, including girl-children, would undermine the gains that have been made in relation to the universal category of childhood and by extension to the overarching subject of child rights, i.e. the gender-neutral child.

The first kind of concern, i.e. about stereotypical representation of girl children, is captured for instance in Jiwani and Berman's critique of the representation emerging from the West of the girl-child located in the Third World. They point out,

> Typically, the girl child is portrayed as the desperate and reluctant victim of female genital mutilation in Africa; the poverty-stricken child laborer and child-bride in India; the child prostitute in Thailand; the undeserving victim of honour killing in the Middle East; the illiterate, uneducated, exploited, and uncared for child in Latin America; or the unwanted girl child in China. More recently, the girl child has entered the popular western imagination in the form of the fleeing, illegal, refugee who is in need of our protection on the one hand, and who signifies the barbarism of her country of origin on the other hand. All of these images are typically displayed prominently in the fundraising initiatives of international aid organizations and in the mass media. The unstated premise is that atrocities inflicted upon girls occur elsewhere – in backward nations outside the realm of the 'civilized' west.
>
> *(Cited in De Graeve, 2015, p. 8)*

The second kind of concern is one that points to the fact that within national and international policy documents there is a disproportionately higher focus on girls than on boys. The title of the Policy Paper No. 35 brought out by the Global Education Monitoring Report expresses foregrounds a concern of this kind through its title and the subtitle itself, which is 'Achieving Gender Equality in Education: Don't Forget the Boys' (UNESCO, 2018). The policy paper draws attention to an argument that is being increasingly voiced about the interests of boys being neglected in discussions on education. Recent analyses of the United Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) too have pointed out that while the UNCRC takes a gender-neutral approach to children's rights, gender does get invoked in the supporting UN documents that provide guidance on implementation issues by highlighting the issues of girls more than that of boys. Froden and Quennerstedt (2019), for instance, while arguing in favour of gendering the rights of children also draw attention to a skewed gender focus that favours girls. They point out that

> significantly more attention is paid to female than male gender. For example, there are 54 references relating to boys' rights issues in the main

implementation handbook (UNICEF, 2007), whereas references to issues in which girls' situation is of particular concern appear 286 times.

(Froden & Quennerstedt, 2019, p. 6)

Incidentally, the gender-neutral approach taken by the main UNCRC document, as also the emphasis on girls in the implementation and guidance documents, is in contrast to the approach of the document that preceded it, i.e. the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1959. While the generic term 'child' is used for the most part in this earlier document, the male-centred understanding of the period is evident from the exclusive use of the pronouns 'he', 'him', and 'his' throughout the document.

A considerable distance thus seems to have been covered in terms of recognising the implications of gendered identities from 1959 when the Declaration of the Rights of the Child was initially proclaimed, to 1989 when the UNCRC was adopted and then to the period between 2001 and 2019 when General Comments on the UNCRC were formulated to serve as implementation guidance. These various milestones are in fact an indication of a growing awareness and acknowledgement of gender issues in relation to children, albeit in binary terms with a focus only on girls and boys. This historical trajectory demonstrates too that while in an earlier phase an 'age-based perspective [was regarded as] necessary to effectively highlight childhood as a social position and structure that entails specific meanings compared to other age categories', there is by now an increasing recognition that gender needs to be factored in as well such that both – age and gender – can be regarded as distinct but also interleaved categories (Froden & Quennerstedt, 2019, p. 3).

There is apprehension, however, that emphasising plurality of identities would lead to diverting attention from *childhood* as a social category and relatedly resulting in diluting the political project of children's rights. Adrian James recognises this conundrum involving a diversity of interests and agendas with regard to children which seems to threaten the project of childhood studies. She addresses the issue head on and seeks to balance various interests by providing a methodological frame for seemingly different studies that are all the same concerned with the subject of childhood. Summing up the need to be alert to the potential dangers that certain approaches might have for the larger concern about childhood, Adrian James elaborates on the existing possibilities for childhood studies in the following manner:

Thus, if we look at children's experiences of parenting, we can explore whether their experiences differ according to their gender or their position in the social hierarchy (be it caste, clan, socioeconomic status of parents, or whatever is the prevailing mode of social stratification); we can explore how and to what extent children (of different ages) are able to use their

agency to mediate the effects of gender and social stratification, either in terms of their daily lives or their longer term life chances; we can consider how children of different genders and from different positions in the social hierarchy are regulated, both formally and informally; and we can ask questions about whether male and female children have the same or different rights and responsibilities and, if so, how this affects their experiences as children and extent to which their use of agency can be a factor in modifying their experiences. Such an approach not only avoids the pitfalls of dualistic thinking, it privileges neither the commonalities of childhood nor the diversities of childhoods and it allows our enquiries to range across the entire fabric of childhood studies, from whatever our perspective, without asserting that any one element of the fabric is more important than any other.

(James, 2010, pp. 494–495)

This chapter seeks to build on the discussions outlined earlier in order to further explore the interconnections among the categories of age, gender, labour, and schooling. The next section provides an overview of children's participation in work as well as in schools within the South Asian context. It also briefly discusses the dynamic between child rights and parental authority in the region. The section that follows draws on studies that have critically examined conceptions of schooling centred around notions of a normative childhood in order to examine the implications of such forms of schooling for working children who also attend school. This chapter then goes on to discuss the case of girl-child labourers who were supported by MV Foundation, an NGO based in South India, to move away from a life of labour in order to attend schools. Based on interviews given by these girls, this chapter highlights some salient features of their response to schooling/education before going on to discuss a few studies that have focused on the ontological dimensions of school-going children. It concludes by emphasising the need for carrying out studies that would enable an enquiry into the nature of the gendered self that develops when working children go to school.

3. Child Labour, Child Rights, and School Attendance

The issue of child labour and the opposition to it is very closely aligned with the conception of a universal right to schooling and quality education. Nearly three and a half decades after its adoption by the General Assembly, the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) continues to provide the normative framework for the understanding of childhoods and child rights at the international and national levels the world over. Through the emphasis it places on protection rights, provision rights, and participatory rights, the UNCRC has served as a key reference, among other issues, for the many fraught discussions

around child labour and the efforts made by states to address it through policies that rely on education as much as on other processes that prohibit or regulate labour. The international inter-agency programme Understanding Children's Work (UCW), which includes the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNICEF, and the World Bank, has been gathering information on the various dimensions of child labour with the express purpose of ending all forms of child labour.[5]

Table 6.1 is a compilation of the information available from UCW for the South Asian countries with regard to (1) school attendance of children aged between 5 and 14 years, (2) their involvement in economic activities, and (3) their involvement in household chores. The data is disaggregated for male and female children.

Some quick conclusions may be drawn from Table 6.1. Except for Afghanistan and Mauritius, school attendance in all the other South Asian countries is well above average. The involvement of children in economic activities is the highest in Nepal and is followed by Mauritius, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka in that order. Where data is available, children's involvement in household chores is close to 50% in most countries except in Maldives (35.6%) and Myanmar (28.6%) where it is below 50% and in Nepal (81%) and Sri Lanka (80.7%) where it is way above 50%. Data about children's involvement in household chores is not available to India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

In all the South Asian countries, except for Afghanistan and Myanmar, the involvement of girls is more than that of boys as far as engagement in

TABLE 6.1 School Attendance and Children's Work in South Asia

Name of the Country	School Attendance (5–14 years; in percentage)			Children's Involvement in Economic Activities (5–14 years; in percentage)			Children's Involvement in Household Chores (5–14 years)		
	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Afghanistan	48.1	34.9	41.8	10.6	4.2	7.5	52.5	49	56.4
Bangladesh	86.9	92	89.4	4.7	3.8	4.3	Data not available		
Bhutan	84.7	84.6	84.8	3.3	4.4	3.9	44.3	56.6	50.6
India	91.4	89.9	90.7	1.5	1.3	1.4	Data not available		
Maldives	79.1	80.3	79.7	4.1	3.7	3.9	29.9	41.6	35.6
Mauritius	53.5	54.9	53.5	14.1	11	12.5	40	57.9	49.2
Myanmar	85.7	86.8	86.2	3.3	3.2	3.3	31.9	25.2	28.6
Pakistan	80.5	69.5	75.3	10.3	9.9	10.9	Data not available		
Nepal	89.9	93.7	91.7	36.4	38	37.2	79.3	82.6	81
Sri Lanka	97.6	98	97.8	10.9	7.4	9.2	78.7	82.7	80.7

Source: Compiled from data collected by Understanding Children's Work.

www.ucw-project.org/info-country.aspx

housework is concerned. On the other hand, except for Bhutan and Nepal, more boys than girls are involved in economic activities. Commenting on the gender dimensions of children's employment and education in the report titled *Measuring child labour in South Asia*, Sherin Khan and Scott Lyon point out, 'Sectoral composition of South Asian children's employment shows variation by sex, although patterns are less clear across countries. In India, the share of girls in agriculture is much larger than boys, while in Bangladesh, the share of boys is much higher in agriculture' (Khan & Lyon, 2015, p. XII). The forms of labour that boys and girls are involved in are therefore largely context-specific, though some broad patterns, too, have been mapped. For instance, Shantha Sinha analyses in some detail the role of the market, the state, and the family that through specific conjunctures determined the labour provided by girls and boys in Andhra Pradesh at the turn of the century:

> In a survey conducted by the MV Foundation of the families of girl children engaged as farm labourers in cotton seed farms, it was found that while girls worked 29.4 days in a month on wage work, the women worked 22.2 days and the men 18.6 days. Further the contribution of the girl to the family income was 28.7%, of the women 28.3% and of the men to the family income was 42.8% during that month. It has also been found that the girls are being engaged in new forms of exploitative relationship vis-à-vis the employers. Thus for instance in a conventional situation girls in the area always worked on a daily wage basis as agricultural labourers. They seldom worked as bonded labourers against an advance taken by the family. It was usually boys who were pledged against a loan taken as bonded labourers. However it is now quite common to see girls working to clear off the advance taken by the parents.
>
> *(Sinha, 1998)*

The involvement of children in labour thus varies depending on the requirements of the market and the family and are further shaped by the laws regulating child labour. On the whole it is clear though that a large majority of children in South Asia are both school-going and also working. Furthermore, the introduction in the previous decade of the right to education in most countries has resulted in various initiatives by the state and civil society that seek to ensure that children access quality education through admissions in schools. In fact, parental authority over educational choices for their children has considerably diminished as a result of such rights promulgated by the state. For instance, the Right to Education Act of 2009 elaborates on the rights of the children and the duties of the school and the teachers but not as much on the role of parents. The function of the parents is limited in the text of the act to 'giving them choice of school and giving them a place in the school development committee' (Sarangapani, 2020).

Drawing on Amy Gutmann's work *Democratic Education*, Sarangapani points out that the claim for recognising parental authority over the education of children is made on the basis that parents have a natural right to safeguard the welfare of their children. The argument favouring parental educational authority is also based on the fact that the parents or the family contribute to the overall development of the child, which may be regarded as non-scholastic, and yet it contributes to achieving educational goals. The main thrust of Gutmann's work though is that educational authority should not be vested exclusively either with the state or with the parents but that a compact built between them (involving the authority of the teacher as well) for the best interests of the child is a critical requirement.

From a feminist perspective though, parental authority in educational matters has mostly been found to be problematic. Studies from different parts of South Asia have found that parents/family prioritise the education of boys over that of girls (Aslam, 2009; Bandyopadhyay & Subrahmanian, 2011; NCERT, 2006). Furthermore, with regard to working children or child labourers, parental authority has for long been suspect; the parents of working children are cast as exploitative adults from who the State needs to rescue the children. On the other hand, children's own narratives of their engagement with economic activities and the role of the family reveals a more complex picture than one of straightforward exploitation by adults (Bissell, 2003; Onta-Bhatta, 2001; Nieuwenhuys, 2009). In their telling of the experiences they have been through, children have empathised with the vulnerable situation of their families, especially of their parents and have also taken pride in the contribution that they themselves make to the family.

There are also narratives though where children have expressed deep resentment against their parents for a situation wherein they had to work due to parental pressure and were not able to go to school. An engagement with the complexity of these narratives of working children vis-à-vis their families and the opportunities to get an education is largely missing in the literature available from India. However, we do have insightful studies that have examined the epistemic frame that is dominant in schools and the negative implications that this form of dominance has for the education of working children. The next section briefly reviews some of these studies, in which considerations of ontology too are *implicit*. However, as the section that comes later argues, there is as much need to attend to matters of schooling and ontology as it is to examine epistemological issues in relation to schooling.

4. Educating the Child Labourer: Epistemological Issues

In her published work, which is based on ethnographic studies on the intertwined issues of childhoods, labour, and schooling, Sarada Balagopalan (2002, 2003, 2008, 2019) has drawn attention to the deeply flawed nature

of the attempts made by the state to end child labour through schooling. As she points out, the 'drive to enrol all children in school has not significantly altered the imagination of the ways in which schooling needs to adapt itself to the needs of these new populations who inhabit its space' (2008, p. 278). She cites the example of the school's reliance on homework given to these children with the assumption that they have literate home environments as well as adequate time after school hours to complete the homework.

The responsibility of ensuring a 'better' future for the child labourer who has turned into a school-going child rests ironically on the efforts that the child herself/himself has to put into the schooling processes (Balagopalan, 2008). But the best efforts of the child are very often thwarted by the fundamental and hierarchised binary that is etched into the formal system of schooling between 'mental work' and 'manual work'. Mental abilities are hugely valued by the formal system of schooling, while manual work is regarded as inferior and not requiring skills or abilities of any kind. Attitudes of teachers discriminating against working children and marking them as 'slow learners' and cognitively incapable have been variously documented (Balagopalan & Subramanian, 2003; Kumar, 1989; Majumdar & Mooij, 2015; Ramachandran & Naorem, 2013; Sinha & Reddy, 2011; Talib, 2003).

Based on a study of quarry workers who attended Delhi municipal schools, Talib (2003), too, has pointed out that the pedagogy and curriculum of schools do not in any way include the learner's life settings or the creative dimensions of labour as the basis for teaching-learning activities in the classroom. As a result, the dichotomy between work and education becomes all the more entrenched in schools. Kancha Ilaiah makes a similar argument in his work *Turning the Pot, Tilling the Land* (Ilaiah, 2019). He explains that the knowledge base of the labouring classes is either dismissed or rendered invisible by schools; it is in fact denied the status of knowledge and is instead referred to as mere skills. Ilaiah argues for these knowledge frames, too, to be brought into school curriculum.

Together with critiquing the epistemologies upheld by schools that discriminate against working children or exclude them, the concern expressed by many of the studies is also that schools are not fulfilling their promise of introducing and mediating an understanding of the structures of modernity for working children or equipping them with ways of engaging with modernity without being diminished themselves in the process. In contrast to the critique of schooling that has been highlighted in this section, the next section deals with experiences of working children who have *not* felt let down by the schooling system. Importantly, too, in their narrativising of themselves, these children do not regard themselves as failures but instead believe they have reaped the benefits that modern education promises. The mediatory role played by MV Foundation, the non-governmental organisation that supported the children, seems to have played a critical role in their ontology. The

next section therefore begins with a brief introduction of the organisation before reviewing the interviews given by the girl-child labourers who successfully transformed themselves into students.

5. Schooling and Ontological Considerations

The Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MV Foundation), established in 1981 and named after the educationist and historian Prof. Mammipuddi Venkatarangaiya, was, during its early years of existence, a research institution on issues about social change. As a result of certain interventions that MV Foundation took up in relation to the problem of bonded labour, it began focusing its activities since 1991 on the abolition of child labour and the schooling of children in the Ranga Reddy district of the erstwhile undivided Andhra Pradesh as a specific instance of its overall concern with child rights. The two main objectives of the Foundation were the eradication of all forms of child labour and the realisation of a universal full-day school programme for all children. Thus, MV Foundation concentrated its efforts on enrolling children in school and ensuring that they did not drop out. Following on the introduction of the Right to Education Act in 2009, through which one of MV Foundation's longstanding demands of universal elementary education was met, the organisation refocused its work and concentrated on the education of adolescents, especially girls.

As part of the new initiative involving girls, interviews were conducted by MV Foundation with 20 adolescent girls who had passed out of school and were enrolled in different college-level programmes (M.V. Foundation, 2014, https://youtube.com/@MVFoundation?si=69P33_1bkMEz53qi). The interviews were part of an effort to build case studies under the programme 'Righting the Future: South-South Collaboration and Capacity Building for Universalising Secondary Education for Girls'. The girls who briefly narrated their educational journey had all earlier been out-of-school child labourers and had been encouraged and supported by MV Foundation to join schools. Each video-recorded interview is for a duration of two to three minutes and has a similar format: the girls began by referring to the work they were earlier involved in, the difficulties they faced, the fortuitous manner in which they began to access school education through MV Foundation's support, their present level of education, their scholastic achievements and ended the recording by mentioning the kind of job they aspired for. I draw on these interviews to gesture towards the possibility of further understanding the ontological dimensions of schooling for girl-child labourers.

A feature common to all the interviews is that the girls were all very keen to study and had an acute sense of missing out on the schooling experience when out of school and involved in work. Almost all of them had to cajole or defy their parents who were reluctant to send them to schools. They had all gone on to do very well in their studies and had secured top ranks in their schools/colleges. They felt very keenly that if they had not gone to school, they would

have been stuck with the work they were doing. Most of them were earlier carrying out care-work in terms of looking after their siblings or their young nephews and nieces with neither respite nor appreciation coming their way. Some of them tended to goats and sheep, and yet others were involved in agriculture. Schooling seemed to have provided them an escape from the drudgery of work they were involved in. They were all clearly proud of the fact that they had studied in a school. As one of the girls commented, 'Those who have easy access to education, do not recognise its value. It's people like me who have to struggle who recognise the importance of education'. Most became emotional when recalling the difficult times their families faced. Many of the girls were very attached to their mothers in particular and were concerned about her well-being. There were also a few who were resentful of their mothers for not understanding their aspirations and their desire to study.

A majority of them spoke with pride about their scholastic achievements and of their determination to continue with their studies and to gain recognition. The support provided by MV Foundation is gratefully acknowledged by all of them as being a critical factor without which they would have continued with the drudgery they had earlier known. Yet none of the girls spoke about their experiences at school, about the transformation involved in becoming a full-time student from having been a full-time worker. This was perhaps due to the format that the interviews had adopted along with the short time duration for each interview. However, what gets missed then is an understanding of the processes of the school by which the new *student-self* of the girls was formed.

As mentioned earlier, studies on schooling in the Indian context in particular have predominantly focused on knowledge issues or the epistemological aspects of schooling. In recent times though, there is a growing interest in examining what has been termed as the ontology of learning (Gade, 2018; Packer, 1999; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Packer & Greco-Brooks, 1999). Education researchers who have adopted the ontological approach have pointed out that within and through the processes of the school, a child does not only learn the content and structure of knowledge but also becomes someone different from what she or he was before going to school. According to Stanton, '[T]aking an ontological view of learning opens up various questions about schooling: what kinds of people are children becoming in school? how do children negotiate the processes of becoming a self in school? in the concrete details of school practices, how exactly do children become selves?' (cited in Packer, 1999). It has been argued that in the initial phase of the schooling process, *every child* experiences an ontological split that results from, on the one hand, being (outside the school) an individual member of a presumably close-knit community and, on the other, becoming co-opted as a member of a category referred to as *student* when he/she is admitted into the school.

The processes through which the transformation from being a child in a family/community to being a student in the school has been studied largely

for middle and upper classes where children are largely similar in terms of their family and community backgrounds and privileges. The ontological split that is observed in relation to these children when they first join school has been commented upon. In relation to working children too it would be useful (in order both to understand diverse childhoods as well as the processes of schooling) to study the nature of the ontological split that the children experience when they gain admission to schools, and the manner in which they negotiate the split.

A study conducted towards this end would thus be based on three sets of interconnected arguments – (1) the ontological positioning of children who are both working and school-going is shaped by their home situation and the labour they earlier performed or continue to perform, (2) gender has an important role to play in the ontology of individuals, and (iii) schooling produces an ontological split by separating the being of the child from the becoming of a student. An additional aspect to be examined when an organisation like MV Foundation plays a mediating role is whether the function of the school is to an extent appropriated by the Foundation through its bridge courses and the continued support it provides to the children throughout their schooling. There are perhaps lessons to be learnt from this form of support wherein the ontological crisis induced by schools/educational institutes is successfully overcome. The study, which is yet to be taken up, would thus be directed towards understanding childhoods through the intersections of education, labour, and gender.

* * * * * * * *

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 The path-breaking work *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School*, by Barrie Thorne, first published in Thorne (1993), is among the few that details an exploration of childhood in terms of gender. Based on an ethnographic study taken up in the United States by Thorne, *Gender Play* not only provided rich insights into the formation of gender identity in school children but also introduced a methodological framework through

which such work could be taken up. For the Indian context, new work is emerging in recent times that provides insightful engagement with the subject of childhood from a gender perspective. Ashwini Tambe's *Defining Girlhood in India: A Transnational History of Sexual Maturity Laws* (2019) and Mary E. John's *Child Marriage in an International Frame: A Feminist Review from India* John (2021) are examples of such work, albeit ones with a focus different from that of the present paper.

2 Notable among these for the Indian context is the early work of Neera Burra (1995).

3 The desirability of compulsory schooling for all children in order to eradicate child labour has strong advocates and also those vehemently opposed to such solutions. See Pappu and Vasanta (2020) for an overview of these debates.

4 It is entirely possible that gendered identities that do not neatly fit within the binary of male/female may be discovered through the study.

5 Parts of this section and the next are drawn from the chapter on 'Child Labor and Education in South Asia' (2020) co-authored by me and included as Pappu, R., and Vasanta, D., in P.M. Sarangapani, R. Pappu (eds.) *Handbook of Education Systems in South Asia. Global Education Systems*. Singapore: Springer.

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7

THE CLASSROOM AS SENSORIUM IN MYSORE, 1840–1930[1]

Janaki Nair

A decade after the Judicial Commissioner of Mysore A.B. Devereux attempted in 1856 to set out 'a general scheme of education for Mysore',[2] it was clear that educational theory, of the kind that filled the pages of *Matha Patrikey* (a journal brought out from Belgaum from the 1860s) would come to grief in a classroom divided by caste, gender, class, language, and not least, religion. To which child, for example, would the five stages of learning, so carefully calibrated for the prospective teacher, apply, when there was no universal experience of either 'childhood' (shishu, 1–4 years; balya, up to 7; kumara, 7–10 years), 'teenage' (pyoganda, 10–14), or 'young adulthood' (taaru-nya, 14–18)?[3] Which child at the shishu, balya, and kumara stages would be uniquely enabled by the teacher to absorb the world through her senses, rather than through the textual medium of grammar, law, and astrology, as the teacher was advised?[4] How did children actually participate in, and make meaning of, the emerging object worlds of the classroom?[5] We have surpris-ingly few clues.[6]

Matha Patrikey concerned itself more with pedagogical norms and ideals, unlike the Reports on Public Instruction in Mysore, begun in 1867–1868, which were more attentive to the ways in which caste, gender, and ethnicity shaped classrooms and opportunities for education. The reports introduced new names for those participating in schooling: scholar, pupil, student, and of course, infant, girl, and boy – but not child. It took several decades for age to become the determining feature of cognitive ability and physical maturity in the colonial classroom.

What understandings of childhood itself does the history of schooling yield up, even from a narrative of 'failure', that lamented leaking roofs, recalcitrant teachers, unavailable textbooks, ill prepared students, and an obsession with

government employment rather than with real knowledge?[7] We can ask what was learned, unlearned, survived, integrated or indeed even normalised – in however mutated a form – in the colonial classroom. I suggest that the classroom, in which children spent a good one third of their waking lives, was experienced as a new sensorium, given the compulsory physical-material aspects of colonial schooling. The nurturing of specific skills of reading, writing, numeracy, or indeed mastery of new subjects, such as history or geography, were also embodied experiences yet markedly different from pre-colonial ones. We can ask what gendered transformations of the child-body were effected by new disciplinary practices, conditions of tactility and proximity, and the privileging of dress and comportment. How did the introduction of new aesthetic qualities, the new demand for 'attention' and for the cultivation of character through an engagement with physical/manual skills, shape childhood? When were these transformations tied more strictly to age? These questions require us to go beyond the depiction of education as failure, or as socialisation that only affirms and renews existing patriarchal, colonial, or capitalist structures,[8] or from the well-known nationalist tropes of mothers/children mobilised in the larger project of modernising the family.[9]

However, this is a speculative exercise, calling for interpretative skills – of images, as of marginal references, even absences – rather than rich citations of documentary evidence. I focus on three (sometimes overlapping) moments in the discourse on schooling in the Mysore/Karnataka region between the 1840s and the 1930s and on those molecular interactions that were envisaged, enabled, and materialised in the classroom. I begin with the role of missionaries in education, who privileged both proximity and individuated attention within the classroom, developed fine and gross motor skills with great and enduring success, and new forms of tactility in learning, particularly for girls. Missionary curricular innovations determined the form and content of the subsequent governmental educational effort. The second moment refers to the contributions of B.L. Rice in decisively shaping the more literary aspects of the curriculum, while also encouraging new forms of (cartographic) perception and apperception. My third moment references the innovative and passionate espousal by H.J. Bhabha of the Sloyd system in 1907–1920 to breach the barrier between mental-manual in male and female childhood/young adulthood.

These are not strictly chronological nor sequential moments and in fact were even coterminous: to that extent, 'moment' refers not to any stable or hegemonic element of discourse so much as its contingent importance. By the end of this period, stages of childhood as they corresponded to specific scholastic achievements (and examinations) had stabilised and were more strictly correlated to age, as the demand for a place in the colonial classroom grew exponentially and the actual content of the syllabus or curriculum became less relevant. Meanwhile, needlework and physical training met with

extraordinary success in the colonial classroom, while the insistence on 'vocational' or manual education faced insurmountable challenges.

My interest is more in the dense transformative point that the colonial classroom had become. In making this argument, I am not suggesting that the pre-colonial school was a sensory void but rather that the colonial classroom – and its association with mass education – produced significant habits of mind and body among 'pupils' and 'scholars' who were increasingly defined by age, as much as by caste and gender. The pre-colonial pupil – usually a boy – learned to read, write, add, and multiply at the end of a process that began with writing in sand, reading from leaf books (usually religious texts), and processes of memorising passages, grammars, and tables.[10] Hindustani (or Mahommedan schools), widely acknowledged as good in language teaching, paid more attention to writing, though here too the emphasis was on 'intoning poetry' and memorising texts, usually religious, but often also 'erotic' poetry.[11] '[T]he whole of the school apparatus was represented by a small bundle of papers tied up in the teacher's handkerchief' at a school in Hirasal, where 'no books or boards were in use'.[12] Classification, such as it existed, was tied to 'the progress of the pupils according as they write on the sand, on boards, or on paper'.[13] Above all, schools were often conducted in multiuse spaces rather than in spaces dedicated to learning.[14] In contrast, colonial education became more routinised and replicable and closely linked to the production of the punctual, conscientious, and docile child, even where modern industry was yet to be, as in Mysore. The physical materiality of colonial schooling produced new sensibilities and moralities that tell us much about how childhood was created and shaped.

Missionary Learning and Unlearning

When missionaries began their educational work in the Kannada region in the early 19th century, they entered a landscape dotted with indigenous schools of varying size and quality. The missionaries had been active in the Kannada region since 1810, in specific enclaves such as Belgaum, Bellary, and Bangalore, gradually expanding to Mysore, Tumkur, Gubbi, and Shimoga. Missionary work in Mysore was divided between the London Missionary Society and the Methodist Mission Service [Wesleyan].[15] The London Missionary Society had worked in the Kannada region since 1810 and in Bangalore since 1817.[16] By 1822, the LMS missionary Laidler, despairing of the relatively poor performance of day schools, resolved to try setting up boarding schools, particularly to withdraw children 'from the influence and example of their heathen connexions'; two boarding schools, one each for boys and girls, were commenced.[17] In 1840, two missionary wives, Mrs Sewell and Mrs Rice, began the first school exclusively for girls in Bangalore and by 1842, two new boarding homes for girls and boys had been set up.[18]

In 1867, Miss Anstey arrived in Mysore to become 'the first of the band of consecrated women'.[19]

The Wesleyan Mission work in Mysore began with the Rev. Elijah Hoole preaching in Bangalore in 1821, and the first school was set up in 1826.[20] 'Evangelism, Education and Literature' were soon well recognised as the routes to possible conversion, though investments in education far exceeded the paltry harvest of souls.[21] There were 20 schools in all, for Kannada, Tamil, and English, for male and female students, by 1848,[22] and by the late 1860s, two girls' schools had been established in Mysore,[23] especially following the arrival of consecrated women missionaries in the 1860s.[24]

In contrast, both private and government Hindu girls' schools were begun only in the 1860s.[25] Females were forced to remain well below their age-appropriate attainments, their school career being cruelly abbreviated by marriage: 'the female schools are at present something like infant school . . . To read with facility is almost the utmost we can expect from girls who with many temptations to their education are removed from the school by the time they are twelve years old'.[26] But meanwhile, before the little woman was plucked from the class for marriage, were other lessons also being learned?

a. The Missionary 'Touch'

Important among these lessons was the missionary insistence on 'mixing', of both castes and genders, within the classroom[27] (Figure 7.1). In a society which was entrenched in a finely graded – and fanatically adhered to – *prohibition* of touch, this mixing was a revolutionary first step.[28] Chakali Chandrasekhar, speaking of the Rayalseema region, to which Gooty belonged, says 'the touch of the missionaries provided comfort, empowerment, acknowledgement, and affirmation of humanity to Dalits'.[29]

Rev. Henry Premaka – who served the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society from 1886 – recounts the surprise he experienced on seeing the white missionary wife, Mrs Riddett, bathing a group of famine children in 1877.[30] Premaka remembered his own schooling from 1863 to 1868 and the 'Brahmin master . . . [who] . . . never came near me and did not speak kindly to me'.[31]

E.P. Rice, writing about the school for 'outcastes' at Anekal in 1889, said:

> The children of these outcastes are never allowed inside a[n indigenous] school. Occasionally, a poor boy belonging to this class may be seated in the road <u>outside</u> [emphasis in original] the school door trying to pick up such scraps of learning as he can. They are of course welcome to mission schools, but their admission would be strongly resented by all non-Christian teachers and pupils, and the school would be immediately emptied. This difficulty has been overcome in towns like Bangalore and

Mixed School Gooty.

FIGURE 7.1   Mixed school, Gooty: This photograph – and its labeling – is testimony to the 'mixing' enabled by the mission school, of gender, age, and caste (though only of Madiga and Mala children).

Source: CWM, LMS, India, Photographs, File no 11, SOAS Archives, London, UK.

> Madras, where there is a resident missionary *and boys are seated on the same benches*. But the difficulty still exists in full force in district towns [emphasis added].[32]

The missionary determination to abolish physical distancing in the classroom, however partially or incompletely realised,[33] got school students to sit together, even eat together, such achievements being celebrated not just in the detailed notes made by the missionaries, but in photographs, and immortalised as an enduring achievement of the missionaries in the more widely circulated postcard as well (Figures 7.2 and 7.3).

Missionary writings and photographs emphasised the importance of mingling with the students, not just during school hours but at mealtimes. The children meanwhile display all the habits that have been learned in boarding school – cleanliness, neatness, and order, in demeanour and clothing, and indeed docility.[34] In fact, so closely does the missionary teacher mingle with the

FIGURE 7.2   Boarding Home of Wesleyan Boys Home, Secunderabad.

Source: Clare Arni/Martin Henry Postcard Collection, Bengaluru.

students, that she is barely visible, amidst the jostle of students to be closer (Figure 7.4). In stark contrast were the indigenous school teachers, who still remained apart from the students (Figure 7.5).

Claims of missionary success in 'mixing' must of course be qualified by the early evictions from the missionary classrooms that had already taken place. Recounting her experience of setting up the girl's school in the Mysore pettah (town) in 1861, Mrs Hutcheon said many left the school due to rumours spread by the peon:

> A few pretty little girls, however, refused to leave us, and they were learning so much more rapidly than our first full pariah scholars . . . But a bitter disappointment was in store for us. A native gentleman, who had become much attached to my husband, came to him, and asked if we knew that most of our nice sprightly pupils were being educated for dancing girls![35]

Hutcheon had no option but to close the school, since she realised that 'these hapless ones are only taught to read, that they may become proficient in learning the abominable and immoral songs contained in their own books'.[36]

The expulsion of the devadasi's daughter from the missionary classroom disturbed the twin narratives of the attempt, on the one hand, to obliterate the debilitating hierarchies of caste, and on the other, to extend the education of girl children. The deliberate exclusion of those who were well equipped

Mission Boarding School Girls. Bangalore

FIGURE 7.3   LMS Girls' Boarding School, Bangalore, 1901. There were distinctive ways in which uniforms began to distinguish age cohorts. Younger girls are dressed in tunics, with post-puberty young women wrapped in saris.

Source: Lamb's photo album, Box 624 C, Edith A. Lamb, Mysore South India 7 August 1901 © The Methodist Church/TMCP.

and indeed were a leaven of sorts in the colonial classroom was matched by the pride taken in those who replaced them. The place of the devadasi child in the classroom repeatedly surfaced in governmental discussions even in the late 1870s, when their admission was discussed.[37]

Nevertheless, even as late as the mid-1930s,[38] missionary schools' commitment to 'habits of personal cleanliness and of a sense of beauty, for scope to be given for training for life in ways not included in the school curriculum eg. by games and hobbies, and for a room set apart for prayer and quiet' was officially recognised.[39] By this time, there was a greater correlation between age and dress, as the 'little women' began to be distinguished from older girls by their dress and by their physical activity (Figure 7.6). The 'tunic' uniform transformed the little girls who were no more than miniature adults bundled in saris, from older girls who wore the sari.

FIGURE 7.4   Senior Girls of the Siddhi Katte School, Bangalore, 1901. Note the child seated on the lap of the missionary.

Source: Lamb's photo album, Box 624 C, Edith A. Lamb, Mysore, South India, 7 August 1901, © The Methodist Church/TMCP.

b. The Fine Arts of Sewing

Nothing symbolised the enduring missionary influence on girl's education as the introduction of needlework and sewing to the curriculum. No male skill or accomplishment of equivalent value established itself as an integral part of the curriculum well into the 20th century.[40] Feminist scholars have long established that sewing inculcated a particular idea of femininity, docility, and obedience: head bent, eyes lowered, girls had perforce to sit still to develop the patience and persistence to concentrate on the sewing task at hand.[41] But needlework's curricular career in the colonies was slightly different, developing fine motor skills among girls, along with a capacity for earning. It was a way of being absorbed, physically and mentally, in one activity, enhancing attention.[42] It enjoined silence and individuation, no doubt, but also imbued young girls with a sense of achievement and equipped them with new

FIGURE 7.5   Tamil School in Knoxpet, Bangalore, no date. The indigenous teachers stand apart, unlike the missionaries who mingle with the students, as in photographs in Figures 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4.

Source: J. Alfred, Vanes Collection, Wesleyan Mission, A132 CSAS, Cambridge.

aesthetic sensibilities.[43] Wielding the needle was as important as learning the alphabet or knowing numbers: 'with a few exceptions, the girls when they first came were utterly unrestrained', said the report of the Belgaum Mission in 1872. 'They knew not a letter *nor even the way to hold a needle*. They were quite strangers to school discipline, and not a little time and patience were required to get them into working order'.[44]

By 1890, the missionary wife Mrs Haines reported progress: 'It is a pleasant sight to see the eager little faces bending over their pretty work' in which they were 'being taught to count correctly and at the same time to distinguish colours', though not without corrections of 'what some of the girls think the right colours that should be used for an animal or a bird', to elicit 'a fairly correct answer' of things they daily saw.[45]

By the 1870s, needlework/sewing constituted a good part of the day in schools that were divided on the basis of class, caste and not least language of instruction, though united in their timetables. There were hierarchies here too, borrowed in part from late-18th-century English distinctions between 'needlework', or ornamental sewing among the schools of the higher kind, and 'sewing', which referred to work by the poor in charity schools.[46] Two to three hours of the five-hour day in girls' schools were spent on enhancing

FIGURE 7.6   Miss Muller's Gallery Classes at the Day School for smaller children were crowded; the girl child is still a miniature adult, especially as far as clothing was concerned.

Source: Council for World Mission Archive, London Missionary Society, Photographs, File 9–12, File 12, 12/3 D 80, SOAS, London, UK.

needlework skills.[47] Its complete absence from the male curriculum made needlework and sewing crucial 'signifiers of sexual difference'.[48]

Was the great attention paid to the incorporation of needlework into the girls' curriculum in order to emphasise that education would not come in the way of marriage but only enhance its prospects?[49] In India, needlework was well appreciated by a wide range of patriarchal authorities – missionaries, colonial administrators, and Hindu, Muslim, and Christian leaders, as well as women themselves. B.L. Rice as the first inspector general of education in Mysore approvingly noted the schools that included needlework in their curriculum for girls.[50] Specimens of needlework done by native girls at the London Mission Boarding School, Bangalore, were sent to the London Exhibition in 1870.[51] Did needlework and the bodily disciplines and character it produced also form the perfect alibi for women's education in the public sphere, successfully staving off fears that the teaching of reading might produce insubordination or, worse, independence? By the latter part of the 19th century, needlework could even constitute the sum total of girl's education: girls at the (upper) 'caste'

school Alasur, Bangalore, were removed 'too early', allowing them to 'pick up only some skills of practical value such as cutting and stitching'.[52] As the Report of 1870–1871 noted, in Mahommedan female educational institutions, such as Madrasa Mufid un Nisvan, Bangalore, 'Needle work and embroidery receive particular attention. No writing is taught'. In other Mahommedan female schools, too, the girls could do reading but 'writing is not taught, as the possession of such an accomplishment would be regarded as dangerous. Some of the elder girls who *had learnt embroidery* have lately left'.[53]

   We are privy to no discontent among those who were being trained in these skills, as noted in other contexts.[54] But the inspectors' reports did not recognise the full range of capabilities that were enabled by needlework, which, as Malathi de Alwis points out, was part of a 'multi dimensional technology of power . . . A knowledge of sewing was also the lynch pin for the development of abstract thought, while presaging the production of clothing, and concomitantly, neatness and decorum'.[55] Needlework in the curriculum did not sequester the woman indoors but brought her out to be among her peers, a social and skill-forming activity.

   Indeed, the prospects of a gender-neutral curriculum alarmed those interested in a more strictly feminised education for girls. The managing committee of the Government Arya Balika Pathashala objected in 1893 to the curriculum that did not provide any options for teaching needlework and music – for which, they said, subjects like geography, arithmetic, and even Kannada could be dropped.[56] Likewise, many indigenous elites, such as M. Ramaswamyya and C. Krishna Rao, the secretary of the Education Committee, recommended, 'The practical subjects for girls should include music, needlework, home economics and physical culture. To provide for these items it is necessary *to reduce the portions in the literary subjects*. . . . In all the classes the portions in Arithmetic, History and Geography may be curtailed'.[57] This contradicted some missionary ideas of what girlhood should be.

c. Loosening Limbs and Tongues

No doubt, sewing, knitting, and crochet were seen as suitable alternatives to the cultures of reading, even in the missionary boarding school. The missionaries also recognised, over time, the twin necessity of disciplining not only sensory organs such as the eye and the ear, but also the tongue, in the case of women, while also loosening it.[58] In her 1916 report, Miss M.L. Butler remarked that, while

> Indian girls are on the whole more amenable to discipline than English girls, . . . the tongue is a most unruly member and most of our troubles come from that source . . . their spare time is all too largely occupied with tongue wagging.[59]

Yet Butler herself equally stressed the need for spontaneity among the girls, putting out a small amount for cooking and running a kitchen on weekends 'to loosen their tongues'.[60]

To attend school was also to learn new styles of comportment. If the 1900 report on the Wesleyan Mission Kannada Girls' School in Honali said 'They have not been taught to rise and stand upright when answering questions, many of their answers are mumbled and spoken without meeting the glance of the examiner',[61] these were bodily habits that were soon corrected. No wonder Butler gestured to mid-19th-century English feminist campaigns for a rightful place for women in the world of higher education, resting on the shoulders of the poet Alfred Tennyson in her call to arms, for women to build a utopian future.[62] Surely, girls in missionary homes and schools developed, along with their new sense of dignity and confidence, a questioning spirit, as Eleanor Tidball reported in 1921.[63]

'To be in the world and yet not of it', said Butler in 1919, 'is hard, indeed, to the aspiring young woman with gates of opportunity opening on all sides of her'.[64]

In the 20th century, and under the full-time women missionaries, femininity was redefined in missionary schools to include physical activities that were relished and enjoyed rather than suffered (Figure 7.7). The fine motor skills produced by needlework were therefore matched with games and drill, recommended by the Hunter Commission as early as 1882. The visual archive provides interesting evidence (Figures 7.8 and 7.9). Whether games and physical activity went so far as to undermine the divisions of caste and community, and whether all hierarchies were dissolved on the playing field 'for the common good' is debatable, but free play and organised games were decidedly a formative and welcome part of the school experience.[65] While the more active sports and games – such as football and cricket[66] – were intended for boys, girls were confined to drill and exercise, perhaps a little croquet. For this, the playground was seen as a necessary attachment to the school. Once more, it was the missionaries who recognised the importance of play, not just in assuring good health but in building character and, in the case of boys, manliness. The London Mission reported in 1883 that 'a tolerably good playground' had 'already begun to have the desired effect of making the lads more manly and of greater physical vigour'.[67]

The government echoed these sentiments, though ambitious plans were usually constrained by the 'lack' of resources.[68]

Neither the academic nor the physical education curricula were gender-neutral: Sequeira had distinguished between girls' and boys' capabilities here to suggest that while no difference may be observed for academic subjects such as arithmetic, language, history, and geography, 'sewing, weaving, and skipping' for girls should take the place of 'carpentry, gardening and football' for boys, 'in keeping with their physical condition and their future

FIGURE 7.7   Playing field and compound, LMS Girl's Boarding School, Banga-
lore, Things Past and Present, 1920. Large playing fields became an
important feature of missionary schools, including girls' schools, in
contrast to government schools that often lamented the lack of funds
for developing the same.

Source: Marguerite L. Butler, Things Past and Present: The London Mission Girls' Home and
High School, Bangalore (n.d.), CWM Archive, LMS, Photographs, File 76, SOAS, London, UK.

occupations'.[69] But physical education for both boys and girls endured, even
after the focus was increasingly driven by more literary concerns.

The Guiding Government Hand: The Founding of Classroom Age

Phillippe Aries ties the lengthening of a short childhood of 5–6 years, and
the emergence of the age of adolescence, to the growth of institutions such
as schools in France.[70] 'The schoolboy or scholar or student . . . of the six-
teenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was to a long childhood what
the conscript of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was to adolescence'.[71]
Such a firm correlation between age and school standard was not attained in

L. M. Girls Anglo Vernacular school
Bellary S. India

Pole Drill in the Lower Secondary Department

FIGURE 7.8 'Pole Drill in the Lower Secondary Department', L.M. Girls' Anglo Vernacular School, Bellary, S. India. The freer space of the playground, as well as the discipline of drill, for boys as well as girls, were introduced in the missionary schools. CWM LMS India, Photograph File 10, SOAS Archives, London, UK.

Mysore until well into the 20th century. Divisions according to social class, rather than age, were more important. For instance, regular primary schools (read: for upper castes], to which pupils 'between the ages of five and 11' would go, and the 'twenty Adi-Dravida and Adi-Karnataka primary schools, where the children are comparatively old', were quite different.[72] While the former would have 'their powers of observation developed by a course of Nature Study and their hand and eye trained by means of Drawing, Kindergarten occupations, Clay-modeling and other items of hand work', the schools for 'lower' castes would plunge straight into 'practical instruction classes in weaving, mat-making, leather-work and smithy'.[73] In short, despite

FIGURE 7.9   'Sash Drill in the Infant Department', L.M. Girls' Anglo Vernacular School, Bellary. Once more, the 'infants' are distinguished from older girls by their uniforms, CWM LMS India, Photograph File 10, SOAS Archives, London, UK.

ending in failure, scholastic accomplishment was tied less to age and more to existing understandings of class/caste appropriate learning. We will return to the consequences of that later.

Schoolrooms had an assortment of little and big children, as evident in the missionary photography (see Figure 7.1). By the late 19th century, if the Gallery classroom of Miss Muller in Bangalore is anything to go by, the little children had been separated from other ages (see Figure 7.6). Yet, bundled up in saris, they are still miniature adults (compare Figures 7.6, 7.8, and 7.9). The regularisation of age and the recognition of 'infancy' or

'childhood' within the educational institution obviously followed a different trajectory in India, given two parallel categories that were emerging by the late 19th century – that of the 'child-wife' and 'child labourer' – both of which had scandalised the middle-class public enough to call for their restriction or even abolition.[74]

We have already referred to the 1867 report of public instruction that began correlating age to achievement, the category of 'infant' emerging as the preliminary stage at which hard skills could not yet be imparted. Mission preparatory schools embraced 'object lessons and exercises on forms and colour in addition to the preliminary reading and arithmetic', but their personal cleanliness and tidiness were lifelong lessons commended by inspectors.[75] Even in 1885, missionaries were complaining of the removal of girls from schools at around 12 years, so 'that their education ceases just when they are most prepared to value it. And profit by it'.[76]

In Mysore, the state-led systematisation of learning began in the mid-19th century under B.L. Rice, the son of the famed LMS missionary Benjamin Rice, who served in Mysore for half a century. B.L. Rice was appointed the inspector of schools in Mysore and Coorg (1865–1868 and 1870–1877) and director of public instruction (1868–1869, 1873–1883) and was secretary to the Education Department of Mysore from 1883 to 1890, thereby overseeing the critical phase of government engagement in education.[77]

a. Silent Reading and the Cultivation of Attention

Rice recorded with some impatience the faults of the indigenous system of learning that he had to rectify: 'The instruction in these [schools] did not aim at anything beyond the elements of reading, writing and arithmetic, and generally resulted in a marvelous cultivation of the memory'.[78] Reading was from palm leaf manuscripts, and students eventually progressed to kadathas, or blackened boards, writing with potstone. Arithmetic consisted principally in the 'memoriter repetition in chorus, led by the head boy, of endless tables of fractional and integral numbers, useful for mental calculations in ordinary petty business transaction'.[79] 'Advanced pupils' recited aloud parts of the *Amara Kosa*, a Sanskrit vocabulary in verse, though they did not understand a word of it.[80] But as A.R. Venkatachalapathy has pointed out, reading aloud from a cadjan text was necessitated by its form (the absence of punctuation) and purpose (for the public); it also demanded a 'high level of scholarship, knowledge of prosody, and the possession of a vast vocabulary'.[81] He says, 'Before the arrival of script, the concept of private [therefore silent] reading did not exist'.[82]

Nevertheless, silent reading was cultivated as a sign of virtue in the colonial school.[83] Critical to this practice was the introduction of the standardised textbook:

As well as benches, boards and books. The textbook loomed large, becoming, in the words of Krishna Kumar, the 'sacred icon of required knowledge'.[84] Rice would exert considerable energy in systematising learning by the book since textbooks clearly indicated levels of cognition, capabilities, and desirable skills, taking schooling in the more literary direction. But the printed word also allowed for privatised, silent reading and cultivated greater attention on the part of the student.

Jonathan Crary has discussed the emergence in Western Europe/USA, particularly in the last two decades of the 19th century, of the problem of 'attention' cathected around three emblematic figures – the industrial worker, the woman shopper, and the student – as 'capitalist modernity has generated a constant re-creation of the conditions of sensory experience, in what could be called a revolutionizing of the means of perception'.[85] Could a new 'disciplinary regime of attentiveness' be produced in a setting of colonial modernity, in which 'the industrial' only had a tenuous hold? What were the forms of this 'fundamentally new object in the modernization of subjectivity'?[86]

The field of education was of course one such realm within which mnemonic practices had to give way, or at least yield space to forms of reading, comprehension, and understanding, in an individuated, immobilised sense, distinct from what previous educational practices had privileged. The native school, Rice noted, 'is sure to be a noisy one, all the boys being encouraged to repeat their lesson as loud as possible. A practice doubtless intended to counteract restlessness which is produced by enforcing silence'.

'In Mussalmani schools', he continued, the left knee was brought up under the chin, and the arm put around the doubled-up leg to reach the book which is placed on the ground. 'In this attitude, the whole of the pupils rock to and fro, using the forefinger of the right hand as the pointer. Adults as well as children invariably follow this method in the schools, and the mussalmani girls too read in this manner'.[87]

We may only deduce from the voluminous reports on education what the effects of such new disciplinary regimes might have been. Silent reading – which, in the view of the educational experts, enhanced not only attention but also comprehension – was encouraged.[88] Comparing the government schools to the private unaided ones, Rice noted 'the specious industry of the children who are bawling out at all hours of the day, while our schools perform their work silently'.[89] At the same time, textbooks allowed students unexpected freedom of choice: thus, at the female school of St John's Road, Bangalore, students were surer 'of the condition of the ancient Britons, and tell me about the Romans and the Saxons', though the reading text 'contains much valuable attention to their future duties as wives and mothers that they will never obtain at home'.[90] Clearly, textbook moralising was less interesting than the new worlds to which students were introduced.

But the material changes to the classroom were a matter of pride, a sign of improvement, even if their educational agenda was severely hampered by governmental parsimony. Submitted to the 1870 exhibition in London was the visual comparison of past and present: Indigenous schools fell far short of the plenitude of the colonial classroom. The exhibits encouraged comparison – contrasting the built form of the new school compared to the veranda or temple space for the indigenous school; sand, cloth-bound books, palm leaf in indigenous schools, and printed paper in new schools; forms of punishment in indigenous schools, which included suspension from the rafters, compared to new disciplinary regimes which included regular examinations.[91] To Rice, while the indigenous school may have produced a certain fluency among students, there was no comprehension. 'Explaining a passage was not as important as memorising it'.[92] The introduction of the textbook, which allowed for individualised, private and silent reading, and the examinations on which it was based, would remove the impediments to comprehension.

b. Cartographic Evangelism

In addition to his obvious interest in classical Kannada literature, Rice's missionary heritage manifested itself in a new form of evangelism, promoting with zeal the study of geography in schools, for which three new objects – the atlas, the globe, and the map – were essential aids, once more encouraging tactility in classroom learning. Rice enthusiastically participated in what Sumathi Ramaswamy has felicitously termed 'cartographic evangelism', demonstrating the disproportionate role played by Protestant missionaries in propagating and establishing the new empire of geography.[93] Rice noted,

> The subject of geography is probably the one that provokes most discussion, the irregular coloured patches on the map representing countries are remarked upon. The branching lines indicating rivers and mountains are considered more to resemble trees or insects, The rotundity of the earth, its revolution on its axis and round the sun – these doctrines are never brought forward without giving rise to numerous dissentient opinions.[94]

Equipping the classroom with wall maps and atlases, and sometimes the globe, was critical to developing the geographical imagination, reorienting perspectives to the 'God's eye view' of the world/country. While a cartographic representation of the world was, on the surface, gender-neutral, many suggestions were made to make the process gender appropriate: thus it was enigmatically suggested that 'wall maps are better than atlases in the girls' school, which is perhaps more free than disciplined'.[95] The formal geographical knowledge

of the textbook could be enhanced only by the visual aids of map and globe, preferably in Canarese, to promote this new perception of the world.[96] By 1868, a large scale map of the world was engraved with Canarese keys.[97] In Kolar, Rice found, 'The last named subject, (geography) would have been studied intelligently if a terrestrial globe had been available for use. Two thirds of the class were unable to give a satisfactory proof of the earth's rotundity, yet their acquaintance with the physical and political points of the eastern hemisphere was very creditable'[98] (Figure 7.10).

The reorientation of perception was uneven: in Shimoga, Rice found that 'all agreed that the sun moved round earth, and the training master himself seemed surprised at my differing from that opinion'.[99] Some schools proved slightly better in likening the globe to an orange, though the theory associated with Rahu (the north lunar node in Indian astrology mythically associated with 'swallowing' the sun or moon during an eclipse, and a 'malefic planet') was only reluctantly relinquished.[100] Despite the globe, the map, and the atlas, Rice lamented, 'Geography was not taught in an intelligent manner, there was too much dependence on the book for definitions and productions'.[101] And in the LMS school at Alasur, the names of places have been committed to memory but 'no pains taken to acquire a knowledge of their position on the map'. As a consequence, as Reverend A.E. Adolphus of the London Missionary Society noted in 1889, failures in History and Geography were higher than those in Mathematics and languages.[102]

But there were also glimmers of success since Sarah de la Mare reported of the Shapore Girls' School that '[the girls] had a good general knowledge of the geography of India and pointed out quickly on the map the principal provinces, towns, rivers and mountains'.[103] Geographical knowledge proceeded apace, though its moralising impulse did not always produce the desired effect among students: Though knowledge of Mysore was poor, it was lamented, one child listed 'learning and civilization in a long list of the exports of England'.[104]

Resistance to geography came from parents who saw no virtue in training their children in subjects that did not lead to a job. Yet despite the long and detailed record of disinterest in, and even resistance to, the cultivation of cartographic knowledge, the encounter with cartographic objects such as the globe, the atlas, and the map considerably broadened children's imaginations, encouraged tactility in the classroom, and even led to a certain enchantment with regions and products that were unfamiliar.[105]

Could 'Experts' Correct the Too Literary Tendency of Learning?

Kini noted in his dissertation on vocational education in 1933 that the training of students, especially boys, in some skills, to draw them away from

'a too literary' education was a constant, even obsessive, concern of the Mysore government. There were equally persistent discussions of the failure to transform attitudes to 'manual' work. Mysore had had an 'engineering' school since 1862 to train 'educated subordinates for the PWD'. Disappointing results, with even the scholarships failing to overcome the 'repugnance to the active life of an Engineer', led to its eventual abolition in 1883.[106] Industrial schools set up in Hassan in 1889 and in Mysore in 1892, also produced paltry results. In the years leading up to 1900, 'Various subjects were taught in the Industrial schools such as masonry, wood-carving, drawing, modelling, carpentry, weaving, rattan work, blacksmith's work, book-binding, manufacturing of roofing and flooring tiles, and aluminum vessels, etc',[107] but this, too, was marked by failure: they attracted only a small proportion of students; upper-caste or non-artisan classes shed their aversion to manual education by 1915 only because of the prospect of a ready job in government.[108]

The government efforts were dogged by at least two irreconcilable contradictions, revealing the centrality of caste and gender as capital in defining access to education. What accounted for the indifference to and poor performance of both upper and lower castes in full-time technical education?[109] Was education intended to provide enhanced life skills to castes already ranked as 'labouring castes'? Alternatively, were the requirements of the emerging modern economy demanding the entry of other (than upper) castes, and skills other than mere manual ones? Would a generalised manual education, in short, be more productive than vocational training?

By the late 19th century, elaborate calculations were being made of the school-going population between 4 and 14 (approximately 15% of the total) of which a mere 15% actually went to school: boys far outnumbered the girls, who accounted for less than 4% of the school-going population, with Mahommedan and Christian girls far outnumbering Hindus among the proportion of learners.[110] Even as late as the 1930s, a disproportionately large number in the government system attended primary school, followed by a sharp drop in middle and high schools.

Year	Primary Schools	All Schools	Primary School Pupils	All School Pupils
1881	907	2,087	38,296	57,657
1915–16	4,930	5,436	158.158	214,397
1932–33	6,243	6,746	247,191	297,099

Source: M. Siddalingaiya, *Reconstructing Elementary Education in Mysore: Mysore Section,* New Education Fellowship, 1935, pp. 4, 10, 12.

To reach the high school was a privilege in more ways than one; missionary high schools introduced both girls and boys to the practice of science and the use of equipment for comprehending the natural and material worlds (Figures 7.10 and 7.11).

Mysore state had no social class adequate to the task of modernising and industrialising Mysore; the government itself had to fit people to that possible future. But how was this to be done, given the established failures of manual education over at least four decades?[111] How moreover, was it to be done by a bureaucratic elite who, while articulating the need for societal transformation, stopped short of measures that would threaten their own entrenched power?

No one better understood the constraints of an education which largely fitted people to learning according to inherited caste callings than Hormusji Bhabha. As the inspector general of education in Mysore, he expressed the importance of drawing out skills from all children, graded according to age and ability. Many other officials of the Mysore government repeated pious

FIGURE 7.10 The Girls' High School had more than just benches, boards, and maps; instruction in this science class deploys other teaching aids as well, which encouraged observation, measurement, and tactility as necessary skills.

Source: CWM, LMS, India, Photographs, File no 11, SOAS Archives, London, UK.

FIGURE 7.11   'Indian Schoolboys Drawing from Nature', F. Deaville Walker. A science class in progress that enhanced observation and recording skills, among others.

Source: Methodist Missionary Society, India General, Photographs File 4, MMS 09/20/04

statements about breaking down the general aversion to manual labour, particularly among the privileged castes. 'Any work that provides a real training for hand and eye is in a true sense educative', said M. Ramaswamayya in 1909, but added:

> Religious scruples must be respected in regard to selection of industries and such of them or parts of them as are against religious ideas may be eliminated. For example, a high caste boy *should not be asked to learn shoe-making* or the making of leather ropes and none of them *ought to be forced to cut up the carcass of a dog or cow* to use the flesh as manure.[112]
> *(Emphasis added)*

Cheluvaraya Mudaliar similarly saw no virtue in establishing an industrial school, preferring manual instruction in ordinary schools 'not with the idea of turning out trained artisans in any particular trade but simple with the idea of turning out a more practical minded individual whose hand, eye and brain have been trained to work together for a common purpose'.[113]

In 1898–1899, Bhabha called for 'the use of the blackboard and maps, object lessons, drill and singing being freely interspersed between lessons of reading and writing'.[114] In 1903, Bhabha was asked to draft a scheme to introduce drawing as a subject in all Taluk and High Schools.[115] In 1904 again, Bhabha was asked by the state to draft a 'proposal for the introduction of practical agriculture and handicraft classes to High school and College students in Mysore state'.[116] Bhabha wanted to break the deep-rooted aversion to manual work by including it as a component of *general* education, with appropriate activities for different ages of childhood. Manual training would no longer be confined to the specialised (technical) schools nor to those classes whose inheritance was in practical skills; the only way for Mysore to develop a class of artisans/workers *mentally* equipped for industrial work was to start them young. He also echoed the missionary hope that 'the training of the eye and hand cultivate intelligence and improves character'.[117]

Bhabha travelled to Europe and America in 1906 to study these methods first-hand.[118] He was convinced that 'the boys and girls of India have as great an aptitude for manual work, if they are trained in it at the right age, as the children of any other country'.[119] Bhabha thus inverted the purpose of the sloyd movement, which arose in Sweden in 1870s in order to *prevent* skills from being superseded by machines, to serve in Mysore as the seedbed for an industrial mentality.[120] Sloyd would produce a love of work, habits of tidiness, an aesthetic sense, forms of attention, a training of the eye, and the capacity to think among children. But importantly, as Bhabha pointed out, it 'does not teach a trade'; its focus was disciplining of the child-body.

In 1907, the government of Mysore sanctioned the introduction of kindergarten and manual instruction in the state; in 1908, Bhabha enabled the appointment of L.R. Latter, headmistress of the Invictor Road Council School, London, for organising kindergarten work and Dr G. Larsson, principal of Quincy Shaw's Sloyd Training School, Boston, for organising manual instruction in Mysore.[121]

For six months in 1907, Gustav Larsson set up the sloyd system of manual training in Mysore, training 22 teachers most of whom were university graduates, in Sheshadri Iyer Memorial Hall, Bangalore. The equipment was procured from America excepting the work benches which were produced by Mysore industrial school as per specification.[122] By 1909, nine sloyd centres for pupils of high and Anglo-vernacular schools had been set up in Bangalore, Mysore, Kolar, Tumkur, Chitaldurg, Shimoga, Chikmaglur, Hassan, and Channapatna and were placed under two supervisors, Krishna Iyengar and David Nagavkar. Sixteen teachers of Government schools underwent special training under Gustav Larsson. 'The nine sloyd centres together have been fitted up with 180 sloyd benches and provide for the instruction of 1260 boys on the whole'.[123] In addition, 'special normal schools for cardboard works and paper folding were held at nine centres during the last summer vacation under eighteen trained teachers. Altogether about 260 teachers of different grades of schools, English and vernacular were trained'.[124]

Before his departure, Larsson also organised an exhibition of work done, and the two supervisors continued manual training for the western and eastern divisions of Mysore, organising sloyd training in high schools. Each of the eight districts had a sloyd class, with two teachers. Meanwhile, Bhabha made bold to revise the curriculum of the Upper Secondary classes in the normal schools: Algebra, English, and history were dropped as less useful in vernacular schools, and 'time found for art work and sloyd in the curriculum. Instructions in geometry, which consists of an experimental and theoretical course, as well as in Arithmetic is now made more practical than before'. This had the effect of making even the teaching of history and geography 'more rational and interesting'. Instruction in object drawing, clay modelling, and brush work begun in the pper secondary training class in the previous year was continued. A course of training in paper-folding and card board work for the teachers under training was prescribed for the first time and it is proposed to teach paper-cutting and basket weaving.[125]

By this time, the term 'kindergarten' had come into more widespread use, replacing references to 'infant' schools. 'Kindergarten skills' were gender-neutral, but sloyd skills were only for boys/men. Bhabha's division was between kindergarten skills and manual training for the senior classes. In making suggestions for the adaptation of sloyd to Mysore, Bhabha suggested the use of local materials (sand, clay, stones, fibre), drew on local skills (thus the existence of weavers in Mandya and Chitaldurg was a practical advantage), and found use in discarded bricks and building material. Sloyd work

involving tools was to be gradually introduced, from Std IV, before which nature study, gardening could be introduced.[126] This process would culminate in science in the laboratory.

It was far from smooth-sailing for these radical ideas. There were those who felt that manual training was more appropriate in rural schools, or those urban schools with artisan children.[127] While opposition to the education of female children had never been very strenuous in Mysore, the content of such education engaged a wide variety of people.[128] The Ladies Conference had demanded a gender-neutral curriculum in 1927, but others strongly believed that the now-entrenched feminine subjects should be retained. The *Review of the Progress of Education in the Mysore State for the* Decennium *1922–3 to 1931–32* stated that the curriculum for girls in schools, initially, was the same as that of the boys' schools, but some additions and modifications were made to ensure that girls were trained in practical skills which were useful for the household.[129]

The sloyd system was finally discontinued in 1920 but Bhabha's passionate espousal of Kindergarten and Manual training bore some fruit in the following years, at least at the level of training teachers: 'Normal classes for training teachers in card board and paper folding are held every year for 3 weeks during the vacation in all District head Quarters as well as in some Taluk stations. . . . Training in Arithmetic, geography, object lessons, narration of stories, drawing and modelling, kindergarten and nature study is given in the Normal schools of the state from 1907'.[130] M.K. Gandhi would iterate the importance of 'training the brain with the hand' in his proposals for basic education, in the late 1930s, though he showed no knowledge of Bhabha's attempt to adapt sloyd to Indian conditions.[131]

Conclusion

In 1915, an enquiry was made into the method to calculate the proportion of children of 'school-going age' to the total population.[132] By this time, 'school-going' – which at the start of our period was associated with specific social groups – had achieved a more secular meaning, associated with abstract notions of appropriate ages for learning. By the 1930s, as reports showed, a more rigid correlation between age and schooling was established.

I began this chapter with educational schemes that met with astonishing success – namely, the inclusion of needlework for girls and physical education for all in the curricula – and I have concluded with an apparent failure – the impossibility of manual education in general schools in Mysore. I have tried to ask a different set of questions related to what the physical material aspects of schooling were, both in terms of what was intended and, to a smaller extent, what was achieved. In the absence of more robust evidence of the experience of schooling from among pupils or scholars themselves, I have shown that transformations of the physical-material aspects of colonial schooling, and therefore childhood, were enduring, well into the present. By the 1930s, when

schooling had indeed become not only an urgent necessity for anyone attempting to redefine themselves in the social hierarchy, but even claimed as a right, by both members of the dominant-caste Lingayats or the much-lower-ranked Halepykas or Panchamas.[133] The content of education was less important than the politics of presence in school, for which the state itself appeared willing to lend a hand, whether through redefining Halepykas as Sudras or in building hostels for Panchamas. But it is striking that reports of the 1930s made little reference to the sloyd experiment; while the word 'kindergarten' continued to have salience for children of classes I to IV, a more diluted and less destabilising reference to the 'practical arts' took the place of manual training.[134]

The Mysore case allows us to flesh out the local details of what was clearly an international success (i.e. the introduction of needlework for girls of both elite and non-elite schools, and the inclusion of physical training in school curricula) and the impossibility of reorienting a syllabus for boys that was, despite the state's obsessive efforts, already closely focused on the more literary skills better suited to the upper-caste school boy and government work. But the occasional flashes within this archive have allowed us to plot a different experience of childhood, in which the colonial classroom emerged as a rich and complex sensorium, only gradually correlated more strictly with age.

Notes

1 This article has benefitted from comments from Neeladri Bhattacharya and Mary E. John, as well as other participants of the Querying Childhood workshop in April 2021, and from the audience at GHIL, 26 July 2022.
2 Honble A.B. Devereux, Judicial Commr. in Mysore, to Captain Cunningham, Secy to Commr. for the Govt. of Territories of HH the Rajah of Mysore, Bangalore, 15th Nov 1856, File no 1 of 1856 Sl. no 1, Education, 1856, 'Scheme of Education for Mysore and Coorg', Karnataka State Archives, Bengaluru (hereafter KSA).
3 *Matha Patrikey*, Pustaka 3, No. 1, July, 1866, pp. 69–70. KSA. The paper was called *Shala Patrike* from 1867.
4 *Matha Patrikey*, Pustaka 2, No. 6, October 1866, p 6 ff, KSA.
5 *Matha Patrikey*, Pustaka 1, No. 4, August 1866, p. 93. KSA.
6 A rare instance was a description of early missionary education in c. 1880: 'I wrote on a black painted wooden board cut 1 ¼ feet wide and 3 feet long with a small piece of chalk. . . . I wrote like this for six months, then on 'paper' made of Kattali leaf. I would fill 8 to 10 leaves per day. After six months of this, they filled 40–50 broad and round ekka leaves per day. . . . There were no steel pens like these days. . . . Only one rich man has a pencil', G. Wesley, *How the Gospel Came to Badachowdanahalli* (Bangalore: Tract and Book Society, 1927), pp. 6–7. Parna Sengupta has traced the career of the 'object lesson', which focused on concrete things as a way of leading to abstraction, in colonies such as India. The transformation of three-dimensional things into two dimensional drawings 'effectively privileged the visual over every other sense'. Sengupta, *Pedagogy for Religion: Missionary Education and the Fashioning of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011), pp. 61–80, esp. 69. See also Hayavadana Rao, *Mysore Gazetteer*, Vol. IV, 1929, pp. 482–483.

 7 Such complaints continued into the 1930s. See M. Siddalingiaya, *Reconstructing Elementary Education in Mysore: Mysore Section* (Bangalore: New Education Fellowship, 1935), p. 30, 142; K.N. Kini, *Proposals for a Program of Vocational Education for Mysore: Based Upon Experiences in Mysore and the United States of America* (Bangalore: Bangalore Press, 1933), p. 1; T.J. Sequeira, *The Education of India, History and Problems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 55. This, despite the fact that Mysore had enviably higher percentages of literates, among both boys and girls, compared with some important provinces of British India.

 8 Krishna Kumar, *The Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonial and Nationalist Ideas* (Delhi: Sage, 2005, 2nd edition); Parimala V. Rao, 'Elite Conflict and Women's Education' in Deepak Kumar et al., eds. *Education in Colonial India: Historical Insights* (Delhi: Manohar, 2013), pp. 351–374.

 9 Preeti, 'Schooling Women: Debates On Education In The United Provinces (1854–1930)' PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2016; Shobna Nijhavan, *Women and Girls in the Hindi Public Sphere: Periodical Literature in Colonial North India* (Delhi: OUP, 2012); Divya Kannan, 'Recasting the Self: Missionaries and the Education of the Poor in Kerala (1854–1956)', PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2016.

10 *Report of the Director of Public Instruction 1866–67* (Bangalore: Mysore Govt Press, 1867), p. 6.

11 Ibid; *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1872–73* (Bangalore: Mysore Government Press, 1873), pp. 68–69.

12 *Report of the Director of Public Instruction 1867–68* (Bangalore: Mysore Govt Press, 1868), p. 91.

13 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1868–69* (Bangalore: Mysore Govt Press, 1869), p. 36; *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1876–77* (Bangalore: Mysore Government Press, 1878), pp. 53–54.

14 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1871–72* (Bangalore: Mysore Government Press, 1872), p. 38.

15 As the church history itself had it, the city of Bangalore was divided in two; LMS in east and the Wesleyans on the west.

16 *Centenary Souvenir of the London Mission in the Mysore State: 1820–1920* (Mysore: Wesleyan Mission Press, no date), p. 5,6. See also, *The Jivana Charitre or Life story of the Rev. Henry Premaka of the Mysore District 1850–1929*, Translated from the Kanarese and edited by the Right Reverend N.C. Sargant (Bishop in Mysore, Church of South India Birmingham, 1955). MMS/Special Series/Notes and Transcripts/FBN 6 (fiche 268–269). SOAS. The LMS began its work in Bellary as early as 1810; 'A Sketch of the Early History of the Bellary Mission' Copy of a letter from the Rev. J Reid to Major Thomson, Bellary May 11, 1840. CWM INDIA Odds Box 3 No. 5, SOAS.

17 Rev James Sewell [1838–1845]. 'A Brief Retrospect of the Bangalore Mission in connection with the LMS'. CWM INDIA Odds Box 3 No. 5, SOAS. The Kanarese Boy's Boarding school was begun by James Campbell, in 1825.

18 Ibid., p. 14.

19 Ibid., p. 8, 10.

20 *One Hundred Years in Mysore: 1821–1921 Being a Review of the Work of the Wesleyan Mission During the Century 1821–1921* (Mysore City: Wesleyan Mission Press, 1922), p. 12, 26.

21 Ibid., p. 31. Rev. W.E. Tomlinson, 'The outcastes of Mysore' Work among the Outcastes: Mysore City Circuit, S India': MMSL INS 131–155, 146, SOAS, London.

22 Ibid., p. 29; Mrs Hutcheon, *Glimpses of India and Mission Life* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1880), p. 23.

23 G.G. Findlay and W.W. Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, Vol. V (London: Epworth Press, 1924), p. 278.

24 Ibid., p. 279.

   16 W. Beynon, J. Smith and E.A. Ware, *Report for 1867, Belgaum*, CWM South India: Canarese Reports Box 1 1866–1883, CWM/LMS/10/01, SOAS.

25 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1868–69* (Bangalore: Mysore Govt Press, 1869), p. 2.

26 *Report on Mysore 1867*, Belgaum, W. Beynon, J. Smith, E.A. Ware, CWM South India: Canarese Reports Box 1 1866–1883, CWM/LMS/10/01, SOAS.

27 J.E. Cummings may have romanticised the missionary classroom when he said, 'Here is the merchant's son jeweled head and foot, standing by the side of the poor boy with hardly a turban on his head or a rag on his back'. Cummings, 'Native Institution at Bangalore', *Harvest Field*, Vol. 1 November 1861–October 1862, Bangalore, Wesleyan Mission Press, 1862. The Gooty school was 'small, partly because the two sections of low caste people, the Madiyas (sic) and the Malas will not mix with each other . . .' *The One Hundred and Sixth Report of the London Missionary Society*, April 1, 1900 to March 31, 1901 (London: Alexander and Shepherd, 1902), p. 154.

28 See Chakali Chandra Sekhar, 'In Search of a Touchable Body: Christian Mission and Dalit Conversions', *MDPI*, Religions, MDPI, pp. 1–14. On the importance of a history of touch, as opposed to histories of vision, see Anna Maerker, 'Towards a Comparative History of Touch and Spaces of Display: The Body as Epistemic Object', *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2015, p. 151, Special Issue: Law and Conventions from a Historical Perspective (2015), pp. 284–300.

29 Chandra Sekhar, 'In Search of a Touchable Body', p. 6.

30 N.C. Sargant, *The Life Story of an Indian Minister, The Rev. Henry Premaka (1850–1922)* (1955) MMSL INS119, p. 7; a full description of Wesleyan work among the famine orphans is in Findlay and Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, Vol. V, pp. 282–283.

31 N.C. Sargant, translated and edited, 'The Jivana Charitre or Life story of the Rev. Henry Premaka of the Mysore District, 1850–1929' (Church of South India Birmingham, 1955). MMS/Special Series/Notes and Transcripts/FBN 6 (fiche 268–269), SOAS.

32 EP Rice, Bangalore March 25th 1889, London Missionary Society 1889: Eastern, CWM India, South, Canarese reports: Box 2, File 5, 1888, SOAS. Emphasis added.

33 Vijaykumar, 'The Development of the Educational Policy of the Wesleyan Mission in the Mysore Area' 1986, Master of Theology Thesis, UTC Archives, Bangalore, p. 72. See however, Chandrasekhar, 'In Search of the Touchable Body', p. 6.

34 'Clock time disciplines temporality, regulates it, socializes it', Nathan Snaza and Debbie Sonu, 'Borders, Bodies, and the Politics of Attention', *Counterpoints*, vol. 501, *Pedagogical Matters: New Materialisms and Curriculum Studies*, 2016, pp. 29–42.

35 Mrs Hutcheon, *Glimpses of India and Mission Life*, p. 26.

36 Ibid., p. 27.

37 The director of public instruction in 1879 said that girls were brought up to see singing and dancing as 'as their legitimate and hereditary calling and profession from the earliest age', so it would only be fair to view 'the little girls of this class . . . not as the children of outcastes from society'. DPI to Secy of CC in

Mysore, 29th Jan 1879 Admission of Children of Prostitutes into Govt. aided schools: File no 5 of 1878, Sl no. 104; Education. Major B for Feb 1879, KSA.

38 'In Mass Movements among the depressed classes, the school has played a very important part. . . . In South India, Local District Boards . . . are active in opening their schools to the Depressed Classes, and where this is not possible they are establishing special schools for scholars of those communities'. LMS All India Ad hoc Committee, Bangalore (March [12–18] 1936), p. 6, UTC Archives, Bangalore.

39 *LMS: Minutes of a Meeting of the Kanarese Committee Held at Bellary July 1st 2nd and 3rd 1935, 1935)* (Bangalore: UTC Archives).

40 Sewing and needlework was discontinued in the 1990s, as the curriculum became more gender-neutral.

41 It could also induce boredom, though there is no evidence in available records. See, however, Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: The Women's Press, 1989 [reprinted and revised]), p. 150.

42 There have been long and illustrious traditions of embroidery from virtually every region of India, but the yoking of needlework and girl's formal education was entirely a missionary/colonial invention. An early critical study of embroidery's link to a feminine ideal, and spirited resistance to it, is \Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*; she points to the strong relationship between sewing and Protestantism, which imbued its practitioners with a work ethic and a calling: 'The Protestant idea of a 'calling' allowed a secular craft or occupation to be seen as God's work'. Op cit. P. 86. Malathi de Alwis draws attention to the 'respectability' that needlework bestowed on its subjects. de Alwis, 'The Production and Embodiment of "Respectability" Gendered Demeanours in Colonial Ceylon', in Michael Roberts, ed. *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited* (Colombo: Marga Institute, 1997), Vol. I, pp. 105–143, 118–121; Maria Mies emphasizes the encashability of such skills in *Lace makers of Narsapur: Indian Housewives produce for the world market* (Zed Press, 1982). See also, Mary Hancock, 'Needlework as an Established Sub Set of Home Science', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4, October 2001, pp. 871–903, esp. p. 884.

43 On the embroidered 'sampler' as an aesthetic object in colonial Ceylon, see Mark E. Balmforth, 'Riotous Needlework: Gendered Pedagogy and a Negotiated Christian Aesthetic in the American Ceylon Mission', *Review of Development & Change*, Vol. XXIII, No. 2, July–December 2018, pp. 63–92, esp. p. 74.

44 Belgaum Mission report of 1872 CWM South India: Canarese Reports Box 1 18661883, CWM/LMS/10/01, SOAS, London.

45 CWM South India: Canarese Reports Box 2, 1884–1895, CWM/LMS/10/01, SOAS, London.

46 Linda Ann Ryan, 'Wesleyan Perspectives on the Education of Girls in Eighteenth-Century England', *Wesley and Methodist Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2016, pp. 135–154, esp. p. 144, 149.

47 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the year 1870–71* (Bangalore: Mysore Govt Press, 1871), p. 114.

48 See Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, p. 81.

49 According to Roszika Parker, these were concerns of early educationists of the 17th century, Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, pp. 105, 107.

50 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the year 1867–68*, pp. 57, 58 63, 66, 67, 68, *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the year 1868–69*, pp. 115, 118; *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the year 1870–71*, pp. 62, 63; 114; *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore 1871–2*, pp. 109–110; *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1876–77*, pp. 117, 119.

51 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1870–71*, p. 71.

52 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1868–9*, p. 69.

53 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1870–71*, pp. 117–118 (emphasis added)

54 On the opposing views of Mary Wolstonecraft and Hannah More regarding the virtues of needlework, see Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, p. 141.

55 De Alwis, 'The Production and Embodiment', p. 129.

56 Rules Relating to Girls' School Committees 1892–93, File no 7 of 1892; Sl no. 1 to 3, Education, KSA.

57 Appendix A – Note by M. Ramaswamyya on the place of manual Instruction and Elementary agriculture in the School Curriculum, *Report of the Committee on Practical and Literary Instruction in Elementary Schools in Mysore* Practical education in Rural Schools File no. 224 of 1909, 1–4, 7, 10–18, 22, 23, Education, KSA.

58 M. Muller, *Report for 1896: London Mission Kanarese Girls' Day Schools Pettah Bangalore* (Bangalore: Caxton Press, 1897), p. 2, UTC Archives, Bangalore.

59 M.L. Butler, *Report of the LMS Women's Work in Bangalore 1916: The Girls' Home and the High School* (Bangalore: 1916), p. 2, UTC Archives, Bangalore.

60 M.L. Butler, *Report of the LMS Women's Work in Bangalore 1917–18: (typescript)*, UTC Archives, Bangalore.

61 Wesleyan Mission Kannada Girls' school, Honnali – Class I, 21/8/1900 UTC Archives, Bangalore.

62 From *Things Past and Present*, Council for World Mission Archive, London Missionary Society, Photographs, File 62–79, File 76, London Mission Girls' Home and High School, SOAS, London. See Nair, 'Seeing Like the Missionary: An Iconography of Education in Mysore,1840–1920', *Studies in History*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2019, pp. 178–217.

63 Eleanor Tidball, *Among the Women and Girls of Bangalore: Annual Report for 1921* (Bangalore: LMS, no date).

64 *Report of Bangalore Women's Work for 1919*, p. 3 UTC archives, Bangalore.

65 Sequeira, *The Education of India*, p. 139.

66 On the introduction of cricket and cricketing grounds, though largely in schools of the higher class, in various parts of the province, see *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1872–73* (Bangalore: Mysore Government Press, 1873), p. 40.

67 Report of the London Mission, Bangalore for the year 1883, SOAS.

68 *Proceedings of the Director of Public Instruction, Dated 15/8/1889, Titled – 'Improved System and Method of Schools and Collegiate Education (Contd)*

69 Sequeira, *The Education of India*, p. 129.

70 Phillippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, Translated from the French by Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 334; part two of his book pertains to Scholastic Life, pp. 137–336.

71 Ibid., p. 329.

72 *Review of the Progress of Education in the Mysore State for the Decennium (1922–23 to 1931–32)*, p. 35.

73 Ibid.

74 Nair, 'The Licit in the Modern', in *Mysore Modern: Rethinking the Region under Princely Rule* (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 2011); Padma Anagol McGinn, 'The Age of Consent Act (1891) Reconsidered: Women's Perspectives and Participation in the Child Marriage Controversy in India', *South Asia Research*, Vol. 12, No. 2, November 1992, pp. 100–118; Tanika Sarkar, 'A Prehistory of Rights: The Age of Consent Debate in Colonial Bengal', *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Autumn 2000, pp. 601–622; Aditya Sarkar, *Trouble at the Mill: Factory Law and the Emergence of the Labour Question in Late Nineteenth Century Bombay* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018).

75 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year, 1868–9*, p. 72.

76 CWM South India: Canarese Reports Box 2, 1884–1889, CWM/LMS/10, Bangalore Mission report for 1885 B Rice File 2, SOAS, London.

77 L.D. Barnett, 'B. L. Rice', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 4, October 1927, pp. 934–936; *Biographical Notes*, B.L. Rice (printed in 1922) Centre for South Asian Studies, Cambridge.

78 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1870–71.*

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

81 A.R. Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book: Scholars, Scribes and Scribblers in Colonial Tamil Nadu* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2011), p. 222.

82 Ibid., p. 221.

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84 Kumar, *The Political Agenda*, p. 67.

85 Jonathan Crary, *The Suspension of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modernity*, p. 13.

86 Ibid., 17.

87 *Report, 1868–9*, p. 37.

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89 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore, 1868–9*, p. 121.

90 Ibid., p. 115, 1868–69. In rural schools, girls were competently reading *pancha tantra, katha sangraha, katha saptati; vagvidhayini. Report on Public Instruction in Mysore, 1870–71*, pp. 84–85.

91 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore, 1870–71*, p. 29.

92 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore, 1868–9*, p. 27.

93 Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Terrestrial Lessons: The Conquest of the World as Globe* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2017), pp. 37–90.

94 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1868–69*, p. 27.

95 Report on *Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1873–74*, p. 55.

96 'Geography Performance of Normal Schools is Poor Since There Are No Canarese Maps', *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1867–68*, p. 49.

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105 Ramaswamy, *Terrestrial Lessons*, see especially the chapter on 'Down to Earth? Of Girls and Globes', pp. 147–215.

106 *Report on Public Instruction, 1870–71*, p. 19; *Report on Public Instruction, 1870–71, 1869–70*, pp. 133–135; Kini, *Proposals for a Program of Vocational Education for Mysore*, p. 24.

107 *Review of the Progress of Education in the Mysore State, 1911–1916* (Bangalore: Government Press, 1918), p. 7.

108 Ibid., pp. 56–69. Of the total number at technical schools in 1915–16, 720 were Brahmans and 917 were other Hindus, 131 Mahommedans and 323 Christians.

109 While young upper castes had their eyes on the end goal of a government job, those from artisan castes left the industrial training once they had picked up a few skills which would earn them a few annas more in the marketplace.

110 *Report on Public Instruction in Mysore for the Year 1894–95* (Bangalore: Mysore Government Press, 1896), pp. 2, 11.

111 Brahmans/upper castes demanded and obtained, especially in the late 19th century, the majority of scholarships even when they were specifically instituted for the enhancement of technical (therefore manual) education in Mysore. See Letter from A. Gopalacharlu, Manager of the Sreenivasa Mandiram and Charities, Bangalore to B.K. Venkatavaradaiengar, Secretary, dated 6/11/1905, File no. 111 of 1905, Sl. no 1–2, Education, KSA; even special schemes for the education of widows were monopolised by the upper castes: 'Distribution of the Devaraj Bahadur Charity fund', 1894, File no 19 of 1894, Education, KSA; Narasimiengar, Secretary of Deva Raja Bahadur Charity Education Fund to P.N. Krishna Murti, Dewan to the Maharajah of Mysore (not dated) Devaraj Bahadur Charity Fund File no. 36 of 1903, Sl no. 1–2, Education, KSA.

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120 The word itself derived from slog meaning 'skilful' or 'handy'. H.J. Bhabha, *Special Report on Manual Training in General Education: 1909*; David J. Whittaker, *The Impact and Legacy of Educational Sloyd: Head and Hands in Harness* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 100, 102. It is interesting to note Larsson's belief that 'in harmony with sloyd, educational gymnastics should be taught as a valuable instrument for a complete general education' (see fn 36 in original book). See also Tidskrift, Journal of Research in Teacher Education: *Theme Sloyd – Tradition in Transition*: No 2–3, 2006, pp. 19–20.

121 H.J. Bhabha to K.S. Chandrashekhara Iyer, Secretary, dated 11/6/1908, Kindergarten and manual instruction, File nos 325 of 1908, Sl. nos. 3; 4–7; 6; 5–13; 10–11; Education, KSA; Review of the Progress of Education in the Mysore State, 1911–1916 (Government Press, Bangalore, 1918), p. 13.

122 Isaac Goddard, 'Gustaf Larsson and the Sloyd Training School', MA thesis in Education, Boston University, 1956, accessed March 5, 2020, pp. 55–59.

123 H.J. Bhabha, IG of Education to K.S. Chandraskara Iyer, Secretary, 25/10/1909: Kindergarten and Manual Instruction: 325 of 1907, Sl. no, 3; 4–7; 10–11; 6; 5–13, Education, KSA.

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.

126 Bhabha, *Special Report on Manual Training in General Education*, p. 133.

127 Note by C. Krishna Rao on Resolution 2 of the First meeting of the Industrial instruction Committee, held in Bangalore on the 24th October 1910.

128 Parimala Rao, however, show that there was a 'policy of discouraging women's education' in 1901 under PN Krishnamurthy, (p. 363) and even more determined resistance from non-Brahman leaders (p. 365), although she admits that women made steady progress despite the opposition. In particular, she documents the actions of leading non-Brahman leader, C.R. Reddy, in obstructing plans for expanding women's education, pp. 366–367. Rao 'Elite Conflict tin Women's Education', in Rao, ed. *Educaiton in India: Historical Insights*.

129 *Review of the Progress of Education in the Mysore State for the Decennium 1922–3 to 1931–32*, p. 73.

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133 It would take me too far afield to trace the rise and importance of hostels in encouraging higher education. 'Proposal for developing the Panchama boarding school ay Mysore into a Central Panchama Educational Industrial and Training Institute', File no. 27 of 1918; 1–4, Education; B. Basavaradhya, Secretary of the Mysore Lingayat Education Fund Association to H.J. Bhabha, IG of Education, dated 4/10/1909: 'A Lingayat Students' Hostel near the new Bangalore High school 'File 140 of 1909, 1–6, Education, KSA; Admission of the boys of Halepyka and other depressed classes into Government educational institutions in the state [89 of 1917; 37 and 42, Education, KSA.

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8

JUVENILE LABOUR IN BEEDI INDUSTRY OF CENTRAL INDIA 1960S–'80S

Megha Sharma

The beedi industry of Central India has grown to immense proportions over the last century.[1] The industry consists primarily of home-based women and juvenile labour. There were approximately a 45 million beedi workers, most of whom were women.[2] Home-based production allows varied forms of organisation and labour deployment, and women workers heavily rely on family labour, primarily their children.

The beedi industry forms an interesting case study to understand how domestic production impacted workers' lives. The present works on the beedi industry speak of the domestic sphere, mainly highlighting workers' exploitation (Prasad & Prasad, 1985). There was a consensus in the official domain that women and children preferred and actively took to home-based production. They reinforced the existing associations between women and home-based production and encouraged women and children to work from home. The *Report of National Commission on Labour*, 1969, in its opening lines on the beedi industry, writes that

> apart from workshop or factory system of production, manufacture of bidis is organised through contractors or by distributing work in private dwellings where workers take raw materials given by the employer or his contractor and hand over the finished product at the stipulated place. At home, women and other members of the family help in rolling the bidis.
>
> *(Gajendragadkar, 1969)*

According to this, the labour of women was supplementary to the primary male breadwinner in the family. The use of the word 'help' to describe

women's contributions marginalises their family labour and the conditions of work at home.

Feminist scholars address the present lacuna and highlight the issues that need to be raised while studying home-based production. Maithreyi Krishnaraj discusses the bamboo workers in villages of western Maharashtra and the organisation of female labour within family-based production. She says,

> Bamboo workers are self-employed in a hereditary occupation. The work is done in family units with all members participating in it, though not in equal measure; the method of production is traditional, all items being handwoven with the use of a minimum of tools . . . skill in weaving and stripping is a question of practice and is passed on from elder to young family members.
>
> *(Krishnaraj, 2012, p. 37)*

Girls are expected to help with housework and basket making from the early years. When they begin home production, though their wages are essential to the family's survival, the income remains controlled by the men in the family. She explains this by looking at production relations at home. The problem arises when

> the claim to women's labour is established through kinship organisations, which sanction men's control over resources and through various symbolic rituals. Exogamy, patrilocality, and strict regulation of female sexual behaviour ensure the subordinate position of women despite the centrality of their work for household subsistence.
>
> *(Krishnaraj, 2012, p. 43)*

Therefore, women's contribution to the production process becomes invisible. Similarly, in the beedi industry, the conclusion drawn about women's invisibilisation from the production process does not offer insight into workers' preferences, reasons for continuing, strategies for using family labour, and aspirations. A closer look at everyday relations becomes crucial to know the dynamics of homework. Workers' testimonies help understand everyday negotiations at home, how they start home-based production, and the conditions under which they continue.

In this chapter, using the interviews conducted with women workers of Bhopal and the Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh, I will discuss their experiences of working at home. Interviews with the workers offered me a way to understand the differences in family labour use and how workers negotiated with informal work flexibilities. In their responses, women workers include how they learn beedi rolling, the required skills, and how long it took to roll

beedi neatly. These responses provide insight into workers' experiences and struggles as women and workers. The reasons for learning beedi rolling, how workers initially learned this task, and factors compelling them to continue with beedi production help understand workers' attitudes and aspirations for their future. The expansion in the study's scope to include family relations and informal spaces offers a possible way to explore the organisation and use of juvenile and family labour in the beedi industry. We can also understand how workers were introduced to beedi production and the mechanisms through which their work continues to be employed. Women workers' narrative reveals that beedi rolling was an intrinsic part of their lives growing up. Children were involved with beedi rolling at an early age and mostly learned this work from their friends and family. Child work was strategically deployed to maximise production by applying them in every production stage. From collecting tendu leaves, rolling beedis, and packing them, their work proved significant for every step. The circumstances influenced the extent to which workers would pursue beedi work and any other activity, including schooling. Workers' narratives explain their expectations and aspirations from beedi work, continuities, and breaks across generations.

From workers' individual time, the use of family labour, and the economic situation of the family encompassed a combination of all factors impacting how workers learn better work and pass it on to the next generations. There were also shifts and continuities across generations on factors and conditions under which women began beedi work. These experiences were critical in shaping their responses and expectations of Beedi work.

I will bring out specificities and challenges that women workers faced while growing up and how they feel about other jobs compared to beedi work. The extent to which they could complete their schooling and later how they managed to educate their children. In this way, I will explain the experiences of women workers while growing up and how they begin beedi rolling along with reasons and methods for deploying children who, in a way, are inextricably linked with women-based home production. Thus, the conditions of work here create an environment that, in a way, sustains the labour requirements for beedi production as well as the essential familial responsibilities.

Childhood and Beedi Making

The complexities of beedi making are reflected in each stage of production. Workers are introduced to beedi work at an early age. Workers' accounts demonstrate how the family's labour involved beedi rolling. Each member, according to their age and dexterity, could contribute to beedi production. A worker explained that 'everyone is not able to make it. Some can fill the leaves; some know to clean the leaves, and some of us could fold'.[3] Family labour became integral to beedi rolling, and the extent to which children

could choose whether they would roll beedis full-time influenced their attitude towards this work. There were primarily two reasons for learning beedi work: the family's economic condition forced the children to take up beedi rolling. The parents compelled the children to assist them in completing beedi production. In other cases, juveniles, mainly girls, began beedi rolling with friends and enjoyed the new sociability that developed around beedi production. However, women workers for both groups resent beedi work and describe it as *beedi ke kaam mein lag jao toh pagal ho jao* (if you get involved in beedi work, you will go mad).[4] The extent of women's dissatisfaction makes it essential to understand how they felt when they started beedi rolling and the factors that influenced their attitude with time. Along with beedi production, it will also be helpful to see whether their attitude changed towards schooling and other forms of employment. It will give us an insight into the initial appeal of beedi work and the subsequent impact on workers' lives.

The early memories of their childhood were closely tied to beedi making and profits they could secure. A worker explained that 'initially we enjoyed rolling beedis as we could sit with our friends and we got money too'.[5] Whether they contributed their earnings to the family or kept it for themselves, women workers were glad about their profits as they could begin earning at a young age. As later sections will show, there was a generational shift in workers' attitudes towards work. For the older generations, there was no option for schooling, and agricultural labour was another option for contributing to the family's finances. There were also restrictions on women's movement, making home production a viable option for them. Beedi rolling allows you to sit with your friends and earn money at home. The friendships help promote work among the residents of the neighbourhood.

To begin with, workers' narratives reveal that entire neighbourhoods need to be involved in such work to be viable. Beedi rolling was seldom limited to a few families in the neighbourhood. Beedi's work cannot be carried out individually but only with a group of people. Even for the contractor to settle on a production site and schedule, others must work alongside them for workers to complete their tasks. A worker who learned this work could introduce others to it and learn from each other. Initially, the contractors were lenient while approving beedis to ensure workers' interest and engagement with beedi rolling. Along with beedi rolling, workers were introduced to all the other stages or tasks in beedi production,

> In Lalitpur [Pali] they used to call Muslims, and they used to come and teach the children how to pack [beedis] in the village. I mean, the children in the neighbourhood learnt very quickly how to pack – like they could pack one thousand beedis in one hour.[6]

The companionship formed while working together helps overcome the monotony and challenges of beedi rolling. A worker commented that 'everyone working for the same contractor became like a family'.[7] While growing up, the friendships helped sustain their interest in beedi rolling. After marriages, women explained that the inability to step out for work compelled them to continue with beedi work. 'This is useless work. If you are sitting at home, then can you do the work for time pass? If your children ask you for some money, you will get some money to give them with beedi work'.[8] A single earner in the family and young children limited women's options of looking for work outside, 'there is one person who earns. Everyone has to handle their housework and finances. We have young children; we cannot go out for work'.[9] Lack of options for alternative livelihood was a crucial reason for picking up beedi rolling and even continuing with the work later in their lives.

Each family had their unique response to beedi rolling depending on their financial circumstances. A woman talks about the time when she first saw beedi making, 'I saw beedi work since my childhood, but I never made beedi before my marriage because my father did not allow me to make beedis, our family was well to do – I mean there was no financial problem'.[10] She explains that beedi work was not considered good in her village. She belonged to Lalitpur village near Bhopal, where beetle leaves were more prevalent than beedi work.

> If a family has financial problems, then they make beedis. In the village, beedi making is considered bad. If you ask your son and daughter to make beedis, it raises questions about what kind of people you are. I had learned how to make beedi so that if I ever have to make beedis, then I can do it.[11]

This response can be contrasted to a worker from a different region, a village close to Sagar, who says, 'I made beedi in my maternal house; in my village everyone is still making beedis as there is no other work. After my marriage, I did not make beedis, as I wanted to leave this work – I was sick of it'.[12] Her entire family was involved in this work 'my parents also used to make beedis, and they still do. My entire childhood, all I could do was make beedis. As soon as I returned from school, and before leaving, I had to make beedis'.[13] A family's economic condition determined the hours of a day devoted to beedi work and how many family members could be engaged with beedi rolling. Lalitpur workers were relatively reluctant to engage in beedi work as alternate forms of employment were present. In comparison, no other work in Sagar made beedi work popular and readily acceptable to workers' families. The beedi work became the dominant source of livelihood and socialisation once it was introduced to labouring poor's neighbourhoods. Entire

communities, either actively or passively, were engaged in beedi work, opening new kinds of labour and familial relations organisation. For instance, girl children predominantly learnt beedi work and, depending on the family's economic condition, started/stopped beedi rolling.[14]

The economic capabilities of families varied over time, and generational shifts also impacted how many members could profitably engage with beedi making. In the Sagar district, the workers claimed, 'In Sagar everyone makes beedis, men are also making beedis, women are also making beedis old people are also making beedis, everyone gets a share of raw materials, and they make beedis. There is no other work apart from beedi'.[15] The extent of beedi rolling can be understood from a woman's narrative where she explains, 'When we were old enough to do some work, we learned beedi making, there was no other work in the village, and we could not learn embroidery or any other work'.[16] While growing up, alternate employment for the workers was cultivation and working in the fields as the preferred option over beedi work. The case was different in Pali, where the workers moved to Bhopal after losing their beetle leaves (paan) cultivation. One of the workers said, 'In Pali, they do farming during the day, and at night, they make beedis. There is no other work right now' (*Pali mein din mein kheti kare hai aur raat mein beedi banaye hai wahan pe abhi bhi koi kaam nahi hai*).[17] The workers from Pali settled in Bhopal and actively started beedi rolling when other forms of survival, i.e. cultivation, failed. When they were young, I juxtaposed the experiences of workers from these two regions to bring out the variations in the organisation of family labour. It is important to remember that rates for beedies and alternate employment possibilities may vary according to the region. However, women were introduced to and taught beedi work at a young age of 7–8 years in both areas.

The employment opportunities through beedi rolling were also unique as women could earn at home. The family politics before and after marriage discouraged women from setting out to work and increased women's reluctance to find work outside. The group of older generation women recounted that we would sit at home and work without any intervention or contractor's surveillance. Women were expected to step out for two tasks, i.e. collecting raw materials and submitting beedis. Women's friendships helped complete these tasks collectively as a group.

Compared to this, women who had been working for only ten or fifteen years wanted to move away and disassociate themselves from beedi making. There were many alternate employment opportunities, such as stitching, that workers could take up. The beedi rates also consistently stayed low, which made it a less attractive option for the workers.

The beedi rates become essential for workers to explain their struggle in an informal economy.[18] In a group interview women remembered that

different rates of beedis indicate different phases in their lives, and now they do not remember when they began rolling beedis. However, they remember the changes and later stagnation in their wages.[19] The rates symbolised the struggle for survival as the income from beedi work could not match the increasing living expenses. A group of women in Bhopal who migrated from neighbouring villages of Lalitpur spoke about the difficulties they experienced: 'We used leaves available at home to make beedis. But then also there was no profit. A rapid increase in the rate of inflation in these years left us with no profit from beedi making'.[20] A worker from Sagar spoke about the conditions of work when she started making beedi, 'in the village there is no other work, you keep doing beedi work all your life. We started beedi work when getting five rupees used to be a big deal'.[21] In her narration, she spoke about how the wage rates were indicative of the difficulties she faced. She said, 'Even today, if I think about those days, I get worried, I get nervous, only I know how we used to manage then, every day I used to pray to God that our beedis should not get rejected'.[22] The consistently low wages gradually adversely impacted the initial appeal and promise of financial independence by work offered to the workers.

The problems for the workers also increased as they started rolling beedis individually after growing up. A worker described how compared to her childhood when she enjoyed beedi rolling. She resents picking up beedi now. She said, '*Beedi ke liye jahan baatein chali yahan haath chale*' (For beedi rolling, you need someone to talk to you; with conversations, you can keep rolling beedis).[23] Once they married and lost the childhood friendship groups, they found it difficult to continue with beedi production.

Beedi rolling initially spread through the promise of quick money and neighbourhood friendships. Lack of alternate employment opportunities encouraged neighbourhoods to take up beedi work. As workers learned the skill of beedi rolling, they could not move away from this work. The contractors employed workers through word of mouth and targeted mainly juvenile girls through their networks of neighbourhood friendships.

Time and Skill in Beedi Making

Childhood experiences were also instrumental in deciding how they picked up the skill of beedi making. In the narratives of women, when they talk about their skill of beedi rolling, it helps to ascertain two things – first, the problems and difficulties in learning how to make beedis and, second, the amount of time that goes into preparing beedis in what is usually described as 'free time'. Workers mostly learned by observing others, and the time taken to roll beedis was crucial in deciding workers' earnings. There are mainly two techniques of beedi rolling – first by hand and second with needles. Contractors look for neatly wrapped beedis that make the skill of rolling beedis

tightly and quickly essential for the workers. A worker explains how contractors' quality check was an important factor during the learning phase:

> We learned the work on our own by observing others. When they used to make beedis, we used to sit there and learn. If they had extra leaves or if their leaves were ruined, then we used those to practice beedi making. From those, the contractor used to take whatever he liked; that is how you improve your speed and quality of beedis.[24]

Internal competition among women workers became an important motivation to produce more beedis. Women explained or attributed their ability to roll beedis according to the technique they learned the work. For example, a worker said, 'I have always made beedis with my hands and not needles. Others make it with their needles; they cannot add the *zarda* to it, and I can place the zarda inside the ones I make. I can save time and make beedis faster'.[25] Another group said that 'they learnt with needles and can roll neatly using them'.[26] The workers learnt beedi rolling techniques by observing others around them. Early socialisation decided how workers picked up beedi-rolling skills.[27] Different techniques form points of difference in their narration and often lead to arguments among the workers. The internal hierarchies of the community of workers living and working together are constantly negotiated around these variables of skill and technique. However, in reality, each technique served the workers well, and their preferences were a consequence of how they picked up the skill in their childhood.

Along with technique, workers also explained the time taken to learn beedi rolling. The hours of practice and skilling required to produce beedi help us understand the complexities of the process. Workers usually took a month to learn beedi rolling and were gradually introduced to each stage of beedi production. Initially, they learned how to peel the leaves, after which they practiced how much *zarda* should go in each beedi. The final step was rolling the beedi, which required regular practice and skill to roll correctly.[28] Workers spent maximum time on this step as contractors rejected beedis for being either too loosely wrapped or too tightly wrapped, making them susceptible to breaking.

Each stage of beedi production, from collecting leaves to delivering the final product, required concentrated time and effort from the workers. If the beedis were rejected, workers lost out on the day's labour and the raw materials for those beedis. Each member initially specialised in certain tasks, and the entire family's labour was required to complete beedi production efficiently. There was also a difference in how many tasks of beedi making a person could start doing. A worker from Sagar said,

> We were eight sisters and two brothers. All of us worked together, and some knew how to make it, some knew how to fold it, cut, and fold like

this everyone knew some stage of beedi making. So everyone cannot do this work, now children, young ones can do everything together. They learn everything, but I am telling you of the time when we were young.[29]

There are many variables with beedi work of skill, time taken, and whether it was compulsory or not for the workers. Each of these variables was decided based on their childhood experiences of learning beedi rolling.[30] The initial memories were crucial even at the later stages when workers continued beedi rolling. It also indicated different stages in the process that highlight the complex nature of production. The beedi production, as workers noted, 'is the worst kind of work. All you do is dress up the beedi, and if you mess up the dressing even a little bit, then the beedi will be rejected by the contractor'.[31] Therefore, the worker further explained that 'one has to be very careful when you are rolling beedis, and we have been rolling well, so our beedi does not get rejected'.[32] Beedi rolling required workers' focus and skill to wrap them neatly. As family wages become dependent on beedi rolling, workers expressed their distress and the constant duress to finish their targets for beedis and manage domestic work.

Women workers struggle to manage domestic responsibilities along with beedi rolling. The preparation for beedi rolling would start a day in advance as a worker narrated that 'you soak the leaves in the evening and leave them overnight, then they were ready to peel the next morning'.[33] Workers distributed their time to accommodate taking care of their children, completing domestic chores, and finding time to roll beedis. A worker elaborated, 'After getting up at seven in the morning, we have to make beedis again. Then from nine, we do housework, then from two, we again do beedi work, and whatever beedi you have made, you go and give it to the contractor'.[34] In their responses, as workers talk about how they manage their time, it helps to question the conclusions drawn about beedi work. This work, concentrated mainly at home, is seen as supplementary to domestic work.[35] In reality, there were many challenges to earning fair wages from beedi rolling, and the workers decided how much time they profitably devote to beedi production. The workers also acquired skills for beedi rolling to ensure maximum returns for their labour. Along with skill, another critical factor was the extent to which they could use family labour.

We have focused on the responses of women workers as they were predominantly engaged in beedi production. Women dominate employment in beedi work, which has led scholars to argue that it is carried out primarily by women.[36] Workers reveal that men and women would sit together to roll beedis, and their children also learned by observing them. The association of women grew stronger with beedi rolling as they were forced to look for work at home. Among workers' children, the girl child was expected to sit with their mothers and help them complete the beedi

work. In households with extreme financial duress, all the family members were responsible for beedi production. However, as financial conditions improved, boys and, subsequently, men would take up work outside the home. Men also undertook alternate employment options as earnings from beedi work were uncertain. The contractor's discretion decided how many beedis were accepted, and workers could not receive a stable or fixed income. If the children did not engage with beedi work, they would even contribute by counting and packing the beedis for their mothers or parents. Girls, who, like their mothers, were expected to stay home, developed a higher sense of responsibility towards homework and home-based production. They would sit with their mothers to finish the targets for the day or take over the domestic chores.

Each family ensured that all members were trained to roll beedis, and depending on the economic situation, workers would draw from their family's pool of labour. However, girl children were sincere in helping their mothers. There was also significant pressure on them before and after marriage to stay at home, which made beedi rolling a feasible option for them. The rhythm of domestic chores restricts women's mobility, increasing their predominance in housework.[37] In their narratives, women have also internalised the need to stay home. They explained, 'We do not need to go out. Why should we go out? Who will take care of the children? We should be at home'.[38] Therefore, girls needed to pick up skills for beedi rolling and engage in home-based production.

In many cases, the reasons for entire families to continue rolling beedis were closely tied to the family's economic condition and other sources of income. There was an overall shift in the use of family labour. Initially, workers would sit together, and everyone helped with each step of the beedi rolling. Family support was critical to continue rolling beedis as women faced severe physical exhaustion. A worker explained how she stopped rolling beedis recently,

> My eyes hurt now, and I am unable to roll beedis. I ask my children to sit with me and help me as my back and shoulders start paining. My hands and fingers are permanently bent now. If children refuse to help me, then I cannot complete the tasks. The children leave, saying we do not wish to do this work. If my husband also goes out to work, then how will I manage? When you work at home, there are sometimes suddenly guests, and one has to start again working.[39]

There was a shift in the attitude towards beedi work, and families also strived to submit individually. Individual wages made it possible for them to keep a part of or the entire wages with them. The conditions under which women continue to work, and other members' salaries determine

their wages' value and power.[40] A woman worker stated, 'If we have money, then we decide; if we do not have money, only then we cannot decide. Children use up all the money when there is only one person who is earning'. A family's source of income decided if workers were compelled to contribute their wages to the family or spend the wages independently. If women's earnings were secondary to the primary income of the males, they could decide how they could spend the money. For instance, girls could spend their wages on items they desired, particularly around social occasions; they would roll more beedis. Thus, girls used their income to buy items that they were denied to them as luxury or frivolous. The promise of financial independence was an important factor to continue with beedi rolling, particularly among juvenile girls. However, if the earning were critical for the family's survival, there was no scope to spend the wages or make decisions about the earrings.[41]

The implications or the rewards for engaging in beedi production also varied for each family. In the cases where workers could save money for themselves, beedi work evoked positive memories. However, most workers felt regret over how they got engaged with beedi work early in their lives. They did not explore any alternatives, nor could they pursue education, 'We would sit with our friends and enjoy talking to them. The beedi was easy when they were around. We never studied after that, and we got nothing from it. With inflation, we never saved enough'.[42] The regret also tied up with the inability to pursue education, thereby precluded any hope for alternate employment.

Possibilities for Education and Beedi Work

Beedi work was introduced to a region through family and friendship networks and diverted focus away from any other kind of activity. For instance, childhood narratives describe that workers collectively took up beedi rolling and could not engage in any other type of work. A family's economic situation decides the extent and duration of beedi rolling by their members. Once workers were introduced to beedi work, an aspect that was directly impacted was the possibility of education. The interviews helped us know their attitudes and aspirations for education and the circumstances and conditions that allowed them to pursue schooling. Women's experiences with beedi work also influence their aspirations for their children. As women closely observed the impact beedi work took on their lives, they were active in deciding whether they would include children in this home-based production.[43] With the help of examples from two groups of women workers, I will outline workers' aspirations for their children and their experience with schooling. I will draw from two sets of interviews conducted with women workers. In the

first group, responses constituted women workers between 50 and 60 years and started beedi rolling when they were growing up.

> We made them work because their earrings helped us survive. We could buy vegetables. We are *majboor* (under severe pressure of circumstances). We would get five rupees if the beedis were good. Our children would sit with us and roll beedis. We could not educate as we never had the means to fund their education. They cry and blame us for not educating them and keeping them trapped with beedi work.[44]

Among the workers of this age bracket, lack of adequate finances and the attitude of their parents towards education were primarily responsible for keeping children out of school. A worker recounts how she got engaged with beedi work and never took up education: 'We were never interested in studying as we were always working from housework to beedi work. From the age of thirteen, we started this; after that, we never got educated'.[45] If they could attend school, they were made to drop out after a year or so.

> Earlier education was not important. If you study till third or fourth class, then what is the point of it? We can do additions and can sign our names. Our village did not have the atmosphere like cities, and our parents used to make beedis. We were four sisters, and we were never allowed to go out. We could not study. Both my brothers got an education. At that time, no one gave importance to studying. My children are studying right now. Beedi work gets to one's head, so we did not let our children get involved in this. We make beedis at night.

There was a further division along gender lines as girls were also discouraged from studying or working outside their respective homes. Workers internalised (to some extent) the pressures of staying in and were forced to take tasks that allowed them to earn money at home, 'When we were learning, we had to learn quickly; no one taught us. We were not allowed to ask questions. We are respectfully working at home, at least, and we do not have to step outside. If we step out, then people will talk about us. It is better to work and make beedis at home'.[46] Due to a lack of adequate finances, workers could not educate their children. However, they recount how their sons went to school irrespective of the family's finances. A worker explained the gendered nature of housework that allowed boys to pursue education:

> When they wanted to study, they were told that you have to make beedis so that there is some income. Boys are different; they get ready and say, we are going to study. We would collect our earnings to pay the fees.[47]

The workers explain that failure to educate their children was not a deliberate choice on their part. It was also not because of the lack of their children's will or motivation to get educated. It was through a combination of factors that children, particularly girl children, were kept out of schools.

> In Pali, you work at the farms all day, and at night you make beedis. There is no other work there. All the girls stay at home and have to roll beedis. Now the girls cry, that mom, why you did not let us study when we were kids. We would have been employed somewhere now. But we could not educate them. There was no significance given to education. Everyone used to say nothing changes after education. You have to come back home and cook. You can study for three to four years; after that, you have to cook food, and education will not serve any purpose. We never used our minds; we never said. How could we say anything when there is no money to meet expenditure? If you did not roll beedis, you could not survive.[48]

Among the children of older workers, there was a strong desire to pursue education and build an alternative source of income for the family. Even when they were not involved with beedi rolling, the girl child was responsible for domestic chores and could not find the time to study. A daughter of a beedi worker explained that 'us, girls sit with our mothers and see them struggle with the work. We help them out and take care of the cooking and cleaning of the house. If any guests are coming, then we also take care of them'.[49] It limited options for children of beedi workers to pursue schooling.

The mentioned struggles for education can be contrasted to the workers' response in the age bracket of 30–45, as they were not compelled to take up beedi rolling. They explained how their children regularly attend school and do not get involved with beedi work.[50] While growing up, the women of this age bracket could also pursue schooling till classes 8–10, even though it did not secure them alternate employment. Most of the families in their neighbourhood sent their children to school. The desire to study in these narratives was more robust: 'I got married when I was ninth, and my in-laws did not let me study. I wanted to study further, and I still want to study. Now, with kids, it's not possible'.[51] Interestingly, she also remembers the subjects she liked and how students' gender influenced the subject choices. 'For girls, maths was not important. Home science was important. Not even English. However, I am still very good at maths and still do calculations at my fingertips. There were also no scholarships to finish my studies'. The aspiration to study comes out clearly in their testimonies.

In some cases, their father's sudden death forced them to start beedi work, 'We learned while we were young as our father passed away. We wanted to study, but we never got a chance. Our mother used to roll beedis as we

learnt from her'. The women workers also recognise the facilities required for studying beyond and in addition to financial resources.

> I have studied till tenth. We go to school during the day, and at night, we would roll beedis. Sometimes we would make it, and sometimes we did not. We are four sisters and two brothers, and we all did this work. Caste scholarship helped in getting educated. The time needed for education we never got that, and we could not be interested in studying. There were no facilities to study. Whatever we could study, we did at school; at home, we never got the atmosphere to study.[52]

Hence, there was a complete absence of infrastructure to provide students with the necessary facilities to pursue and sustain schooling. There are other accounts where women expressed their aspiration to study and memories of studying their favourite subjects. However, the lack of support from workers' families forced them to give up their studies. 'I used to enjoy maths, and I studied till eighth. My parents and my in-laws everyone make beedis. I have children, so I cannot go out to work'. Women's inability to fulfil their aspirations for education was exhibited through resentment for beedi work and a strong focus on ensuring their children finish schooling:

> I hate this work now. Everyone wants to fulfil their dreams and get educated. We could not study. We could study till the tenth. We saw that our parents did not have the money to educate us. That was the age to study; our teachers also used to understand that our economic situation forced us to roll beedis. She would forgive us if our fees were late.[53]

There was a clear preference among women and their children to move away from beedi work,

> I am educating all my children; they are in college. We never taught them beedis. They also said no to learning beedi. Now, we are illiterates, and we face many difficulties. We used to make it with our friends, and that used to be fun. Now making alone is tiresome.[54]

The women explained their disappointment over the failure to create employment opportunities for themselves.

Women from both age groups regretted not pursuing education and worked to ensure that their children completed schooling. Instances of regret were stronger for women who chose beedi work over schooling even though the economic situation allowed them to pursue education. The resentment for beedi work was also strong when women chose beedi work for quick financial gains. Women's perceptions also changed when they saw their friends

who completed schooling in a better economic situation. For women from the first group (age bracket 50–60), schooling was never offered to them. They recall being coerced into beedi rolling due to economic pressure. Other employment options were working in the fields while growing up. Once they got married, their husbands were vegetable sellers or ran small grocery shops and were forced to find employment at home, which would roll beedis. In most cases, fathers and husbands did not allow them to work outside or discouraged them from stepping out of the house. After initial reluctance/hesitation, women workers confessed how they would prefer to work outside, but they do not have the option of going out to work. They also rationalised the decision to work on two grounds: first, as they have young children, they cannot go and work. Second, the freedom to work at home without any surveillance from anyone. A worker said, 'If we can work at home, then why should we step out and listen to anyone's order and lose our respect. We can sit at home and without listing to anyone else. We can take care of domestic responsibilities as well'.[55] Women accepted the need to stay at home; however aspired to find any other kind of work where they would get to learn a skill and build a future for their children. As a worker explained, 'we need a job where we learn something new as without education you cannot get knowledge'.[56] The women workers are determined to involve their children in activities where they are learning and find employment opportunities.

A family's economic situation dictated how much they could educate their children. The younger generation strategically tried to use the money from beedi rolling to ensure that children were not involved in this work. Women's narratives reveal that failure to learn new skills and gain knowledge was an important factor in moving away from beedi rolling. The stagnation in wages and skills with beedi rolling made it difficult for them to contribute to their children's education. Hence, they aspired that their children were involved in opportunities that would, along with wages, hold a promise of growth and future employment.

Conclusion

Beedi work was integral to the early childhood experiences of women workers. The process of socialisation through which they learnt the work decided to some extent their attitudes and their earning capacity from this work. Initially, the beedi work promised quick money in circumstances where additional income was critical for families' survival. The friendships and camaraderie developed with peers through beedi work also helped workers in continuing with beedi work. Workers could not dissociate from this work as they could not get educated or skilled to follow any other form of employment. Beedi work, therefore, does not stay as production done in free time.

The circumstances in each case decided whether women workers could go out for work. In most cases, the pressure of child care and domestic responsibilities precluded their chances of engaging in production outside of their homes. Each group of workers' responses was conditioned by the family's economic setting, which impacted the probability of taking up beedi work. When workers worked at home, they included family labour to produce beedis that helped them survive. In very few instances, workers earned enough to spend money on their individual needs and desires. The workers' narratives highlight that their daily lives were restructured to accommodate beedi production demands. The implications of the rhythms of beedi work could be seen in how the aspirations for education remain unfulfilled for the workers. Although increasingly with new generations, there was a move away from beedi work. Even in older generations, the choice of making beedis was not a natural preference. Nevertheless, it becomes central to their early childhood memories where learning beedi work introduced new sociability among the workers. The memories of beedi rolling were central to their growing-up years and left little or no space for any other type of activities or employment opportunities.

Notes

1 A version of this paper titled 'Recasting language of Work: Beedi Industry in Post-colonial Central India' published in *History and Sociology of South Asia*, 12:1, 2018, pp. 32–47.
2 Annual Report, Ministry of Labour, 1999–2000, Government of India: New Delhi, p. 109. *A Study on Child Labour in Indian Beedi Industry* by Yogesh Dube, and Godsen Mohandoss Report by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 2013 estimated that beedi production employs 21% of all working children, p. 4.
3 Group interviews, Bhim Nagar, 15 December 2014.
4 Group interviews, Chola Road, 14 December 2014.
5 Group interviews, Bhim Nagar, 15 December 2014.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 This interview was taken on 18 June 2014 in Shiv Nagar, Bhopal. A worker offered her house to conduct the consultation and her mother was also present; she belongs to the Chaurasia community and settled in Bhopal after her marriage; she belongs from Lalitpur, where she grew up. She is 25 years old now. She and her mother both make beedis.
12 Interview, with AP, Chola road region, on 24 June 2014.
13 Ibid.
14 The skill of making beedis in these families and in the community places them at an advantage vis-à-vis others.
15 Group interview, chola region, 22 June 2014.
16 Ibid.

17 Interview with CC Chola region, 17 June 2014.
18 Workers also recalled that changes in the rates of beedis was symbolic of changes in the conditions of work. The contractors' attitude towards the workers was changing for worse; for instance, they reduced the amount and *zarda* given to workers. Workers are forced to invest from their side to earn profits from beedi rolling.
19 Group interview in Bhim Nagar, on 17 June 2014.
20 Group interview, Bhim Nagar, 19 June 2014.
21 Ibid.
22 Interview with MD, in Bhim Nagar area of Bhopal, on 17 June 2014. She belongs to the Chaurasia community. In the interview her relatives also participated and recounted the struggles for survival due to uncertain income from beedi rolling.
23 Ibid.
24 Interview in Shiv Nagar, 19 December 2014.
25 SS, Chola region, 22 December 2014, in her house.
26 A group interview of the workers from Sagar and Bhopal. The interview was taken in Chandbarh, Bhopal, and in the group, there were women who were rolling beedis for 20 years as well as women who were unable to roll beedis. The women explained that everyone cannot roll beedis as many could not identify the leaves for beedis.
27 Ibid.
28 Group interview, in chola Road, 21 June 2014.
29 Group interview in Bhim Nagar, 17 June 2014.
30 Tamara Hareven, foregrounds the importance of time in understanding the adaption of the workers. She writes that 'timing provides a way of understanding how individuals and families ranked their priorities in their daily lives as well as in their encounter with social and economic developments in the larger society; how they revised their experiences to meet new circumstances; what kind of choices they made even under severe constraints, when few options were available to them', *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 8. Kalpana Ram says that 'divisions between work and non-work are blurred by combining a great variety of tasks. A typical female task such as weaving of nets is much more likely to be interrupted by the demands of childcare, housework, the arrival of one of the men, than are the male tasks associating with fishing. It is an index of how ingrained the sexual division of labour becomes that such punctuations of one's tasks are not regarded as interruptions at all, by either men or women, but rather as of the nature of women's work per se'. In *Mukkuvar Women: Gender, Hegemony, and Capitalist Transformation in a South Indian Fishing Community*, Delhi: Kali for Women, 1992, p. 122.
31 Group interview in Bhim Nagar, 17 June 2014.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 A worker remarked, 'I know how to make beedis so it is not difficult for me, I have to do a lot of work at home then I have to do things for my children also then I do my work of beedi'. Ibid.
35 See in Vinod Sen, *Labour in an Informal Sector: A Study of Beedi Rolling Industry in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh*, New Delhi: Segment Books, 2012, and Anuradha Eshwara Prasad, *Beedi Workers in Central Provinces*, Noida: National Labour Institute, 1985.
36 Manjit Singh writes that 'due to the domestic nature of the *beedi* industry, a large number of women and children are also engaged in *beedi* rolling'. *The Political Economy of Unorganized Industry: A Study of the Labour Process*, New Delhi: Sage, 1990, p. 47.

37 Kalpana discussed how everyday social interactions and responsibilities makes the 'social world of women'. She writes that 'all the key functions of the household are associated with women rather than men, women's ability to cooperate within the household has greater repercussions on the form taken by the household than have the relation between men', in *Mukkuvar Women*, p. 201.

38 Group interview, Chola Road, 18 June 2014.

39 Group interview in Bhim Nagar, 17 June 2014.

40 Chitra Joshi writes, 'Work and wages especially in the absence of male earners also provides women the possibility of struggling against authority structures in the family'. 'Notes on the Breadwinner Debate', p. 271.

41 Interview with RC on 24 June 2014 and SS on 17 December 2014 at Chola Road Bhopal. Aihwa Ong also noted that a few factory women were concerned not with looking for better conditions in factory work but viewed their wages as a means to improve their technical qualifications in order to compete for better jobs. With the introduction of mass education, better communications, and establishments of the factories, village girls wanted to seek their own employment and earn their own income of their own accord and not just under family pressure, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia*, New York: State university of New York Press, 2010, p. 197.

42 SS on 22 December 2014 at Chola Road Bhopal.

43 There have been legislations such as Juvenile Smoking Amendment Act of 1932 that disallowed juveniles at beedi workshops and factories. The Lok Sabha discussions in 1966 when the bill for beedi workers was discussed. In these discussions, members also mentioned that women and girls can easily do this work at home and should be allowed to continue carrying out beedi rolling. In Bhopal and Sagar, the trade unionists while recognised the problem of child and juvenile labour maintained as the work is carried out in workers' homes there are unable to intervene.

44 Group interview taken on 22 June 2014 at Bhim Nagar, Bhopal.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 SS, interviewed on 21 December 2014 in Kenchi, Bhopal.

50 Group interview taken on 24 June 2014 in Bhopal.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Group interview, 21 December 2014, Kenchi, Bhopal.

54 Ibid.

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9

LEARNING TO SERVICE

Vocational Training for Marginalised Youth, Aspirations, Consumption, and Social Reproduction[1]

R. Maithreyi

Introduction

Fourteen-year-old Faiza belongs to a migrant Muslim family from Jharkhand.[2] Her father juggles various petty jobs, such as selling *chappals* (slippers) and clothes and working as a Hafeez, in the city of Bangalore. Faiza has two younger siblings, a brother and a sister studying in a private school. When asked why she herself was studying in a government school, located in the suburbs of Bangalore, Faiza tightened up and replied, 'I just need education. That is enough for me'. Despite economic difficulties, Faiza's family wanted her to become a doctor, though Faiza aspired to be a teacher. When asked if her family would be able to afford the costs of medical education, she replied, 'If Allah wishes then we will get money from somewhere somehow', and then shared the story of a boy whose fees had been waived at a degree college on having secured high marks. Hoping for similar outcomes, Faiza felt the pressure to perform well and deliver on her family's hopes and aspirations. In supporting her to achieve these dreams for the family as a whole, her parents (unlike most of her classmates') had asked her not to do any housework once she entered class 10, particularly after she had gotten low marks in one of the exams.

Faiza was also able to clearly explain the trajectory she would have to follow in order to achieve her dreams. Her plan was to join the science stream after class 10 in one of the private colleges in her neighbourhood, though she was aware that the fees were high. She also noted that she had to do an MBBS degree next, followed by an MD. Sharp and observant, she stated that she had learnt this during her visits to the hospital, where she had noticed the boards outside the doctors' rooms which usually had 'MBBS, MD' written

on it. She also noted how there was a high demand for healthcare nowadays and stated that she had selected the healthcare vocational subject at school to progress in her goal of attaining a medical degree.

Faiza's classmate Ayra had reported that the teachers at their school had also encouraged students to 'join healthcare if they want to become a doctor'. Ayra, the oldest child of a Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) bus driver, had selected the healthcare subject for different reasons, however. She stated that it was 'a process of simple elimination'. Being Muslim, she reportedly found the third language Kannada subject difficult and had opted for the vocational healthcare subject in its place. Being a little *ullu* (in her own words), she admitted that she wasn't able to take IT, the other vocational subject offered at her school (though other students in her school stated that IT was only offered to the boys). Ayra, however, aspired to join the military or become a singer. The latter ambition had developed when she had studied at a madrassa school which encouraged music. Ayra had been shifted to the government school due to her family's desire to give Ayra a regular education. Her mother had even said, 'Madrassa mein hi padhti rahogi ya school bhi kabhi jaana hain?' (Will you always be studying in a madrassa or will you ever go to school as well?). Though Ayra was unclear of her future post class 10 or how to prepare for the military job, she stated, 'If I fail, I will try again and keep trying but I will not quit. But I can think of what to do next only after passing 10th class'.

Narrative accounts of students like Faiza and Ayra from across government schools in Bangalore and Mysore, during a year-and-a-half-long ethnographic study of the national skilling programmes conducted for youth in India, presented a number of insights. They revealed the strong aspirations for higher education among economically and socially marginalised urban families and certain collective, strategic decisions made in order to realise this. Such decisions included choosing mainstream education over religious education, accepting, and adapting to the career choices made by families. For some students like Faiza and Ayra, it included taking on the pressures of performance, despite their precarious living conditions and limited educational opportunities available to them.

Within this context, most students explained vocational education and training, particularly the courses offered at their government schools under the Vocationalisation of Secondary and Higher Education Scheme (VSHSE) and the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA) as strategic choices and 'backup plans'.[3] They viewed them as additional opportunities that would provide them with a safety net in the event of being unable to realise their original dreams. The significant possibility of such outcomes was also poignantly recognised by the youth, on account of the limited economic resources and educational support available to them. Not just students such as Faiza, but others such as Shanaya, belonging to a single-parent labouring

class, Schedule Caste (SC) family, also explained her selection as a backup option. Shanaya had taken up the beauty and wellness (B&W) vocational course at one of the government schools located in north Bangalore. She aspired to become a teacher, though her mother wanted her to get a 'company job' and had told her, 'Nalla padikunam, dudh irukanam, nalla velakku ponam' (You must study well, earn well, and have a good job). Shanaya stated that since the skills subject was easy to score, she would at least be able to get 60 marks, thus increasing her chances of passing the class 10 board exams. However, in the event of failing the board exams, she shared how the B&W course could become useful since the B&W teacher had been able to place another girl who had failed the previous year at a beauty parlour. Similarly, Srilakshmi, belonging to a single-parent SC family, whose mother worked as a domestic help, had taken up the B&W course simply as a means to tide the economic situation at home. To support her aspiration of becoming a teacher, which would require long years of study and financial resources, she had planned to take up tailoring, but saw an immediate opportunity in the B&W course offered at her school. She stated, 'Idhu immediate a edukallam; teacher ku innum time aagum' (One can take this up immediately, teacher preparation will take time).

Amidst the buoyant official discourses surrounding youth and skilling programmes aimed at harnessing this 'demographic dividend', students' accounts and their understanding of the skilling programmes offer a contrast. They pointedly reveal the disconnects between the state's vision for youth development and young people's own goals and aspirations. In the remainder of this chapter, I critically examine the RMSA-VSHSE scheme and discuss what this implies for young people's futures. I argue that the programme is not only misaligned with students' needs and aspirations but also draw upon one particular vocational subject as an illustration to demonstrate how it aims at creating an underclass of feminised labour for consumptive practices of the elite. Critical scholarship on youth futures in India has shown how the state's agenda of capitalising this 'demographic dividend', by pushing youth to aspire for social mobility through jobs in the expanding yet precarious private sector, since liberalisation, has produced contradictory and divergent outcomes for youth social mobility (Jeffrey, Jeffrey, & Jeffrey 2007; Mehta 2021). When read along with some of the other papers in this volume (cf. Nair's paper, 'Learning to Labour, Labouring to Learn'), a certain historical continuity in the planning for young people's futures is visible, through state skilling and training programmes. Though imbued with the expectations of social transformation, the analysis of past as current schooling and vocational training programmes of the state reveals the lack of political will required to ensure this, and demonstrates how state education planning is more aligned with its own modernising goals that continue to reproduce social differences.

Elaborating further on this latter point, I closely examine the nature of learning that beauty and wellness courses entail for the students: girls from poor and marginalised communities are introduced to knowledges and practices of conspicuous consumption that are however personally out of reach for them. However, imbibing these knowledges and practices is essential to their employability – that is in order to be able to 'service' the elite through their 'aesthetic labour' (Maithreyi 2021; Maitra & Maitra 2018; Nikson, Cullen, & Watt 2003), which is harnessed by the state's skilling programme. Thus, I point to the different expectations for enactment of 'consumer citizenship' (Fernandes 2006) by the state for this class of students.

This chapter adopts the following structure: The methodology of the study is presented first. This is followed by a discussion of the skills training offered through the VSHSE programme and the beauty and wellness course observed in government schools in Karnataka, in particular. Finally, the chapter concludes by reflecting on the state's educational provisions for lower-caste/lower-class urban youth, whose social aspirations for mobility through education go unattended; while their aspirations around lifestyle and cultural capital are harnessed to produce the enterprising citizen and 'aesthetic labour' required by the market.

Methodology

This chapter draws on two rounds of ethnographic study conducted between 2016 and 2018 by a team of researchers from the Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, Bangalore. Empirical fieldwork was undertaken through preliminary visits to schools, as well as vocational training institutions, such as industrial training institutes (I) and diploma colleges in the first round, followed by year-long observations at ten government schools in Bangalore and one in Mysore. With the VSHSE programme operational primarily in government secondary schools, the targets of the programme were mainly from urban, poor families, largely consisting of other backward classes (OBCs), scheduled castes (SCs), and minorities (Muslims). Parents of these children worked in the informal economy as domestic help, housekeeping staff, drivers, painters, welders, watchmen, street vendors, and tailors, or within garment or other factories in industrial areas. A combination of methods, including weekly classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and informal conversations with teachers, trainers, and students was used to gather data. In addition, home visits were undertaken to understand the economic and social contexts of students and family aspirations. Along with this, key informants from departments of labour and education, vocational training partners (or VTPs, i.e. private organisations providing vocational training within these schools), and potential employers

were also interviewed. In addition, policy documents, such as the national skills policy and qualification frameworks, curricular material, and various reports on India's skilling needs and outputs, were also closely examined. The primary and secondary data gathered in this manner was thematically coded using the Atlas Ti qualitative software.

Vocationalisation of the Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Programme

The VSHSE was introduced in 2013 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to offer optional vocational courses in secondary schools, alongside academic subjects. While previously vocational education (and most forms of vocational training) was offered post-completion of class 10, the revised scheme introduces vocational subjects to students as early as from classes 9 and 10.[4] This extension of the vocational education program into basic years of schooling needs to be seen in relation to the growing advocacy for skilling, internationally and nationally, in the last two decades. Globally, against a context of declining investments by the state in social welfare, skills have come to be positioned as the panacea to all problems – ranging from poverty and unemployment to the changing contexts of work, culture, and society (Craig & Porter 2003; Jackson & Jordan 1999; Lauder 2013; Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan [RMSA], Karnataka 2013; Singh 2012).

An emphasis on skilling can also be seen in India since the early 2000s. The national policy on skill development was first introduced in 2009 to target youth through a range of initiatives, including short-term and long-term skilling programmes and bank loans for skill development and self-employment (Ministry of Labour and Employment 2009).[5] Further, the National Skills Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) was introduced to bring all forms of education (general, technical, vocational, long-term, and short-term) under one system, based on the identification of core competencies and skills related to all levels and types of courses (Lauder 2013; Young 2013). The NSQF, which is organised as a series of levels from 1 to 10, is expected to provide quality assurance through standardised, nationally recognised learning outcomes for every sector and job role. The integration of all forms of learning under one system is also expected to offer mobility within and between different streams of education while creating equivalence with international standards to ensure global mobility of the workforce. The NSQF is expected to offer youth flexibility and opportunities for further education and mobility, by providing standardised certifications for every job, as well as by opening up routes for educational mobility through a modular educational system that youth can enter, exit, and transition between levels and across streams, according to their own capacities and interests.

The VSHSE programme, in particular, maps on to levels 1–4 of the NSQF and has been specifically designed with the objective of 'enhanc[ing] employability of youth through demand-driven, competency-based, modular vocational courses' (MHRD 2014: 7). Based on a district-level skill-gap study conducted by the National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC 2013), the VSHSE was rolled out in Karnataka in 2014–2015, in 100 schools. Students from classes 9 to 12 were offered a standard set of vocational courses such as automobile, healthcare, IT, retail, and beauty and wellness, to choose from (irrespective of the specificities of location and districts).[6] The identification of these specific sectors for training is questionable in the light of NSDC's own report that has highlighted the incremental demand for labour in other sectors, including agriculture that is significant for rural students, and social sectors such as education. Importantly, the training provided through these courses were all for entry-level jobs, located within the lowest rungs of the urban service economy, and clearly misaligned with students' aspirations for professional jobs or even other 'viable jobs' such as 'sarkari anukri' (see Mehta 2021). In many of the sectors the job roles entailed manual labour or what students identified as requiring them to 'dirty one's hands' (e.g. as a service technician or mechanic in the automobile sector; as a general duty assistant or GDA, which is similar to a care worker or attendant's position in the healthcare sector). This is despite the availability of alternate entry-level positions such as sales executive or customer relationship executive in the automobile sector or X-ray technician or diet assistant in the healthcare sector. Importantly, it is these latter jobs that can bring students closer to their aspirations for 'company jobs' or professional jobs (e.g. as doctors) even with limited means or resources to pursue the necessary forms of education required for these jobs (e.g. medical education). However, these alternative job roles that could offer a greater sense of respectability and also perhaps require additional skills and investments (e.g. knowledge of English or computers). Thus, by training students for whom these additional investments on education and training may be difficult, for alternate low-status jobs, the RMSA-VSHSE programme appeared to be slotting them into what were considered as menial jobs by students.

Even when just the selection of job roles seems to suggest a reproduction of social differences, through the training of students from lower-caste and lower-class backgrounds for manual/menial jobs, the skills and knowledges provided for these roles further appear to entrench the historical caste-based social divisions in access to and acquisition of intellectual/cognitive skills versus manual/non-cognitive skills. A close examination of the level-wise skills and knowledges identified under the NSQF showed that even when students in these government schools were offered training in high-end service industries, such as IT/ITES or retail, students were mainly being prepared for repetitive or manual jobs such as attending to phone calls (IT service desk

attendant) or packaging and labelling (retail), which allow for little application of intellectual skills, such as decision-making, logical reasoning, or use of high-end technology. The latter higher-order skills may have, however, been expected of alternate job roles with similar levels of training within the same sector (e.g. such as of a junior software developer in the case of IT or X-ray technician in the case of the healthcare sector). Considering that the policy itself notes that these vocational training programmes are being offered as many of the students targeted through the programmes are at-risk of dropping out and may be unable to access higher education (RMSA-Karnataka 2013), what this amount to is a 'gentrification of skills' (Maitra & Maitra 2018) and the reservation of non-intellectual forms of knowledge and job roles with no further mobility for students from disadvantaged households. This also points to the lost opportunity for redressal of historical caste-related discrimination that marginalised groups have long faced within education.

As will be seen through a close examination of training offered in one of the five sectors in Karnataka – beauty and wellness (B&W) – the vocational education courses not only slot them into the lower ends of the urban service economy but, further, also lays expectations upon them to produce 'aesthetic labour' required to service the consumptive cultures and lifestyles of the elite, through the internalisation of embodied and gendered forms of learning.

Learning to Service the Neoliberal Economy: B&W Curriculum, Production of 'Aesthetic Labour', and the Reproduction of Caste, Class, and Gender

Before undertaking a deeper analysis of the curriculum, one might question the very choice of B&W as a subject introduced to high school students, considering the significant implications this has on the understanding of the self. As many feminist scholars have noted, conceptions of beauty associated with female bodies inscribe moral judgements on them and signify the work of patriarchy and capitalism (John 2000; de Grazia 1996) that produce, reproduce, and propagate narrow conceptions of who is considered as desirable, undesirable, modern, successful, and/or ideal (Aizura 2009; Bordo 2003; Jha 2016). As Aizura (2009) notes, such constructions of the ideal or desirable are often produced through the conflation of characteristics of 'whiteness' (and upper caste and class bodies) with ideas of beauty. Further, as an industry, the sector has been particularly successful in harnessing women's consent and participation in its extractive practices by 'beaming impossible standards of sexual attractiveness' and normalising them along culturally acceptable lines (John 2000).

While these macro-critiques of the B&W sector raise certain moral questions on the choice of introducing this subject to marginalised adolescent girls, in this section, I elaborate upon the classroom transactions of the B&W

course observed to discuss how students related to the training. (A discussion of the actual trajectories and outcomes for girls at the end of the course is beyond the scope of this chapter, as girls were continuing education at the end of the study period.) Instead, what I focus on are the specific questions of 'Who are these girls that are being trained?' 'What expectations are being laid upon them as part of such training?' and 'How did they internalise this training?' That is, the aim is to undertake a discursive reading of the classroom transactions of B&W and demonstrate how this curriculum was geared towards training marginalised adolescent girls in gendered and embodied forms of labour to serve the 'elite' customer. Though knowledge around beauty and self-care were undoubtedly of interest to the students in personally making themselves up, the ways in which students related to the course also showed how these knowledges were simultaneously alien, out-of-reach, and expensive to personally adopt for the girls, on the one hand, and not considered to be professionally relevant (except as a 'backup' option), on the other hand.

Personal Consumption and Affective Responses to the B&W Training

The B&W classes were attended over the course of an academic year at two government schools in north Bangalore. The course was offered only to girls in these specific schools as well as the 18 other schools offering B&W courses in Karnataka. The classes attended consisted of theoretical and practical sessions, with several challenges faced by the vocational trainers in conducting the theory and practical classes. This included non-availability of books, rooms with appropriate facilities such as wash basins, lack of funds to procure material for practical sessions, as well as challenges related to availability of periods to undertake the classes. In the aforementioned government school in north Bangalore, for example, practical classes would be organised by the B&W trainer after-school hours on Saturday. This was both due to the limited class hours she would get during the school week and in order to be able to use common facilities such as the water pipe located on the school grounds. Students would fetch water from this pipe for the practice sessions, and wash up after the session. The B&W trainer, Vrinda, explained that conducting practical sessions on a regular day was a problem as this attracted other students in the school, who also wanted to participate in the practice sessions, and have it tried on them. This led to conflicts with their teachers or parents (who did not approve of these practices).

Even among the students who had undertaken the B&W course, there were girls for whom the B&W course clearly conflicted with familial or religious values. For example, this was evident in the case of Raabiya, a devout Muslim girl in Level 2 (class 10) of the B&W course at the north Bangalore government school. Raabiya, who even appeared to break the school dress code

by wearing a full sleeves uniform-kurta (unlike all other girls who wore half sleeves uniform-kurta), also wore a head scarf and refused to remove this at all times. Even during the B&W practical classes, when students were paired together and asked to practice the skills related to various procedures on each other, such as manicures, pedicures, facials, waxing, threading, and so on, Raabiya would refuse to remove her head scarf, putting her in conflict with the teacher. Though Raabiya would undertake these different procedures on her partner, she explained that she would be beaten at home if she waxed her hands or threaded her eyebrows and could not read namaaz after undertaking these procedures. Students such as Raabiya thus clearly demonstrate that decisions around the selection of the B&W course by students were far from straightforward and often conflicted. While personal interest and consumptive desires appeared to an important reason for the girls' choice of the B&W course, it did not, however, convert or allow for personal consumptive practice, or even as professional practice, for a variety of reasons (including disapproval of families or teachers, and costs associated with these consumptive practices). As Vrinda explained, Raabiya's conservative parents were in fact on the verge of pulling her out of school after having apparently gotten to know of her involvement with a boy. In this scenario, Vrinda argued that the B&W course would at least allow Raabiya to undertake some beauty services at home for her neighbours and earn some money, though Raabiya herself seemed to present the B&W course as unacceptable to her parents.

For the other girls observed during the classes, the course again stirred mixed affective responses. On the one hand, knowledge to personally manage the self and one's appearance invoked excitement and the desire to apply these skills to oneself. As several girls repeatedly noted to me, the course had taught them a set of personal hygiene and beauty routines that they aspired to apply to themselves. For example, Sindulekha, daughter of a single mother working in a gum factory, and one of the few upper-caste girls in class 10 of the north Bangalore government school, explained that she was learning about health, *hengirubeku* (how to be), how to look after one's skin, and the importance of keeping healthy. Sukanya, a SC girl whose parents worked in a garment factory, presented a whole personal self-care regimen that she had learnt as part of her beauty course. Having never been to a beauty parlour, she explained that the course had taught her to keep her hands, legs, and nails clean and always cover them with socks and gloves; about the beauty products that could be used on skin and those that were harmful. She even admitted that she had learnt to manage her pimples after her B&W trainer had told her about a particular soap that could make pimples go away. Similarly, Shruti, the daughter of an Ola driver, also from the same school admitted to trying out the facials and other beauty tips taught by her trainer, Jamuna, such as applying potato and tomato juice on her skin. Like Sukanya, Shruti also admitted having never been to a beauty parlour. Thus, for many

of the girls, the B&W classes and the lessons provided opportunities to fulfil some of their consumptive aspirations around dress and grooming. As other studies have shown, these opportunities for girls from lower-income families with low social status enabled them to compensate for the lack of social status by consuming 'socially visible products' (Gupta & Srivastav 2016). Thus, the classes were explained by the girls in terms of the new cultural capital that the girls gained, which catered to their aspirations for upward social mobility.

However, the usefulness of the course to pursue a vocation was less vocally articulated by the girls, whose aspirations in this regard were around higher education and intellectual forms of labour. For example, girls like Sukanya explained how she wanted to pursue science after completion of class 10 as it would teach her to 'think' (clearly signalling the difference between pursuing education and training for intellectual and manual forms of labour) and was confident of scoring at least 78% in her exams. She explained her choice of the B&W subject on the other hand as something she would be able to easily pass, and that would be useful to get a job if she were to fail the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) exam. Similarly, Shruti, too, shared her aspirations to continue with higher education and even went on to explain how in order to pursue her ambitions of studying further, she would even have to marry a man with lower qualifications than her (as according to her men who studied more did not allow their wives to pursue further education!). Shruti, inspired by her 28-year-old middle-class dominant-caste Lingayat B&W trainer, Jamuna, wanted to become a fashion designer (though she had initially wanted to become a police officer), but had taken up the B&W course as a backup. She stated that she had noticed that no matter how much one studies, it becomes difficult to get a job and a practical course such as this one would help them get jobs.

Thus, what these narratives of the girls revealed was not just strong desires for education and professional jobs, but also a navigation of educational futures with a strong understanding of the social field and political economy of education and labour that made it hard for them to realise their dreams. As all of these girls' examples suggest, girls (and their families) expressed two kinds of aspirations that would bring them closer to their hopes for social mobility and aspirational regimes of the new middle class – on the one hand, gendered cultural knowledges and practices around bodies, beauty, appearances, and dress made accessible through the B&W classes for personal consumption and, on the other hand, educational and professional aspirations that were not centred around the B&W course and, in fact, significantly moved them away from relating to the B&W class as a 'vocational course', except in the event of failure in class 10 or if unable to continue studying further. Both of these presented pathways to social mobility for the girls. Other studies, for example, by Gupta and Srivastav (2016), have also shown how

such aspirations and consumptive practices among those at the 'bottom of the (urban) pyramid' reveal hierarchically ordered preferences: In their study, Gupta and Srivastav (2016) have noted how urban poor in metro cities like Mumbai and Kolkata privileged consumption of educational services over consumption of visible lifestyle products, such as mobile phones, jewellery, and cosmetics, as the former is seen to be a pathway out of poverty, while the latter is understood simply as presenting an appearance of social mobility in the present. Girls' choices of the vocational subject in the government similarly appeared to be linked to an evaluation of its role in ensuring a sustainable future pathway out of a lower socio-economic status and its immediate consumptive value (i.e. personal appearance, backup options, etc.).

In contrast with students' own understanding of mobility, it is worth noting how the B&W course diverged from their aspirations for sustained mobility through respectable jobs by preparing them as an 'underclass' of feminised labour for the service economy. By harnessing girls' interests and desires around bodies and beauty to produce 'aesthetic labour', their own consumptive practices and claims to 'consumer citizenship' and social mobility through this was devalued, and repositioned as 'learning to labour' within the course. I elaborate on this further in the next section by analysing how students of the B&W course were imagined and positioned within the curricular text.

Aspiration and Consumption Within and Outside Students' Reach: Deconstructing the B&W Curriculum

Providing a rationale for the introduction of the subject, the introductory chapter in the B&W workbook for students of class 9 points to the 'exponential growth' in the beauty and wellness sector in India due to 'consumerism, globalization and changing lifestyles' (NVEQ Level 1 BW101-NQ2013 – Introduction to Body care [Student Workbook], henceforth referred to as Student Workbook). The workbook states,

> Rising disposable income of the rapidly expanding *Indian middle class*, demand fuelled by increasing stress levels and willingness of people to look and feel good are further fuelling the growth of the Beauty & Wellness industry.
>
> *(Student Workbook: 8;* emphasis mine*)*

What the chapter revealed was not just the positioning of the industry in service of the middle classes for whom lower-caste/lower-class students from these government schools were being trained but explicitly described the girls' job roles as that of providing personalised services to regular and 'elite customers' (Student Workbook: 8–9). Statements such as these, along

with other lessons, such as that on nutrition made it amply clear that the curriculum was designed to train students to service clients far removed from their own lives, while their own consumptive desires and status as potential consumers were overlooked. As an illustration of this point, I present an analysis of a lesson on nutrition discussed in the Student Workbook.

Following a detailed discussion on the several kinds of balanced diets available for various purpose of body-shaping (e.g. for losing weight, gaining weight, and athletics), the ideal regular diet was introduced as consisting of seven meals, comprising of the right amounts of the different food groups. Learning assignments further drove this point home, by asking students to fill in details of the seven meals they had the previous day, in order to practice analysing the nutritional content of meals. Such exercises clearly stood in contrast with the experiences of students in a government school, for whom the state-sponsored midday meal often is one of the only meals of the day.[7]

Further, references were also made to foods alien to students within these schools, for example, 'tuna sandwich with seeded bread' (p. 59), 'soy-based yoghurt' (p. 59), and 'cereal and oatmeal' (p. 60). This clearly signals the consumptive lifestyles and practices of globally minded, elite customer, for whom the course seeks to prepare the girls, with the appropriate knowledges of the cultural practices and lifestyles required to service their needs. For students in the government schools being trained for the B&W industry, though these foods maybe unaffordable as well as inaccessible and uncommon to their everyday dietary practices and routines, knowledge of these foods is still critical to complete the 'aesthetic' experience of consumption sought by the elite customer. Introducing the girls to these new knowledges of conspicuous consumption, the course both marked out the girls' provinciality as well as their '"deficient" worker bodies' to be refashioned 'into productive ones in the shortest possible time and in the most cost-effective manner' (Maitra & Maitra 2018). Examples such as these and indeed, the very language of the

TABLE 9.1 Assignment on Nutrition Given in the Level 1 Beauty and Wellness Workbook

Meal Type	Meal Timings	Meal Content
Pre-breakfast		
Breakfast		
Post-breakfast		
Lunch		
Snack		
Dinner		
Before going to bed		

*Adapted from NVEQ Level 1 BW101-NQ2013 – Introduction to Body Care [Student Workbook]

workbook encoded what appeared to be the linguistic registers and life-styles of the globally oriented new middle class (see the following illustrative examples).

Illustrative examples from the beauty and wellness workbook

If you want to increase the amount of calcium that you consume, then here are some ways of adding it to your diet: *Obvious*, but pouring milk over your cereal or oatmeal (italics mine; p. 60)

Did your traps rise like you were *shrugging a couple* dumbbells? If all of this happened, then you are a chest breather.

(italics mine; p. 15)

While inaccessibility and unfamiliarity with the concepts and products mentioned in the workbook was just one of the forms of marking out the poor girl students' provinciality, the very language of the text (thus presented) which introduces certain conspicuous practices of consumption and everyday routine as *obvious* (e.g. pouring milk over cereal), or in a nonchalant and casual manner (e.g. shrugging, instead of lifting dumbbells), further emphasised the deficiencies of knowledge and everyday practices that constituted the lower-caste/lower-class selves of the girls. The language of the workbook and use of words such as 'obvious' and jargon such as 'traps rise' and 'shrugging dumbbells' suggested that such practices constituted common knowledge that students were expected to be familiar with too.[8]

Significantly, in this process, what is important to note is how middle-class consumptive routines of nutrition and fitness and physical health itself is being instituted hegemonically as the norm and the aspirational goal, discursively conditioning the girls to distance themselves from their own lifestyles, foods, and everyday routines. What the course thus appeared to be doing was producing new forms of understanding of the self and beauty through what Carolan (2003) describes as an 'upper class civilizing appetite'. Tracing how practices of diet and health have changed over the centuries as greater food security has come to be afforded by the upper classes, Carolan (2003) shows how dietary palates have now come to focus not on how much one eats but what one eats, with the content of one's diet becoming a marker of class. While the text presents the middle-class consumptive knowledges and everyday routines as constituting the right approaches to health, what remains unsaid is how this lifestyle requires the conspicuous investment of personal resources and time in oneself.

Carolan (2003) also further points to how this refinement of palate has also come to be associated with concepts of health and beauty, a topical elision that can also be seen within the B&W curriculum. Such elision is noticeable even in the naming of the course as B&W and the naming of the job role for which students are to be prepared for as that of a beauty therapist.

Trainers such as Jamuna, teaching at another government school in north Bangalore, reiterated this, stating that the course should not be viewed as a beautician's course but as treatment by which students would be able to diagnose and identify problems and give solutions appropriately. Taking note of such elision is important as it associates upper-caste/upper-class dietary practices and physical routines with scientific knowledges and techniques of health and medicine. In addition, it also allows for the products and services of the beauty industry – which otherwise are classified as luxury items – to be repositioned as essential to everyday life. Justified through this analogy drawn with health, students in the B&W course were taught to imbibe a set of consumptive practices around beauty and self-care that were articulated as essential to health.

Presented as embodied forms of knowledge on health, the disciplining and shaping of students' bodies and the understanding of their selves that were enabled were presented and accepted uncritically within the classes, without considerations of the new forms of (unaffordable) consumptive aspirations among students that it was creating. In teaching girls to shape themselves in novel ways, in fact, the B&W course harnessed the girls' own interest and consent in participating in the cultivation of patriarchally established, gendered bodies and identities, but more importantly, it did this by teaching them also to distance themselves from their own caste and class positions in order to prepare them job roles that would reproduce their current social positions.

'Bayige Baralla': Learning Consumption to Service the Elite

How students were taught to distance themselves from their own social identities and locations became evident during discussions with students such as Divya and Priya, from the government school in north Bangalore. During an informal discussion, Divya pointed to having learnt the importance of applying Fair and Lovely (a skin-whitening beauty cream) daily, stating that earlier she had only been using it once in a while. Another student, Priya, stated that she had learnt the importance of washing one's face at least thrice a day. All of these new knowledges had been received by children during classes on skin colour, skin pigmentation, and skin problems. Along with such information on products for fairness given to students, which hegemonically set up the ideals for beauty and aspirations to fit with these standards and encouraged consumerist tendencies such as increased use of beauty products among them, classroom transactions on beauty reproduced casteist and racist gender norms in other ways. For example, during classes on skin care routines on using cleansers, toners, moisturisers, and sunscreen, trainers such as Vrinda, a 38-year-old upper-caste middle-class facilitator (teaching at the government school in north Bangalore) encouraged children to apply sunscreen over the moisturiser, at least six times a day, stating that this was so that they did not

tan or become dark (*kappagubaraduantha*) as they came to school by bus. During another session on haircare, Vrinda similarly told the students that it was those who went out in the sun or worked in the sun (*bisillali kelasa maadavaru*) who would have dry brown hair with split ends and instructed children to stay away from the sun. Setting up middle-class/upper-caste lives as the norm (whether it is in reference to diet, work, or lifestyle such as being able to avoid the sun), what was evident through observations of transactions of the B&W curriculum was how it reproduced the social divisions between dark-skinned and fair-skinned persons and between manual-labouring castes and classes and professional workers (based on their appearance). With a majority of students in the government schools in which the course was being conducted belonging to lower-caste/lower-class homes, such curricular transactions presented the danger of not just being personally humiliating but reinforcing a sense of inferiority within students that is profoundly gendered. Further, with students aspiring to attain such standards, curricular transactions served not just in re-establishing divisions within society but even within families by cultivating in students the consumptive aspirations to be and become like the upper castes and the new middle class that are very different in dress, diet, work, and lifestyle from those within their own families and social contexts.

Significantly, it should be remembered that the cultivation of new consumer identities and selves amongst the poor girls attending the B&W course is not of course an end unto itself. What these specific gendered forms of transformation in appearance and lifestyle expected of students was the cultivation of skills for the production of aesthetic and affective labour, central to the job roles of these lower caste and class students. Positioned to 'service' the consumptive culture of the middle classes, these skills become central to students' employability, as well as to the sustenance of the consumer and service economy. Considering this, the introductory chapter of the student workbook even explicitly lays expectations on students to transform themselves into consumer citizens, stating,

> A beautician has to look well-dressed, neat and smart-looking at work. She/he has to be always polite, punctual and professional in her/his approach. When interacting closely with the clients, it is imperative that the beautician is patient and accommodating, inspiring the clients' trust and have good rapport with them. She/he must take an interest in the latest beauty trends and products to be knowledgeable enough to advise clients when required.
>
> *(p. 8)*

As the text shows, students of the B&W course were expected not just to have the right sets of knowledges to service the elite customer but to embody

these very knowledges through their own dress and qualities of personal conduct. Not just within text, but students' such as Srilakshmi from the north Bangalore government school also described how her visit to the parlour as part of the course had taught her the importance of behaving and dressing well, and being amenable to customers, as they would otherwise not come, as they would not like the atmosphere. Other girls like Kavita, an OBC student who aspired to become a software engineer and had also taken the B&W course as 'backup', admitted that even beauty parlours would not take them if they did not dress well.

Along with investments in products to enhance one's appearance and aesthetic qualities, expectation was also placed on students to be up-to-date with the latest beauty trends and knowledges, through personal investments and practices of consumption. For the majority of students who were part of these courses, the middle-class knowledges and products of beauty were in fact inaccessible, as a result of their limited economic and cultural capital. That students struggled even to keep up with the lessons taught in the classroom was evident from instances such as students using the word 'rose' for 'blusher' and trainers such as Vrida scolding them for being stuck on the beauty concepts and terminologies of a past era ('*Neev innu haLe kaaladalli idhira. Eega rose antha kariyalla*'). While children struggled with many of the terms (such as 'moisturiser' and 'concealer') taught and expected of them, and some such as Rachna (a class 9 OBC girl, aspiring to complete MBBS, from the north Bangalore government school) even admitting that these words did not even enter their mouths (*baayige baralla idhu*), the curriculum placed expectations on them to stay constantly updated on new beauty concepts, products, and services.

What all of this seems to suggest is not just the reproduction of caste, class, and gender through the B&W curriculum but also the subjectification of students into enterprising neoliberal workers who would continuously work upon themselves in order to serve the interests of the elite and the beauty industry.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the state's skilling and educational vision for urban, marginalised youth, in relation to their own future aspirations. While the options enabled by the state for these young people slots them for the lower rungs of the urban service economy, their own accounts reveal aspirations for more professional jobs and knowledges of the middle class, along with the strategies they adopt in realistically navigating the limited opportunities available. The huge push towards skilling, particular in the last decade, by the state has been accompanied by discourses that position it as investments in young people's future, to pull them out of poverty, unemployment, and

precarity. However, a growing body of work on youth and skilling demonstrates how skilling discourses and programmes essentially serve to fix the onus of getting and keeping jobs on young people themselves. Skilling discourses urge youth to become 'employable' by constantly reskilling oneself to manage the growing contractualisation and informalisation of labour within the private and government sectors, on the one hand, and by aspiring for social mobility through jobs in the precarious and expanding private sector, on the other.

While the young people in this study, as other studies (see Mehta 2021), do opt for 'skilling', their rationales for this differ significantly from the ways in which the state imagines their futures through skilling. In contrast with their desires for higher education and professional jobs or for other 'viable jobs' for social mobility (Jeffrey & Dyson 2022), choices around skilling appear to be strategic moves to manage precarity. Young people appear to navigate their present and future precarity by choosing skilling for low service economy jobs (as in the case of this study) or low-end jobs in the service economy itself (e.g. as a data entry operator in a private firm, as in Mehta's study) as 'backup' or 'stopgap' options while pursuing other aspirations and goals for a viable future. Such strategies also reveal the 'capacity to aspire', not the lack of it (Appadurai 2004; López-Muñoz & Ingelaere 2020), among the poor, as well as the capacity to navigate complex trajectories in an attempt to reach their aspirations despite limited opportunities and resources. As young people in my study, and others' such as in Mehta's (2021) and Gupta and Srivastav's (2016) study show, it is not the 'comparatively weaker sense of the pathways from concrete wants to intermediate contexts to general norms and back again', as posited by Appadurai (2004) that limit them. Rather, our studies together demonstrate how a realistic understanding of the limited possibilities leads them and their families to strategically plan and pursue multiple pathways that are non-linear to realise their aspirations. Such pathways may take the form of adopting different consumptive practices – from consumption of lifestyle and cultural goods in the immediate present for upward social mobility to longer routes of educational consumption as more viable forms of social mobility in the future.

However, within the state's vision for skilling youth, such capacities and aspirations hardly find resonance. A close examination of one of the many skilling programmes available to marginalised youth, the VSHSE-RMSA programme, shows how the opportunities offered to them only serve to reproduce their caste/class and gender positions by training them for the kinds of non-intellectual blue-collar labour they far from desire. In fact, it even fails to identify them as 'equal citizens' with educational aspirational capacities of the middle class or as 'consumer citizens' with the capacities to consume the very services for which they are being trained. Instead, as seen through a close reading of the B&W course, the state's vocational education

programmes explicitly position young girls from marginalised communities as labour to service the elite, enlisting their own desires and consumptive practices around beauty and body, shaped hegemonically through industry and middle-class standards, only to produce 'aesthetic labour' for the market.

Notes

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2 All names of people and schools in this chapter have been anonymised to protect the confidentiality of informants.
3 A similar observation has been made by Mona Mehta (2021) in her study on job preferences among peri-urban youth in India, where she argues that youth opt for certain low-end private jobs as a stopgap arrangement.
4 For a more detailed discussion and review of the scheme, and the vocational education and training structure in India, refer to CBPS' study, Skills Development, Social Mobility and Educational Change: A Sociological Analysis of the Effects of the National Policy on Skills Development in India, undertaken through the first round of funding of the APF Research grant in 2016–2017.
5 This was replaced by the National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in 2015, with the creation of a separate Ministry for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
6 Courses in the same five sectors are offered across the districts of Karnataka, despite the district-level skills gap analysis that was conducted. Further, only two of the five sectors are offered in each school, and often decisions on choice of subject were based on schools' motivations rather than students' interest or choices. For more details regarding this, refer to CBPS' study, A Critical Sociological Analysis of the Skills Development Initiative of India, undertaken through the second round of funding of the APF Research grant in 2017–2018.
7 Here I refer to the free midday meal programme that is part of the compulsory and free elementary education programme, though this is unavailable to students in secondary and higher secondary schools. Several studies have pointed to the importance of this provision, particularly for girls, who also face gendered disadvantages in relation to nutrition within the household.
8 The second example is particularly significant as it is only one of the many exercises that can be undertaken using dumbbells that involves the shrugging of shoulders.

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III

Practices of Parenting

10

DISCIPLINING GIRLS IN GERMAN FAMILIES

Gendered Childhood Experiences of Violent and
Authoritarian Parenting in Germany From
the 1890s to the 1940s

Christina von Hodenberg

Until recently, most historiography on childhood in 20th-century Germany has concentrated on periods of war and dictatorship and often constructed children as passive, vulnerable, sometimes traumatised victims of war and persecution. German children have been investigated as witnesses and victims of war or war-related displacement (Stargardt 2006; Zahra 2011; Vaizey 2011), as objects of indoctrination in institutional settings under the Nazi regime (Stargardt 2006; Zahra 2011; Vaizey 2011), or, where the focus was on the offspring of fallen soldiers, Nazi perpetrator fathers or non-white occupation soldiers, as living embodiments of the consequences of war and Nazism (Seegers 2013; Lemke Muniz de Faria 2002; Fehrenbach 2018). Many historiographic accounts have critically analysed public discourses about childhood in the early Federal Republic and thus indirectly responded to contemporary concerns about 'fatherless sons', 'incomplete families', and the allegedly resulting juvenile male delinquency.[1] While there is much of value in this scholarship, which has increasingly emphasised child agency, it has at times struggled to break free from the implicit association of children with fatherhood and war. The focus on the socialisation of young males and male parenting, or on the long-lasting, trauma-inducing lack of the male parent, has been strongest in bestselling studies aimed at a generation of older, mainly West German readers.[2]

Feminist perspectives, or work on mothering styles and daughters' experiences, are still rare in this field.[3] There is still relatively little historical research into gendered childhood experiences within families as opposed to in public, in schools or institutions (Levsen 2020; Grüner and Raasch 2019a; Rosenbaum 2014; Rosenbaum 1992; Gebhardt 2009). While childhood trauma relating to violence outside everyday settings – during war, in ghettoes, and in

concentration and DP camps – has been studied extensively (Denzler, Grüner, and Raasch 2016; Michlic 2017, pp. xv–xxxiv),[4] the violence experienced in everyday family and school settings remains largely unexamined.

Nevertheless, the assumption that German children were raised in a particularly loveless, violent, and authoritarian manner underlies much of the popular debate and media output to this day.[5] In several populist works based mainly on anecdotal evidence or fictional treatments, German mothers of certain age groups appear as emotionally cold, cruel, and overbearing Nazi witches – as 'Hitler's willing mothers' (Bode 2016, p. 149), intent on toughening up their offspring and sacrificing sons for the nation in holy wars (Vinken 2001, pp. 280–281, 234–240, 257, 287). Fathers are presented as authoritarian, harsh, and violent patriarchs, or fatherlessness is discussed as a source of loss and trauma. Many of the activists of the late 1960s protest movement in West Germany, now in their 70s and 80s, have argued that the uniquely repressive parenting styles they and their predecessor generations grew up with were at the core of fascism and had to be overcome (Hodenberg 2018, chap. 3; Rosenbaum 1992). To this end, from the turn of the 1970s onwards, the activist cohort experimented with contested anti-authoritarian, 'self-regulating', and non-violent forms of parenting, childcare, and schooling which they believed to be essential to making 'new human beings' unshackled from the toxic legacies of German fascist and capitalist history (Reichardt 2014; Baader 2014a, pp. 425–439; Zellmer 2011, pp. 68–82; van Rahden 2016). Recent research shows that these activist experiments built on expert and media discourses which had established a new narrative from the early 1960s. West German psychologists and educators began to present authoritarian and violent parenting as a German peculiarity. They identified these modes of child-rearing as a legacy of Nazism, typical of the 'authoritarian personality' types described by the Frankfurt School sociologists, and therefore as a liability which kept West Germany from becoming a truly 'Western' and 'democratic' society. While this narrative dominates public debate to this day, there is little evidence to support the link it constructs between parental violence, Nazism, and a specifically German authoritarianism (Levsen 2020, pp. 287–303, 618–620).

This chapter explores the extent to which German children who grew up before the 1960s were indeed raised in violent and authoritarian everyday environments. I will investigate childhoods lived between the 1890s and 1940s and explore aspects of discipline and punishment in the raising of girls. How did mothering and fathering styles towards girls change over time? What types of physical punishment, violence, and methods of discipline, including withholding tenderness, did girls experience? Where possible, I will compare my findings to how boys were raised, and attend to class differences.

Generally, due to limitations of the source basis in state archives, the voices of mothers and daughters are rarely heard in the historiography. We know

more about the administrators, experts, and politicians who regulated and disciplined mothers and children in order to uphold patriarchal 'normality' and safeguard the new generation, which they saw as an asset to the future of the nation (Buske 2013; Schnädelbach 2009). How girls remembered their mothers' parenting and how mothers described the differences between the way they were raised and the way they raised their own children have to be reconstructed on the basis of ego documents, interviews, and oral history sources.

The Sources

My analysis draws on four different sets of interviews with adult West Germans about their childhoods which were conducted between the mid-1960s and the 2000s. I use four samples to trace changes to girlhood experiences and mothering styles over time, with a particular focus on violence, discipline, and punishment.

Sample A: BOLSA • born 1888–1906 • tapes from 1965 to 1968 • conducted in Bonn • N = 221

Sample B: Merker • born 1909–1928 • transcripts from 1967 to 1968 • conducted in Bonn • N = 65

Sample C: Rosenbaum I • born 1893–1921 • interviewed in 1985–1986 • conducted in Hannover • N = 30

Sample D: Rosenbaum II • born 1923–1927 • interviewed in the early 2000s • conducted in four towns/villages • N = 48

The methodological challenges posed by all such interview sources are well known. The memories presented are always malleable and subjective and change over time. The life stories narrated are inevitably coloured by socially constructed, acceptable, and often mass-mediated patterns present in society.[6] For example, there is a widespread pattern of childhood narratives being generally sentimentalised in recollections decades after the fact. Old people, even from deprived backgrounds, tend to see their childhood in a relatively rosy light. They may try to protect their deceased parents' memory by not overly criticising them (Rosenbaum 2014, pp. 628–629). Where we do hear the elderly finding fault with their own parents' mothering and fathering styles, it therefore is to be taken seriously.

My first sample (A), the 220 interviews with elderly people from the 1960s, is a particularly large and unusual source. The so-called BOLSA study was conducted by psychologists at the University of Bonn from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. The team produced almost 3,000 hours of tapes on which

220 people born between 1888 and 1906 talk about their lives. Half of the subjects were women, the other half men, belonging to two age cohorts born roughly 1888–1895 and 1897–1906. They were predominantly lower class and lower middle class and little educated, and thus, they were pretty representative of West Germany's population in the 1960s. The study was designed to investigate individual patterns of ageing and to understand the development of personality traits in later life. The raw material is therefore topically very wide-ranging. The researchers followed the participants until death, for up to 20 years. They collected not only interviews and photos but all kinds of biographical, social, psychological, and medical data on their subjects and fed these into a massive dataset. Here, I reanalyse not only the interviews on tape, but also the BOLSA statistical dataset, in order to cross-check individual childhood narratives against the entire sample.[7]

Sample B, which I have named the Merker sample after the psychologist Helga Merker who designed the study, was surveyed by the same team of psychologists in Bonn, again during the late 1960s. They asked a middle-aged cohort who had been children before or during the Nazi era about their youth, how their parents raised them, and how they raised their own children (Merker 1973). These interviews survive as shorter transcribed sources and were meant to provide a comparison with the elderly subjects of the BOLSA. Comparing the 104 women in sample A with the 29 women in sample B will therefore be useful in testing changes to childhood experiences.[8]

The other two samples I use (C and D) are from published studies by Heidi Rosenbaum. In 1985–1986 she interviewed a sample of working-class people from Hanover about their proletarian childhoods in the imperial era. The subjects were 18 women and 12 men born between 1893 and 1921, but mostly between 1900 and 1915 (Rosenbaum 1992, pp. 18–23). In the early 2000s, the same author conducted and analysed 48 interviews on childhood experiences with men and women born between 1923 and 1927 who grew up during the Nazi years (Rosenbaum 2014). Again, we can compare these two samples to test changes over time.

Basic Parameters of German Childhood in the Long 20th Century

A general statistical overview of our samples reveals some structural similarities between modern German childhoods. To begin with, childhood experiences and parenting styles were strongly linked to how many children families had to cope with. Sample A clearly establishes that the poorer the family, the larger it was likely to be.[9] But over time there was a trend towards having fewer children. The same sample shows that the oldest age group (born in 1888–1895) grew up with an average of 5.4 children in the family, including themselves. The next age group (born in 1897–1906) grew up with an average of 4.9 children. But when those born in 1888–1895 became parents,

they only raised on average 2.56 children, and those born in 1897–1906 even fewer: 2.28. Within one generation, the average number of children per family had halved (**see Table 10.1 and Figures 10.1–10.4**).[10]

In sample A, children frequently reported having to help with either domestic or agricultural work. Child labour in factories had been banned in most areas of Germany from the mid to late 19th century (Konrad 2014; Mierendorff 2014). Accounts of childhood hunger do occur, but they are rare and relate mainly to the war years among the BOLSA subjects and in sample C. They are non-existent among the middle-aged subjects of the Merker study (sample B) and sample D.[11]

The elderly BOLSA interviewees in sample A saw their childhoods as fairly happy. We know this because the interviewers assessed the 'tint of childhood memories' for each of their subjects on a scale of 1 to 9, with 9 being an idealised, rose-tinted childhood and 1 being a totally unhappy one. The mean here was 6.34, and women and men did not significantly differ in how

TABLE 10.1 Average Number of Siblings Per Birth Cohort

Birth Cohort	Number of Children in Parental Household					
	1	2–3	4–5	6–7	8 and more	Total (N)
Born in 1888–1895	6	24	35	16	26	107
Born in 1897–1906	6	28	38	22	19	113
Children of parents born in 1888–1895	18	52	8	3	3	84
Children of parents born in 1897–1906	31	43	6	5	0	85
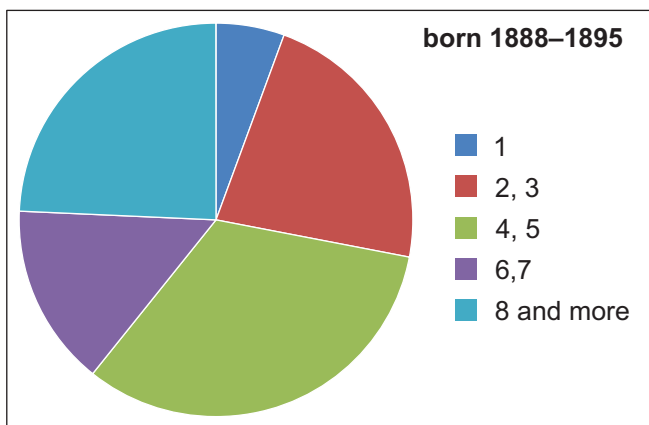
FIGURE 10.1 Number of children in the childhood home of BOLSA subjects born between 1888 and 1895
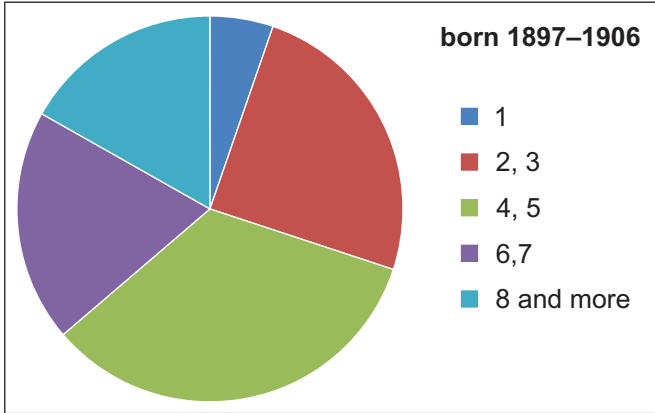
FIGURE 10.2   Number of children in the childhood home of BOLSA subjects born between 1897 and 1906
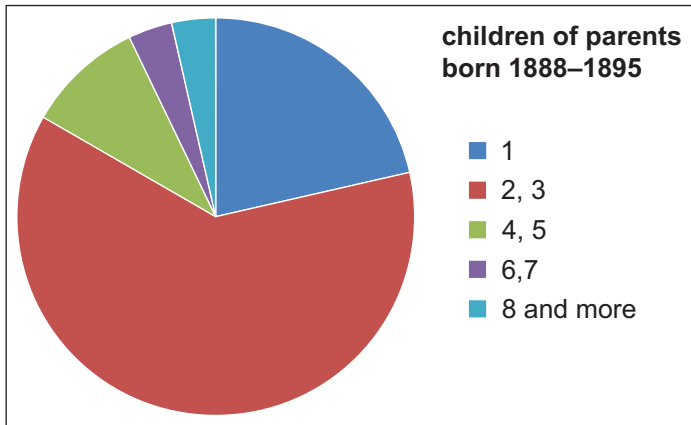
FIGURE 10.3   Number of children raised by BOLSA subjects born between 1888 and 1895

they rated their childhoods. But very significant differences emerge when we take class into account. Poorer people and women and men from poorer parental homes were clearly unhappier with their childhoods (chi-square 0.000 and 0.014, n = 221). However, it was statistically insignificant whether the mother was a housewife or in paid employment, or whether she was educated.[12] We can therefore discount the narrative that a cultured, middle-class, stay-at-home mother automatically produced a happier childhood.

There were two other statistically very significant variables denoting a happier childhood in the BOLSA sample A. One was the main carer. Children
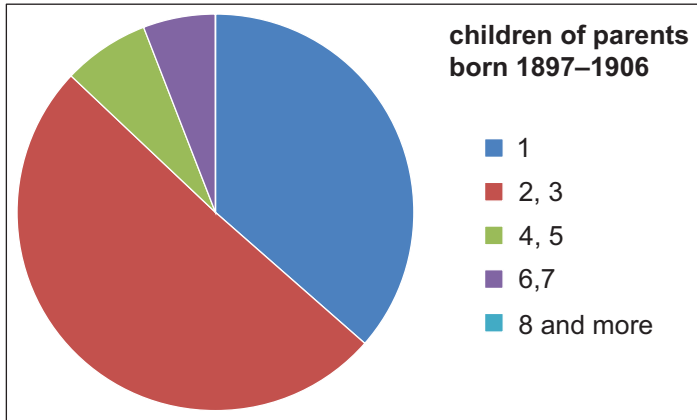
FIGURE 10.4   Number of children raised by BOLSA subjects born between 1897 and 1906

who were mainly looked after by their parents (a mother, a father, or both mother and father) recalled a happier childhood than those children who were cared for by other relatives, non-relatives, or care homes (chi-square 0.000, n = 219).[13] This means we can assume that most children raised outside the parental relationship received comparatively little love and support.

Another remarkable correlation exists between the father's level of formal education and the degree to which his children were critical of the parenting styles they grew up with. Thus, lower-class, low-income fathers were likely more authoritarian and violent than others.[14]

For all four samples, the life stage of childhood lasted until age 14, when the compulsory, free-of-charge German elementary school (*Volksschule*) ended and working life began.[15] The dominance of the *Volksschule* model only waned after the 1950s (Rahlf 2015, p. 64). Seventy per cent of girls in the generation born before 1910 left school at age 14 and took up work. In the BOLSA sample A, there was no significant gender difference between girls and boys regarding their school leaving age.[16] But girls were much less able to achieve their vocational aspirations. Regardless of the class they belonged to, their gender meant that their parents typically discouraged them from higher education or specific types of jobs.[17]

After children left school, it would in most cases still be another 9 to 12 years before they got married. The average age of first marriage in sample A was 26.6 years for men and 23.5 years for women (n = 72). None of the women married before age 19. This is unsurprising, given the traditional pattern of late marriage in north-western Europe which lasted into the 1950s (Wehler 1995, p. 495). Even afterwards, from 1950 to 1987, the average statistical age of first marriage for women remained between 23 and 25 years

and for men between 25 and 28 years.[18] Therefore, the girlhood experiences reported in the BOLSA sample A typically describe school attendance until age 14, followed by paid employment or domestic help in the parents' home until marriage or the birth of the first child about five to ten years later.

Gendered Childhood Patterns

A major reason for girls being denied educational chances was the gendering of domestic work. This pattern is evident in all sample A interviews. Tasks such as needlework and caring were considered exclusively female. More generally, the entirety of chores in house and garden fell overwhelmingly to the girls and the mothers (Benninghaus 2000). The most extreme cases of daughters' domestic labour coming at the expense of their own schooling and life chances occurred for older daughters with several younger siblings. A few examples are given in the following.[19]

> Marie Prager, born in 1892, ten younger siblings: 'We had to work . . . I wanted to study . . . but that wasn't possible . . . One was in the household'.
> Leni Mittenzwei, born in 1891, eight younger siblings: 'There's not much [good] to remember. Mostly I had to keep the children safe. And afterwards I was in service'.
> Aurelie Hölderlin, born in 1894, seven younger siblings: 'I didn't have any contact with my parents, I always had to look after younger siblings. . . . I wasn't allowed to play, I just had to be home and mind the children. . . . When I was done with everything and wanted to go into the garden for a little while, I still had to stay inside and knit'.
> Clara Schade, born in 1905, six younger siblings: 'I didn't get much from my childhood and youth . . . When I returned from work, I had to tackle the household'.
> Marie Niewald, born in 1902, four younger siblings: 'It held me back that I had to help the younger ones in the family. I was tied up. I had to hand my pay to my mother'.

Another typical pattern emerges when we look at children whose parents became seriously ill or died. Given that the average life expectancy of Germans was 37 years in 1871 and 47 years in 1910 (admittedly skewed by the high infant mortality), the death of parents during childhood was a frequent occurrence (Wehler 1995, p. 499). But it meant different things for boys and girls. Asked to name any adverse events that had blighted their lives, elderly men often recalled their father's death as depriving the family of income, therefore cutting their schooling short and diminishing their career prospects. Women more often reported a parent's death or illness not as thwarting career

aspirations (these were low anyway) but as the moment from which they had to run the household and raise younger siblings.[20]

Virtually all of the elderly interviewees in sample A and the middle-aged interviewees in sample B reported having been kept in the dark about all things sexual. The women vividly recalled their parents' warnings not to fall pregnant before marriage, and the pervasive fear and ignorance related to sexuality. A typical recollection among women is their shock when they started to menstruate, and the brief and incomplete advice given to them by mothers on this occasion. This lack of information about the female body, birth control, and sexuality is also present in samples C and D, Heidi Rosenbaum's interviews with women and men born between 1893 and the late 1920s. Only the generation of mothers born after 1910 started to pass more information to their daughters, as evidenced in interviews with the mothers in sample B. Therefore, the female cohorts born roughly from the 1940s onwards were the first to be at least partly 'in the know' during their adolescence (Rosenbaum 1992, pp. 196–199; Rosenbaum 2014, pp. 229, 233, 395, 496; Hodenberg 2018, pp. 170–182).

Emotional Distance between Parents and Children

In BOLSA sample A, women and men from all classes describe the parental home as an authoritarian setting in which children were not supposed to talk when adults were present. Usually there was no pocket money and limited choice regarding clothing or toys. Children had to obey orders and be content with what they were given. Typically, parents were characterised as strict and, if they were poor, intent on making the older children supplement the family income in any way possible.[21] Marie Niewald, a teacher born in 1902, said, 'There was too much "You have to, you should, you must not" . . . too little understanding. The child was not supposed to make objections'. Widowed housewife Klara Pommer recalled, 'Well it had been drilled into us . . . that we had to help'.[22] Sample A interviewees reported matter-of-factly how little time their working-class parents were able to spend caring for them or talking and playing with them. It was normal for pre-schoolers to be locked into the family flat until their parents came home from work,[23] or to be 'raised by the siblings' instead of the parents in large families.[24] Many women defended their parents' choices. Housewife Erna Schumann, born in 1893, compared her own mothering experience to that of her time-poor mother: 'I was at home for my children. My mother went to work, and in the evenings, she still did the shopping. . . . It was tough for my mother – in contrast, I had it golden. Because I stayed at home from the beginning. She was forced to go to work'.[25]

A comparison with sample B, interviewed by Helga Merker's team, reveals that the younger generation of 29 women born between 1909 and 1927/1928

also told of having been brought up very strictly. Most of the 29 women interviewed criticised their parents for having been too strict or distant, and said that they had raised their children somewhat, if not totally differently. 'If I talk about my youth now, for example, I was not allowed to do much, I didn't have anything much like work when I was young. My mother kept me on a fairly tight rein, and I was not allowed to go out', said 44-year-old Frau Zorn, born in 1924. Frau Banse, born in 1923, described her own upbringing as 'educationally intimidated': 'Our times demanded only obedience, just don't make any mistakes, don't talk back at work'. Frau Eichhorn, born in 1925, saw her parents' house as uncompromising. Her father ruled over the family, the post was opened and wardrobes were searched, and pocket money was as unimaginable as talking back. There was 'never a conversation at table. The children had to be quiet . . . You know, my parents throned over us and we sit with the children . . . We talk to the kids. That is the big difference'.[26] Many mentioned that their mothers never played with them and had little or no time to spare for their children. The emotional distance between parents and children was large, and the girls often felt misunderstood.[27]

Emotionally distant parents were also a key point reported by Rosenbaum's two samples C and D. Kisses, hugs, and other physical signs of affection were extremely sparse in the 29 working-class imperial-era families in sample C. Only in 10 of the 29 families could the children remember any such instances, and these were normally linked to rare events such as major illness. The picture remains largely unchanged for the 48 Nazi-era interviewees (sample D). They hardly ever recalled moments of physical closeness beyond the dutiful good night kiss. Disparaging comments about the effeminacy and 'monkey love' (*Affenliebe*) that such tenderness supposedly represented were frequent (Rosenbaum 1992; Rosenbaum 2014). Thus, even where the relationship between parents and children was loving, it did not normally involve close physical contact.

While these descriptions of working-class parenting from the 1890s to the 1940s drive home the large differences from today's affluent and tactile German settings, they do not necessarily equate to a climate of violence and intimidation. Widespread time poverty, emotional austerity, and restrained physical closeness affected both girls and boys. But how frequent, how gendered, and how intense was the use of physical violence?

Debates on Physical Punishment of Children

The historiography on physical punishment in 19th- and early 20th-century Germany focuses mostly on debates among educators – and therefore on the educated upper classes, and more on theory than practice. While in 19th-century France and England, beating as a means of education may possibly have become less popular over time, the same cannot be said with

certainty for Germany (Konrad 2014, p. 106). There, educators continued to advocate the use of corporal punishment. From the 19th century up until the 1960s, physical violence was typically described as an unavoidable and necessary means of education when other means had failed. Only 'excesses' were frowned upon. For teachers, the type of cane, the body parts struck, and the volume of beatings were increasingly regulated over time. Manuals and officials argued that beatings should be 'proportionate' and reserved for 'extreme' cases, or specifically for younger (preschool) children who needed to learn obedience by means of bodily pain (Grüner and Raasch 2019b, pp. 13–15; Grüner 2019, pp. 37–39). Around 1900 and again in the 1920s, lively debates developed about how and when it was proper to cane children, and the notion of the 'vulnerable' child gained traction (Baader 2014b, pp. 167–168, 173–174). A decade later, Nazi Germany's bestselling manual for mothers, Johanna Haarer's *The German Mother and Her Child*, argued that children had to be taught that life was a hard battle. They had to be toughened up, get used to pain and rise above emotional dependency as early as possible. Haarer sold 500,000 copies of her book, in which she warned mothers of exaggerated parental affection, which she also denigrated as 'monkey love'. She recommended 'a few slaps at the right times', rather than regular beatings, to create obedient and resilient children (Kössler 2014, pp. 307–308; Grüner 2019, p. 46; Gebhardt 2009, pp. 85–99). Later, Johanna Haarer became infamous for cruel Nazi mothering styles, although the emotional austerity and restrained physical punishment she preached had already been taught for decades before her (Rosenbaum 2014, p. 209; Grüner 2019). Such long-term continuities from the late imperial era to the 1960s are also highlighted by Miriam Gebhardt, who has analysed parenting manuals and 'parenting diaries' written by educated middle-class mothers and fathers of preschoolers since the 1890s. Emotional distance, a fear of tyrannical and out-of-control children, and a strong focus on bodily discipline (including physical punishment) characterised German parenting until the 1970s. Gebhardt argues that while educators had already preached such practices during the late imperial era, the widespread implementation and radicalisation of physical discipline only happened during the Nazi era (Gebhardt 2009, p. 67).

Gebhardt's examples, however, are restricted to the treatment of infants and toddlers in the upper and educated middle classes. Her findings contradict Sonja Levsen's recent research on the physical punishment of children in post-1945 West Germany and France. According to Levsen, during the 1940s, the corporal punishment of minors was just as common in Britain and the United States as in Germany, and French schools operated with stricter hierarchies than their German counterparts: 'Beatings were no German peculiarity and violent punishment in school was not a relict of Nazism' (Levsen 2020, p. 349).

It therefore remains to be seen how far parenting practices in the majority population followed educators' debates and upper middle-class practices, and whether violent forms of punishment intensified during the era of Nazi rule.

Violent Parenting Practices

While educators argued over the function and regulation of corporal punishment, it appears to have remained widespread in many school and family settings. But it is difficult to determine just how widespread, gender- and class-dependent beatings were, given the available sources. Both the lower-class and middle-class samples interviewed by the psychologists of Bonn University during the 1960s (A and B) have limitations for our purposes. The researchers were not specifically interested in methods of child discipline and therefore did not ask targeted questions or code related variables in their dataset, which makes exact quantification difficult. Nevertheless, the topic often surfaced in the taped or transcribed childhood recollections.[28]

Among the sample A subjects born between 1888 and 1906, corporal punishment seems to have been extremely widespread. Its actual extent is difficult to gauge because physical violence was often referred to with codewords such as 'tough parenting' (*straffe Erziehung*) or a 'harsh' father or mother (*harsch, derb, herb*). Beatings were mainly meted out by fathers and sometimes by mothers. They were mostly directed against the sons and oldest siblings. Accounts of girls witnessing brothers being caned were frequent.[29] It was clearly unusual to grow up in a family where hands were never laid on the children. Several BOLSA interviewees stress how exceptional their parents were for refraining from violence.[30] Many girls told detailed stories of violent parenting. Aurelie Hölderin, the daughter of a craftsman and the oldest of 11 children, was 'whacked with the hand, with the wooden spoon' by her 'terribly hard' mother for having neglected the supervision of toddler siblings.[31] Other interviewees referred to a 'somewhat harsh mother', who made them work a lot (as in the case of a cleaner from Frankfurt), or mentioned that even though their parents had been loving, their mother had beaten them.[32]

Generally, the sample B subjects spoke less of physical violence than the women of sample A. While there are many references in sample B to 'tight discipline' (*Zucht und Ordnung*) or the 'hard' parenting they grew up with, only 3 of 29 middle-aged women hinted at having been beaten. Use of the cane seems to have affected the boys of this generation much more than the girls. Frau Hahn, born in 1919, recalls having been beaten once by her father with a clothes hanger after coming home late. Frau Ruhle's parents kept an 'appetite cane' (*Appetitstöckchen*) near the dining table with which they enforced the rule of 'cleaning the plate', a tradition she kept with her own two sons. And for Frau Zabel, beatings had always been an essential part

of raising obedient children: she berated her husband for 'not being strict enough, he can't beat them . . . I think he hasn't whacked them once yet'. The two latter women came from comparatively poor families; they had worked in factories and one had been a sales assistant.[33] Interestingly, those women in sample B who had become mothers themselves often argued that it was fine to physically punish sons but not daughters, because males needed to get used to pain and self-discipline in order to face life's struggles: 'Boys have to be raised in a more hands-on way' (*härter angepackt werden*).[34]

Many of the 36 men in sample B reported to have been beaten not only by parents but also by teachers and priests. Herr Ullrich sighed: 'Whether in the parental home, in school, in church . . . blows, blows, that was our daily bread. . . . One was bossed around and beaten until one broke free from home'.[35] Many of the men said that they tried to hurt their own children less than they had been hurt themselves and that they tried to reduce the intensity and frequency of the beatings they dealt out.[36] But very few stated that they never beat their children as a matter of principle.[37] At the point in time when sample B was taken, the late 1960s, there was therefore a gradual, incremental reduction in physically violent parenting rather than a principled turn away from it. Boys were still beaten to a larger extent than girls, with physical punishment practices becoming even more gendered over time.

These hypotheses are confirmed by a comparison of the two Bonn-based samples A and B with Rosenbaum's two samples C and D. Her sample C – of working-class childhoods in the imperial era – establishes that 'beatings were part of everyday life for many children'. Rosenbaum distinguished between three types of parenting styles which she called 'traditional', 'social democratic', and 'petty bourgeois'. 'Traditional' fathers were present in 8 of the 29 families, just over a quarter of her sample. Such fathers were emotionally distant and quick to resort to beatings with a whip, leather strap or cane, while mothers hit the children, too, and girls were beaten as well as boys. But in her 16 'social democratic' and 5 'petty bourgeois' families, the parents only rarely and more hesitantly engaged in beatings (Rosenbaum 1992, pp. 93, 241–242, 251–252, 267).

For the Nazi era, Rosenbaum's sample D again shows that physical violence 'almost without exception' formed part of working-class childhood. But boys were usually more on the receiving end than girls and older siblings more than younger ones. At home, it was typically the fathers who administered beatings, using whips, leather belts, and electric cables in addition to their hands. Mothers, and sometimes grandmothers, smacked bottoms and slapped faces. Girls more often recalled their horror at witnessing brothers being beaten than experiencing physical violence themselves. At school, corporal punishment was even more commonplace than at home. Here, it was mainly male teachers caning the pupils, with some teachers targeting only boys, and others (in rural schools) caning boys on the bottom but girls *only*

on the hands. In addition, boys' games on school playgrounds often incorporated significant physical violence, which was inflicted on the weakest males in the group (Rosenbaum 2014, pp. 22, 24, 210–211, 561–562, 597, 114, 123, 394, 582–583; Stambolis 2012, pp. 87–89).

A few scattered contemporary social science surveys also confirm that violent parenting and teaching practices remained widespread from the 1920s to the 1940s, but selectively so. In 1925, the sociologist Otto Rühle described the regularity of violence experienced by proletarian children at the hands of peers, at school and at home, with 50% of 10-to-13-year-olds reporting regular beatings.[38] When adolescents of the late 1940s were surveyed by social scientists linked to the Frankfurt School, fully 80% said they had experienced beatings by parents. But only 13% attested to frequent, the majority to infrequent (*selten*), and 7% to no corporal punishments. Other surveys from the 1940s and 1950s corroborate that beatings were widespread and slightly more common in the lower classes and the *Volksschule* than in the middle and upper classes and in elite school (*Gymnasium*). None of the surveys gauged the exact intensity and frequency of the violence, however (Levsen 2020, pp. 301, 304–305).

If we compare the imperial era with the Nazi period, it therefore seems that child beatings remained widespread, but the number of parents who relied on regular harsh acts of violence to uphold discipline seems to have declined. Over the same period, practices became even more gendered. Particularly in public settings such as the school and playground, the Nazi era saw more and harsher physical punishments of boys than the imperial era. Girls continued to experience violence, but in milder forms and more rarely than their brothers (Levsen 2020, pp. 293, 309). Corporal punishment also seems to have become increasingly masculinised between the 1890s and 1940s, with male teachers and fathers reporting more often than females that they used extreme means such as canes and whips, and with mothers increasingly expecting their male partners to carry out parenting tasks involving violence – though there still were plenty of mothers and female teachers engaging in such acts themselves (Levsen 2020, pp. 303, 325).

Overall, these findings correspond with Gebhardt's and Levsen's studies, which date 'the incremental retreat of corporal punishment from West German culture' only to the late 1960s and 1970s. Levsen rejects a link between Nazism and endemic violence against German children and instead points to a much longer tradition which was radically abandoned from the late 1960s onwards (Levsen 2020, pp. 288, 325, 350). Gebhardt similarly emphasises that parenting practices only really turned away from violent punishment in the 1970s. At this time, an increasing number of German parents began to be 'child-centred', to see things from the child's perspective, and to distance themselves from the parenting styles they had grown up with (Gebhardt 2009, pp. 126–128, 173, 215, 238). The turning point of the late 1960s

is also underlined by our samples A and B. In 1967 and 1968, the Bonn psychologists conducted a so-called PARI (Parental Attitude Research Instrument) test on their two samples of elderly and middle-aged subjects. They found a wide gap between the parenting styles of the different generations: the older the subjects, the more they tended to defend 'harsh discipline', with men doing so more often than women.[39] By the late 1960s, then, parenting styles had become a subject of open disagreement between the over-60s and the middle-aged population.

Conclusion

Several patterns emerge from a comparison of the four samples taken from the German working classes of the 1890s to the 1940s, reflecting both continuities and changes. Among the distinct continuities was widespread compulsory schooling until age 14 and a consistently late marriage age for both genders. The gendered nature of domestic chores did not necessarily change much and burdened girls, particularly older daughters, more than boys. In terms of parenting practices towards girls and boys, emotional austerity, restrained physical closeness, and a focus on strict child control were common from the imperial era until at least the 1940s. This general pattern of parenting did not deviate markedly from other countries, such as France or Britain (Levsen 2020). It also reached across class boundaries, although class differences produced significant variation in accounts of childhood: the poorer the upbringing, statistically speaking, the unhappier. Nevertheless, none of the interviewees described their childhood as 'traumatic'. The concept of 'trauma' seems to have been unavailable to these age cohorts.

Among the notable changes over time are the decline of child labour and child hunger and the slow alleviation of the widespread extreme time poverty of working-class parents. The reduction of household sizes within the span of only one or two generations had a big impact. The trend for smaller families increased parents' willingness and ability to invest in their children's futures, particularly their daughters'. The biggest complaints in the interviews with women who grew up in imperial Germany (sample A) relate to missing out on education, not being allowed to choose their occupation, having to perform domestic labour within the family, and being kept in the dark about sexuality. If we follow the age cohorts from the late 19th century into the 1960s, we see that over time more and more girls were allowed to continue to further education and choose their vocation from a widening spectrum of roles (Lehr 1969, pp. 136–146, 162–171). In addition, girls born from the 1940s onwards began to receive more information from their mothers about sexuality and their bodies. In the 1960s, mothering styles, as they were described by contemporary mothers themselves, had not broken completely with tradition but differed notably from the previous two generations. The

sample B mothers interviewed during the late 1960s reported spending more time with their children, allowing them more freedom, and negotiating many decisions with them (Hodenberg 2018).

In regard to German parents' use of physical violence and their methods of discipline, changes between the 1890s and 1940s are apparent but hard to quantify. A widespread rejection of corporal punishment for children only set in during the 1970s. Before that point, beatings were part of the everyday fabric of childhood. This was true for all classes, although the frequency and intensity of violence varied and was slightly more intense in the working classes than in the middle and upper classes. Over time, parental violence saw a slow and incremental decrease while becoming ever more gendered. The belief that boys had to be 'toughened up for life' and treated in a 'more hands-on' way and that it was the fathers' job to mete out physical punishment persisted well beyond the end of Nazism and war in 1945. During the Nazi era, which temporarily intensified the focus on bodily discipline, boys in particular suffered widespread maltreatment in public settings. Girls often, but not always, escaped corporal punishment. Thus, between the 1890s and the 1940s, girls' experiences of violence arguably changed more than boys'. For most but not all girls, corporal punishment became less frequent and less intense over time, and their parents increasingly began to invest in girls' life chances as average numbers of children plummeted.

Notes

1 The sociologists René König (in 1946) and Helmut Schelsky (in 1954) posited that fatherless families were a danger to the stability of the nation. In the 1950s, West German social policies defined only 'complete' families, i.e. those with fathers, as eligible for benefits (Moeller 1996).
2 Stambolis (2012) presents self-diagnosed traumatised women born between 1930 and 1945 whose fathers died in the war. For fatherless men, see Schulz, Radebold, and Reulecke (2004). Cf. Gebhardt (2009, pp. 11–12) and Seegers (2013, p. 392).
3 For an overview, see Baader, Esser, and Schröer (2014) and Winkler (2017, pp. 108–113). Recent special issues on childhood in the *Journal of Modern European History* 2021/2 and 2021/3 and in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 2020/2 widen the perspective to include class aspects in 1970s West Germany and childhood in post-socialist Eastern European societies.
4 The well-developed scholarship on the childhoods of Holocaust survivors is not suitable for comparison here because of the extreme levels of violence and the loss of parents experienced by most Jewish child survivors.
5 For example, Haarer (2019) and the feature film by Michael Haneke, *Das weiße Band*, 2009.
6 Lu Seegers interviewed 30 men and women born in 1935–1945 who grew up fatherless. She shows that the childhood narratives of West German and East German interviewees differed. Westerners claimed to have been traumatised by fatherlessness more often than Easterners, and Westerners defined themselves more often as belonging to a 'generation of war children'. These interviewees had

incorporated narratives from TV, the press, and bestsellers into their memories (Seegers 2013, pp. 140, 544–545).

7 The BOLSA archive is accessible online at https://bolsa.uni-halle.de/. For context, see von Hodenberg and Moeller (2020). I used SPSS for the statistical analysis.

8 The sample B transcripts survive in file A17 of the BOLSA archive, Historisches Datenzentrum Sachsen-Anhalt, Halle.

9 BOLSA (SPSS) dataset, in: Digitized Materials of the Bonn Longitudinal Study of Ageing, ed. Historisches Datenzentrum Sachsen-Anhalt, Halle 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/32306>. A cross-tabulation of v239_t1 socio-economic status of childhood home and number of siblings (n = 220) renders a significant result of chi-square 0.003.

10 Ibid. This and the following graph are based on BOLSA wave 1 data (1965/66), classified by age, number of siblings (n = 220), and number of own children (n = 169).

11 Fathers were given the biggest and best portions at dinner, especially in the poorest families (Rosenbaum 1992, pp. 152–169).

12 BOLSA dataset (as in note 9), n = 221: Cross-tabulation of tint of childhood memories v243_t1 with gender v8_t1; with age at the point of leaving school v242_t1; with socio-economic rating v36_t1; with socio-economic rating of parental household v239_t1. The correlation with occupation of mother v237_t1 and school education of mother v238_t1 is not significant. 't1' means the variable was coded during the first wave in 1965/66.

13 Ibid., v243_t1 tint of childhood memories cross-tabulated with v234_t1 dominant caregiver during childhood.

14 Ibid., v236_t1 schooling of father cross-tabulated with v1325_t3 criticism of parents' parenting style results in chi-square 0.003 (n = 171). Children of workers or farmers also rated their childhood experience less positively on average than children of clerks and lower civil servants (a mean of 6.0 for workers', 5.59 for farmers', 6.80 for white collared fathers' children on a scale of 1 to 9: v235_t1 with v243_t1).

15 From the 1880s onwards, the *Volksschule* was offered free of charge from age 6 to 14 and attended by nearly all children. Although regional differences persisted and between 50 and 70 children per class were the norm, the rate of illiteracy in the German Reich was extremely low: 1% in 1890. But one-fifth of children from rural families were in 1900 reported regularly helping with agricultural work, thus missing school often (Wehler 1995, pp. 1193–1196, 399–400).

16 BOLSA dataset, as in note 9.

17 Ibid., n = 218. Cross-tabulation realisation of intended career t1 with gender t1: chi-square 0.000, very significant: women less able to achieve their vocational aspirations. The relationship between achievement of intended career t1 and SES parental home/origin t1 is not significant (n = 218, chi-square 0.142): Gender was more important than class.

18 While the pattern of late marriage remained intact, the reasons for it changed (Rahlf 2015, pp. 37–39).

19 The names in the text box are the pseudonyms of the following test persons: Test person 2737, Marie Prager, 1st wave: 014 – Exploration II, Bonn 1966, in: BOLSA archive (as in note 7), <http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/22735>; test person 2725, Leni Mittenzwei, 3rd wave: 014 – Exploration II, Bonn 1967/68 in: Ibid., <http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/28076>; test person 2708, Aurelie Hölderlin, 3rd wave: 014 – Exploration, Bonn 1967/68, in: Ibid., <http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/19741>; test person 2639, Clara Schade, 3rd wave: 014 – Exploration II, Bonn 1967/68, in: Ibid., <http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/22275>; test person 2650, Marie Niewald, 3rd wave: 014 – Exploration II, Bonn 1967/68, in: Ibid.,<http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/27598>.

20 Test person 2623, Gertrude Glöckner, 3rd wave: 014 – Exploration II, Bonn 1967/68, in: Ibid., <http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/19287> and interview Gertrude Glöckner, BLSA_E_26231_A_01, Bonn 1965, in: Ibid., here: 01.21:00. Test person 2727 remembers that when her father died, she had to look after her mother and four younger children: 'I did all the work and others benefited'; Erna Schuppe, 3rd wave: 014 – Exploration II, Bonn 1967/68, in: Ibid., <http://dx.doi.org/10/25673/31044>.

21 Test person 2733: 'We children were the ones who brought the money home'; Irma Wernicke, 3rd wave: 014 – Exploration II, Bonn 1967/68, in: Ibid., <http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/25158>.

22 Test person 2650, Marie Niewald, 3rd wave: 014 – Exploration II, Bonn 1967/68, in: Ibid., <http://dx.doi.org/10/25673/27598>; test person 2739, born 1892; interview Klara Pommer, BLSA_E_27393_A_01, Bonn 1967/68, in: Ibid., here: 02:47:00.

23 See test person 2711; interview Cornelia Rahm, BLSA_E_27421_A_01, Bonn 1965/66, in: Ibid., here: 04:09:00. See also Konrad (2014).

24 Test person 2712 with 9 siblings, Jana Wehmar, 3rd wave: 014 – Exploration II, Bonn 1967/68, in: Ibid., <http://dx.doi.org/105673/24963>.

25 Test person 2718, born 1894, Erna Schumann, 3rd wave: 014 – Exploration II, Bonn 1967/68, in: Ibid., <http://dx.doi.org/105673/30956>.

26 All transcripts in BOLSA file A 17 (as in note 8), using pseudonyms throughout: Frau Zorn, p. 1; Frau Banse, pp. 1, 4; Frau Eichhorn, pp. 2, 4.

27 Ibid., Frau Stamm, p. 2; Frau Borchert, p. 5; Frau Baumann, p. 3. See Merker (1973, pp. 181, cf. 183–184, 232–233).

28 Sample A left about 3,000 hours of taped interviews which are poorly indexed and not transcribed, making quantification difficult.

29 See, for example: Marie Niewald's (test person 2650, born 1902) brother was 'awfully' beaten with a cane; Marie Niewald, 3rd wave: 014 – Exploration II, Bonn 1967/68, in: BOLSA archive (as in note 7), http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/27598. Klara Pommer (test person 2739, born 1892) recalled that physical punishment was directed at boys, but not girls; interview Klara Pommer, BLSA_E_27391_A_01, Bonn 1965/66, in: Ibid., here: 02:26:00. Cf. Raasch (2019): 'harsh' fathers beating boys were the norm in 19th-century noble German Catholic families.

30 Anna Mundt (test person 2736), born in 1893 into a working-class family, stressed that her father 'never' shouted at or hit his four children and linked this to the fact that he was Italian; Anna Mundt, 1st wave: 014-Exploration II, Bonn 1965/66, in: BOLSA archive (as in note 7), <http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/28191>.

31 Test person 2708, born 1894; interview Aurelie Hölderlin, BLSA_E_27081_A_01, Bonn 1965/66 in: Ibid., here: 01:10:00.

32 Test person 2748, Minna Sipp, 1st wave: 014 – Exploration II, Bonn 1965/66, in: Ibid., <http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/31443>; test person 2719, Laura Urban, 1st wave: 014 – Exploration II, Bonn 1965/66, in: Ibid., <http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/24980>. See Rosenbaum (1992, p. 201), who argues 'harsh' mothers who had not learned how to show affection were typical among the poor.

33 BOLSA file A 17 (as in note 8): Frau Hahn (her father owned a hotel), p. 5; Frau Ruhle, pp. 12–13; Frau Zabel, pp. 11, 16–17. Other references to discipline and harshness for example by Frau Banse, p. 1; Frau Kaiser, pp. 3–4.

34 Ibid., Frau Eichhorn, p. 5. Similar: Frau Örtel, p. 5; Frau Gutsche, p. 5; Herr Galen, pp. 5–6.

35 Ibid., Herr Ullrich, pp. 5–6.

36 Ibid., Herr Lochny, pp. 13–14; Herr Berger, p. 6; Herr Russ, p. 4; Herr Oblach, p. 6; Herr Ebelt, pp. 10–11; Herr Augustin, pp. 3, 5; Herr Tetzlaff, pp. 16–17; Herr Seifert, p. 1; Herr Örtel, p. 5.

37 Ibid., Herr Anschütz, p. 13; Herr Ullrich, p. 5; Herr Rottorf, p. 3.
38 Rühle (1925, pp. 36, 57, 67). See also Baader (2014b, p. 177). Gebhardt (2009) states that during the imperial and Weimar eras, 'there were indeed times where beatings came crushing down' (p. 63).
39 Of the 115 PARI questions, ten gauged attitudes towards 'strict discipline' and breaking the child's will without explicitly mentioning corporal punishment. Relating to those questions, there was consistently a significant difference between the older and the middle-aged groups and between men and women (Merker 1973, pp. 180–183, on PARI scales 4 and 8 see pp. 313–318, appendix p. 11).

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11

NARRATING CHILDHOOD

Difficult Memories in Trans Autobiography

Barbara Lotz

Introduction

A major role in transporting issues of gender incongruity to the level of an international public sphere has been played by autobiographical first-hand accounts, which have grown into a huge literary corpus worldwide. The first biography on a person who had undergone sex reassignment therapy and surgery was written by a German journalist in 1932 on the Danish painter Einar Wegener, who called herself later Lili Elbe, the narrative claiming authenticity by using diary material and letters.[1] Another prominent landmark became the autobiography of the American GI George (later Christine) Jorgenson in 1967, who was celebrated as a star by the media after she returned from her sex change operation at Kopenhagen to the US. The autobiography *Conundrum*, published in 1974 by former travel journalist Jan Morris, gives an account of her ten-year transition from man to woman, which created enormous interest and curiosity around the world. The 1990s saw a surge of trans autobiographical publications in book format, the onset of the internet propelling the emergence of an international literary forum for a public debate on trans peoples' rights. As the genre of memoir itself is somewhat receding in favour of trans novels, poetry, blogs, social media platforms or performances, Susan Stryker in 2016 observes a 'new hypervisibility about transness'[2] in TV and mass media. The realm of self-publishing on internet platforms has been attracting younger writers with low-cost alternatives,[3] as authors of the community have become media-fluid, engaging in different formats simultaneously.[4] Professional documentary films broadcasted on TV allow trans people to narrate their biography and the complex aspects of their transition aiming at a wider public to create awareness and empathy.[5] From a

radical feminist perspective, this new visibility has been downplayed as 'artificial hype', where especially girls not comfortable in their bodies were allegedly lured into hasty decisions of transitioning.[6] Influenced by black feminist thought, black trans people, trans persons of colour, and trans people of the Global South have started to react against the alleged hegemonic whiteness of trans memoir, pointing to the intersectionality of class, caste, race, religion and restrictive state regimes in trans persons' struggles. In India, influential autobiographies appeared from the first decade of the millennium onwards dealing with the specific chances and challenges that the traditional *hijra* network offers for transident persons, at the same time connecting to the global discourse on gender diversity.

For this chapter, six autobiographies by authors who transitioned from male to female were selected, published between 2007 and 2019 in India and Germany.[7] Coming from a literary studies background, my interest in Indian trans memoirs originated in a project on (mainly Hindi) autobiographical writing of Dalits, tribals and other marginalised groups in India, when I realised an increasing number of autobiographical titles being published by Indian trans authors. These books had been translated into English but had a life of their own in their respective original languages. As the narrativisation of childhood memories takes up a prominent part in these texts, I sought to select three German autobiographical texts by German trans authors with the aim to juxtapose similar or divergent modes of constructing childhood in retrospective in a comparative study for this volume.

The period of publication was narrowed down to the first two decades of the millennium in view of possible trends to modify and overcome standardised modes of narration typical for the 1990s. Especially in view of the narration of childhood, my interest lay in tracing more encompassing views of the self, as opposed to A-to-B narratives of transition. Guided by this aspect, a further interest arose to reflect a generational difference from the point of age at narrating. What stands out at first sight with the Indian texts is the comparatively young age group in the field of memoir, the authors being in their mid-20s to mid-30s when writing. Naturally their distance to (painful) childhood memories then was quite close, as was the experience of the sex reassignment operation (at least with two of them), and with it the joy of having left the unwanted gender identity behind. This proximity factor might explain the dominant narrative attitude from anxiousness to relief and with it a tendency of disowning one's childhood as a string of misunderstandings. The young age and still vital relation to one's birth family also implies the problem of continuing dependence on supportive family structures. Against this background, I selected an elder generation for the German authors, with an age of early 50s to late 60s when writing, as these authors obviously had a larger distance to their childhood years and look back on a longer life span as trans persons, two of them having lived as family fathers and all three

mastering successful careers. Although here, too, the narrative of metamorphosis dominates, I hoped to locate a possibly more accommodating perspective towards the former abandoned childhood self, expressed by the quest to retrieve the 'lost child'.

Regarding the publishing format, one aspect for the selection of the texts was their appearance as well edited books, accessible to and discussed by a general readership, against the mass of (partly shoddily edited) e-contributions to the trans discourse largely confined to the community. The six books discussed here comply with a characteristic twin function of trans autobiographical narrative as guide books, where the narrator doubles in his role as the narrative self and the observing commentator. While in some of the selected titles, writing one's life story is intricately interwoven with explicit messages and public appeals by the authors, others come equipped with sophisticated para-texts in the form of introductions, afterwords by translators or informed surveys by renowned trans scholars. In this way, these books are decidedly composed as political manifestos for trans visibility and recognition of the whole community, transcending the realm of an introverted, individuated navel-gazing by far.

All six titles appeared in renowned publishing houses, ensuring a certain sober authority as opposed to the sensationalist image the genre generally carries.[8] The history of text production, however, differs considerably in each case. The German texts appear as having been written, researched, and structured to a large extent by the authors themselves, at the most being organised on the advice of editors. In contrast, it is important to notice the multi-layered process of text production that stands behind the three Indian titles. All of them had been first composed (or noted down from oral interviews) in Tamil or Marathi. Already during this initial publishing process in regional languages, but certainly along the translation process for large English publishing houses, the texts underwent a partly significant restructuring of plot and content, where, for example, the emphasis on childhood became a 'must' in the view of interviewing journalists, translators, and publishers, while the narrators themselves resisted the reawakening of traumatic and painful memories, as we know from personal statements in media interviews or para texts.[9]

The books discussed here are all written by authors who have transitioned from a male to a female gender identity, and this selection might reflect the (hitherto) strong dominance of male-to-female autobiography against the practically invisible genre of female-to-male writing. Due to the prominence of this section in trans life writing, the main thrust of criticism, especially in feminist discourse from the late '70s onwards, was directed to male-to-female trans autobiographies with their alleged reassertion of an intrinsic truth of the sexes and the uncritical reproduction of binary gender constructions (Hausman 1995; Raymond 1979). In a sarcastic analysis of prominent trans

autobiographies such as *Lili Elbe* or *Conundrum*, Sandy Stone (2006: 221) demonstrated the complicity of these 'frogs into princesses' accounts, with Western white male definitions of performing gender roles, and the 'obsession' of the trans subject to pass into the 'normal' population as soon as possible.

The actual rising number of persons transitioning from female to male notwithstanding, there seems a lack of autobiographical writing about this life experience. A. Runte states already in 1996:

> The most astonishing finding of the material review remains the fact that woman-to-male transsexuals, who have increasingly appeared since the 1950s, have written hardly any autobiographies so far. [. . .] Do female transsexuals, who are generally considered to be better adapted, not need to write?
>
> *(Runte 1996: 30)*

She quotes research results in the 1970s where trans men, as compared to their 'problematic' counterparts, were frequently characterised as 'psychologically balanced, less socially isolated, more able to integrate professionally', etc. Similarly in 2014, Julia Serano sees the reason for the larger public visibility of trans women in their mostly problematic existences singled out by society, where renouncing masculinity and opting for the inferior sex invites ridicule and scorn, while in contrast, persons who chose masculinity over femininity are allowed to blend easier into a male-centred gender hierarchy. Still in 2020, trans man and activist Jamison Green describes the trans men community as a decidedly apolitical subculture, preferably keeping their transition a secret.

The way trans authors seek to see themselves represented has changed over the decades and with it the terminology in use. The overarching term 'transgender', introduced already in 1978, referred initially to individuals whose identities were considered to fall somewhere between 'transvestite', a term coined in 1910 by Magnus Hirschfeld, and 'transsexual', a term popularised in the 1950s by Harry Benjamin. But only after appearing in the influential pamphlet *Transgender Liberation*, by Leslie Feinberg, in 1992, 'transgender' became a 'pangender' umbrella term for an imagined community encompassing transsexuals of all shades with the appeal to engage in a common struggle for justice.[10] The word 'trans' as a stand-alone term did not come into formal usage until the late 1990s.[11]

In the context of the Indian autobiographies, the term *hijra* (or *kinnar*) is used to denote members of a community of trans persons who are assigned male at birth but dress and act like women and are very visible in public.[12] In South India the term *ara(a)vani* was used as a synonym, replaced by the respectful denotation *t(h)irunangai* (man-woman), which was withdrawn

again in 2019 by the present Tamil state government in favour of *moondram paalinathavar* ('third gender').[13] Derogatory terms like *chakka* ('sixer', gay, trans) are used in Hindi, as are *ali* (eunuch) and *number nine* (effeminate, incomplete man) in Tamil. In view of the regional differences and especially the exclusion of transmen in many of these denotations, the term 'transgender' is widely used in national or international contexts.

Narrative Strategies, Predictable Plot, Difficult Memory

The reconstruction of childhood seems to be the inevitable point of departure in the genre of autobiography in general, and even more prominently in trans autobiography, where frequently used narrative devices such as tropes of a journey (path, voyage, track, crossroads, passage, metamorphosis) imagine life as a linear development starting with childhood. In Bourdieu's critique of the term 'life history', the presupposition of 'life as a history and intentional project' is aptly questioned: 'Life is inseparably the sum of the events of an individual existence seen as a history and the narrative of that history. [. . .] A progression [. . .] a unidirectional and linear move, consisting of a beginning ("entering into life"), various stages and an end, understood both as a termination and a goal'. Behind this theory, he argues, lies the presupposition, 'that life is a whole, a coherent and finalized whole, which can and must be seen as the unitary expression of a subjective and objective "intention" of a project' (Bourdieu 1986: 210). If these observations were made in view of life writing in general, they hold a special significance in trans autobiographical writing, where the apparent predictability of plot development and narrative strategy has remained a matter of steady concern. Annette Runte (1996), in her profound analysis of more than 40 trans autobiographical texts, carved out a 'minimal plot' she found common to most of them and described the prominent narrative strategy as being 'structured towards a purpose' (*finalstrukturiert*), where in retrospective every moment of childhood is interpreted as an indicator for a later developing transsexuality. In a path breaking publication on transgender narratives, Jay Prosser (1998) considered the highly formalised narrative of transsexual autobiographies an 'archetypal story' with a narrative organisation of consecutive stages, and the formalisation of transsexuality as a plot: suffering, epiphany, transformation, and reassignment. In what Prosser termed 'body narratives', transition becomes the definite property of the transgender narrative that drives narration and coheres its form.

Tracking down first or early moments of awareness, of 'being different', of feeling like a strange misfit and not understanding why is invariably of central concern for the first-person narrator in trans life writing, even if the narrative is not organised chronologically. The attempt to prove of 'having always known' about one's gender incongruity is the driving force to prove, in the words of the pioneer trans scholar Benjamin, 'an inborn or early

acquired transsexual trend of "latent" character'.[14] As psychotherapy forms a tangible reality in the lives of trans persons on their way to medical treatment and legal acceptance, unravelling childhood traumas by accessing trigger moments becomes a well-rehearsed and painful practice, often reflected in the use of an informed psychological jargon in trans narratives. Narratives can assume the dynamics of a rite-de-passage, where the progression from one stage of life into another (birth, puberty, adulthood, etc.) is used as a pattern to design life phases such as the phase of separation of the former gender, the phase of transition and lastly the phase of incorporation and integration into the desired, newly acquired gender identity.

To pass as 'trans enough' in order to access clinical treatment, however, creates a lot of pressure to perform in compliance with authorised narratives on being trans, naturally questioning the credibility and authenticity of such autobiographical accounts.[15] Sandy Stone even spoke of 'lies' when she pointed out how, in the absence of a medical test for the gender dysphoria syndrome, Benjamin's *The Transsexual Phenomenon* of 1966 became the standard reference book for the intake interview at clinics.

> It took researchers a long time to realize, that the reason the candidate's behavioural profile matched Benjamin's so well was that the candidates, too, had read Benjamin's book [. . .] part of this process is known as constructing a plausible history – learning to lie effectively about one's past.
>
> *(Stone 2006: 228–230)*

The problem of a seemingly preformatted and possibly manipulated plot, setting out with memories of early childhood, and steadily navigating to the narrative climax of a sex reassignment surgery (SRS) gets further aggravated by the difficult process of accessing childhood memories from an adult perspective. If the complex process of remembering and forgetting, guided by unreliable and blurred memories and influenced by stock narratives of family members, remains a critical issue in autobiography in general,[16] it is augmented in trans autobiography where we naturally have to follow the authors' perspective of 'I always knew I was a girl/boy'. How sure can we be of the discerning powers of the memory of the adult going back into his or her life history to discover and name the first moment of revelation: I am different, I am a girl/boy, if one is exactly guided by this intention, to trace the initial moment of awareness? As Prosser observes:

> Isn't it, that an episode does not properly acquire its full significance as origin story for the transsexual self until the moment of recounting, until it is assigned the place in writing? That the memory becomes the scene that launches the transsexual plot?
>
> *(Prosser 1998: 118)*

As neurological research has shown, memories are no static and monolithic entities but rely on a complex process of storing, encoding, and retrieving, where every remembering leads to a reconstruction of the brain. The memory image will be influenced and changed by the momentary mental state in which it was invoked, stored, or retrieved (Köhler 2001: 65). This way, remembering oneself is always shaped or even distorted and corrupted by the sum of experiences that have accumulated between the past remembered and the later time of remembering.

Approaching the childhood self in trans narratives is further complicated by the unique narrative constellation of remembering while simultaneously seeking to forget and discard one's former gender identity. The panic and bodily discomfort trans persons experience by the use of wrong pronouns or when being called by their former name (deadnaming) reflects the despair which the wrongly assigned gender triggered since childhood. Hausman discussed the problem of transsexual narrative that lies in documenting change, on the one hand, 'to say how I became a woman – and the transsexual's claim to already truly be a woman' and isolated it as 'the central contradiction in trans autobiographies: Of always-already being and becoming'. Prosser carried Hausman's statement further in considering this conflict as an intrinsic quality of trans narrative:

> This play between transformation and the continuity of the self, is not a disruptive paradox, but a founding dynamic. The repeated positioning of a 'true gender' ab initio, a recasting of the past to produce the present, propels the story of transsexual change.
>
> *(Prosser 1998: 119)*

Stone, too, addressed the problem of tracing the former self and at the same evading and denying any relationship to it in trans autobiography since 'the highest purpose of the transsexual is to erase him/herself' (Stone 2006: 230). The motif of the 'second birth' experienced and described in the context of gender reassignment processes (and especially after sex reassignment surgery) is as prominent as that of the 'deletion' of the former gender, which is described as being deliberately 'forgotten' or even 'killed' on the operation table. Shaping and establishing the new self resembles an act of creation, releasing a hitherto chained, imprisoned, and long suppressed person into light and life, essentialised by the process of selecting a new name and having it recognised and registered in all private or official reaches of life, sometimes to the extent of changing all gender relevant details in one's CV or former documents. The adoption of a new proper name is the most radical step to signal and mark the beginning of a completely new identity in society. This way, choosing a new name means a conscious discarding of what Bourdieu

pointed out as the most integrative signifier for the narrating self in a 'general' life history:

> The social world, which tends to identify normality with identity understood as the constancy of oneself, of a responsible being that is predictable or at least intelligible, in the way of a well constructed history [. . .] has available all sorts of institutions of integration and unification of the self. The most evident of these institutions is of course the proper name, which as 'rigid designator', to use Kripke's expression, 'designates the same object in every possible world'.
> *(Bourdieu 1986: 212)*

Naturally also, Lejeune's postulate of the autobiographical pact between author and reader, which is sealed by the author signing with his name, ensuring the unity of narrator and narrated self, loses its impact somewhat. What happens to the former childhood self in trans autobiography? Can we think of a lost, discarded childhood?

Authors and Texts

Authors and book contents shall be briefly presented here in the order of their publication. The period of childhood taken into account for this study starts with earliest memories up to the age of school years, puberty, and leaving the parental home.

Living Smile Vidya, 2007, I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey

Living Smile Vidya (Smiley) was born 1982 into a low-income Dalit family in village Puttur close to Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu. She was assigned male and grew up as Saravanan, the only boy between two elder sisters and a younger one. Her childhood memories take up 4 of 15 chapters in the text and narrate events from early childhood, violent conflicts with her father, the pressure of performing at school, and early college years during which she got in touch with the *tirunangai* community and NGOs. After escaping from home she lived with different *tirunangai/hijra* communities who arranged her SRS (*nirvana*). She eventually left the community and lives as a writer, theatre performer, and international activist for trans people and Dalits in India.[17] She published her autobiography in 2007 (translated from Tamil) at the age of 25. She speaks of herself as *tirunangai* in the text and uses the term transgender in a general context.

Revathi A, 2010, The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story

Revathi was born in a village near Namakkal in Tamil Nadu. Assigned male, she grew up as the youngest son named Doraiswamy, with three elder

brothers and one elder sister in a rural family of peasants and truck drivers.[18] Childhood memories take up around 4 chapters out of 29 overall, dealing with problematic early years and escape from home to follow her *hijra*-guru to Delhi. After turbulent years within *aravani/hijra* communities in Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, she had surgery (*nirvana*) at around 16 years and kept on shuttling between her birth family and the *hijra* community. Revathi is based in Bengaluru and one of the most prominent supporters for sexual minorities in India. Her work served as a big incentive for other *hijra* writers. She published her autobiography in 2010 in her late 30s. In the text she refers to herself as *hijra* and *aravani*.

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, 2015, Me Hijra, Me Laxmi

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi was born into a high-caste Brahman family 1979 in Thane, Maharashtra. She was assigned male and grew up with an elder sister and a younger brother, being called by the male nickname Raju. Childhood and teenage memories extend over 4 chapters out of 21, from childhood and school years up to her entry into the Mumbai *hijra* community. She lives at home as Raju and as Laxmi in her own *hijra* family. Laxmi set up her own self-help organisation *Astitva* in 2007. She is a flamboyant transgender activist[19] and a prominent guest at TV shows; she even features in a German documentary film.[20] She is married and has adopted two children. She published her autobiography in 2015 at the age of 36 and refers to herself as *hijra*; the term 'transgender' is used in international contexts.

Jean Lessenich, 2015, Die transzendierte Frau: Eine Autobiografie[21]

Jean Lessenich was born in 1941 in Remagen, during World War II in Germany. She was assigned male and grew up in a small village in a Catholic craftsman's household, as a long-awaited single child. In a complex narrative, childhood memories appear scattered over 27 chapters; 2 chapters dealing predominantly with growing up in a post-war German village, 'where one is a faschist or fundamental catholic, which makes in fact no big difference'. Jean worked in elite media design companies in Frankfurt and Düsseldorf. Married in her early 20s, the marriage broke up after Jean's entering into a queer-lesbian partnership. She underwent SRS at Casablanca (Dr Burou) in 1973, aged 32. From 1986 she lived outwardly as man again to enable her Japanese wife's stay in Germany. Jean spent her last years living as a lesbian woman; she died in 2017. Her autobiography was published at the age of 70 in 2012, around 40 years after her SRS.

Livia Prüll, 2016, **Trans* im Glück, Geschlechtsangleichung als Chance: Autobiographie, Medizingeschichte, Medizinethik**[22]

Livia Prüll was born in 1961 into an academic household in Germany. Assigned male, she grew up with a brother and a sister. As she declares her book 'as a kind of guide-book that works with one's own biography as material', the autobiographical narrative is intertwined with general aspects of transitioning and trans theory. On only nine pages different phases of childhood are narrated, the strong influence of her mother, mobbing at school, and growing up as a young adult, professional, and married life up to the moment of 'epiphany' at 49 years. Livia started her academic career as an outwardly successful married man with two children. She underwent SRS in 2014 at the age of 53. Presently she is Professor for History, Theory, and Ethics of Medicine at the University of Mainz and appears for talks and interviews in the media. Her autobiography appeared in 2016, at the age of 55. She refers to herself as trans*ident.

Ulrika Schöllner, 2019, **Transfrau? Ja, genau! Auf dem Weg zu meiner Identität**[23]

Ulrika Schöllner was born in 1959 in the former GDR into an urban, academic household, 'conservative-bourgeois, at the same time strictly communist'. Assigned male, she grew up as Uwe. Her book opens with a single chapter covering around 50 years, starting with childhood and youth, then over to marriage, work-life, and the decision to start her transition to female in 2016. The mother encourages her son to engage in all kinds of household chores; the father, although 'not a tyrant', is excessively focused on his career as a university lecturer. Disastrous experiences at school dominate a lonely childhood in a time 'where support groups or other options were unknown, at least to me'. Ulrika left the GDR in 1987 to live in the FRG as IT specialist and after one year brought wife and eldest son to FRG, too. Ulrika underwent SRS in 2016, at the Olmec Clinic New Delhi, aged 55. She published her autobiography in 2019 at the age of 60. She refers to herself as trans woman and lives in a village in Bavaria.

Textual Analysis: Differences and Commonalities

Even a first cursory reading of the narrated childhood memories reveals fundamentally different historical, geopolitical, and social settings conditioning the individual childhood of each narrator. The societal background of class, caste, and religion appears vital in governing the access to education, job prospects, medical assistance, and the possibility to lead a self-determined and respected life. In the following textual analysis, we will follow up first the

transnational *differences* in familial backgrounds and relation to parents and siblings. Contrasting the German and Indian narratives, the greatest difference here seems the option in India to join a parallel family setting within the *hijra* community after the often seemingly inevitable exclusion from the birth family, which we find prominently discussed in the Indian autobiographies, interlinked with issues of lower-casteness and poverty. How are the relations with a newly assigned *hijra* mother or sister described? How is one's agency experienced, oscillating between euphoric belonging and claustrophobic confinement? Can we see the alleged embeddedness of the Indian trans experience in a 'traditional' scenario in comparison with the highly individuated life of German trans people? Secondly, different ways to cope with gender incongruity will be compared, reflecting on the respective norms of accepted behaviour, resulting in either male overcompensation or enacting the female self in dance. A third apparent difference concerns the societal awareness of trans issues and access to medical and psychological aid, where our texts reveal not so much a difference between Western countries and the Global South, but more evidently the gap between a post-war generation growing up during the 1950s/1960s and another one growing up in the decades before 2000 with increasing access to global networks.

Against these three exemplary moments of differences, we then focus on amazingly *conform* and trans-culturally recurring emotional motifs that emerge after a closer reading. The first comparative set of authors' statements on their childhood will present the repeatedly stated intrinsic knowledge of the childhood self of 'being a mismatch', which seems too strong a common denominator to be discarded as simply a compliance with expected patterns of narration. Secondly, traumatising experiences at school and memories of the disturbed relations to boys and girls alike when approaching puberty will be isolated in the texts. A third and crucial aspect concerns comparative statements about the experiencing of a 'second birth' and the distorted relation to one's former childhood self, which is perhaps the most striking commonality of the autobiographies in question.

Birth Family and Life in 'Second Family'

In the German texts, childhood memories of the 1940s and 1950s appear embedded in largely intact nuclear family scenarios typical for this era. What is striking is the close relation to a very protective and rather dominant mother in all narrations. In Jean's case, the mother had hoped for a girl, and although she was not dressing her son in girls' clothes, she kept calling him by the name of Rosemarie; also, Livia and Ulrika narrate that their mothers had their sons looking like girls with long locks in childhood. Although supportive, mothers are unable to address the 'dilemma' their child is facing. Fathers are characterised by being busy and often absent, and apparently glossing

over their boys' behaviour, at most they show a slight suspicion that they might turn out gay. Acts of physical violence in the family are no topic, but we rather read of subtle or rigid attempts to bring the child back on the right track (trim haircuts, boys' clothes, sports training, etc.). In Ulrika's account, we read of a 'knowing' and understanding grandmother, in Jean's of a supportive elder aunt, which is a common feature in trans narratives. The role of siblings is of no vital importance in these childhood narrations. As all three were still struggling to define and name their problematic gender identity as children and even young adults, there was no outing or open conflict with parents; further, leaving the parental home is considered common for young adults in Germany at some stage.

In the Indian texts, sharp differences in caste and class decide over personal choices in trans life. Vidya and Revathi hail from lower social strata of society, exposed to the strict social protocol in rural villages, whereas Laxmi stems from a reputed Brahminical, urban, and economically sound family. All however had access to higher education; Vidya studied up to MA, Revathi left school in 10th grade because of bullying, Laxmi completed her postgraduation. During their teens, they all got in touch with *hijra* circles and started earning with dance performances (Laxmi), begging (Vidya), or prostitution (Revathi). The intersection of being trans with poverty and class is very prominent in the narrations of Vidya and Revathi, where the problem of payable, secure housing seems an unsurpassable hurdle even today. One reason for Laxmi's parents to keep her in the family house was that the upper-caste background should not be tainted by her begging and living in the streets.

Indian childhood narratives reflect the tight framework of joint families; the tender relationship to the mother appears in all cases to be overshadowed by the dominant behaviour of fathers, brothers, and cousins. In all three accounts, a good education for the sons is of utmost importance for the parents and goes along with high hopes for the professional future of the male heirs of the family 'who should do better in life', resulting in desperate thrashing when they fail to live up to the expectations, but even Laxmi dreaded to betray her parents' expectations: 'I was Laxminarayan, the eldest son of the family, who went to College and had a job. They looked at me with hope' (33). Eventually for all three, it was indeed their education that proved to be the basis to leave the *hijra* community and seek alternate job possibilities. All three were exposed to physical violence in their birth family, being exploited and raped by a cousin (Laxmi) or brutally punished by their father (Vidya) or brothers (Revathi), to teach the 'sissy-boy' a lesson, culminating in fleeing or being evicted from the family.

In all Indian narrations, (elder) sisters prove to be the closest and most protective persons in family life, not only in childhood where they look with great affection after their brothers but also later in life, when they offer them

a safe place in their own homes during occasional visits to the village (Revathi and Vidya). On one such a visit, Revathi's sister is the only one to addresses her openly as female and helps her dressing up for an all-women village temple ceremony; again, Vidya's elder sister is the only one who looks for her brother after his disappearance and finds out that he lives as a woman in a *tirunangai* community; she tries to mediate with their father several times but in vain. Also Laxmi's elder married sister stands firmly by her, in spite of having to fear the taunts of her in-laws. Interestingly, the intimate relation to one's sisters extends well into the *hijra*-clan family, where the newly assigned 'sisters' of Revathi and Vidya become their closest companions while earning through train and shop begging, or being sent together to undergo the emasculation surgery, and lastly forming a new peer group against the elders of the community.

After the initial relief of being accepted in a new family,[24] all three develop a significant disenchantment towards the control mechanisms of the community over the years; Vidya was perhaps the most sceptical towards the encrusted hierarchies of the *hijra* clan set-up. But even Laxmi distances herself increasingly from the oppressive ghetto-mentality, eventually 'dumping Lataguru [her clan-mother], the bitch, money minded to the core' (155).

As a result, all three experienced painful shuttling between their birth families and (unstable) parallel families across India in search for acceptance. In two cases, birth parents and *guru-ammas* virtually get into custody fights over their wards, Vidya's father pleading with the *guru amma* to release his son (79) and Lataguru demanding of Laxmi's family to allow Laxmi move in with her (72). Laxmi, in the end, runs her own *hijra-khana* and lives in two families: 'There's a family I'm related to by blood, and then there are my *chelas* who are my other family. I need both families and cannot envisage a life without either [. . .] I live with both these families simultaneously' (167).

Awareness and Access to Treatment and Surgery

The German authors had to cope alone with the confusion of their felt gender incongruity as children and it took them long years well into adulthood to realise their identity. Jean left her family and village after marriage and moved to the progressive Frankfurt of the 1960s where she entered cross-dressing, lesbian, and gay circles; the young couple got separated. Livia and Ulrika lived their trans identity as married family fathers in secret with cross-dressing during business trips and at trans clubs up to their 50s. In both cases, accessing precise information in the form of scientific publications on transsexuals led to the moment of epiphany and the clarity of mind to start the process of transition. For both, coming out was a well-planned act of self-assertion, earning mostly respect from colleagues and friends; both

marriages, however, broke up in the process and maintaining a good relation-ship with their children proved the biggest challenge. All three underwent SRS under state-of-the-art medical conditions and could economically afford the costs of transition with public health insurance and/or private invest-ments; Jean's company director even granted her a credit at a time where support through health assurance was unheard of.

In the Indian context, the deviant behaviour of the children was obviously recognised by adults, teachers, or members of the gay/trans community long before they themselves knew what exactly was 'wrong' with them. Laxmi thus was introduced as a teenager to a prominent gay leader and the ho-mosexual scene that met in public parks, while Vidya and Revathi as young teenagers started mingling with groups of *tozhis*, boys who secretly enacted their femininity by dressing up, dancing, and singing. All three initially took up the path laid out for 'people like them' and joined *hijra/tirunangai* com-munities in their teens, against the advice of friends from the community to live out their gender identity secretly and work in well paid jobs; however, the possibility to undergo an emasculation operation, which was obsessively pursued by Vidya and Revathi, was in their case only possible within the *hijra* framework. Laxmi did not opt for this step.

Ways to Cope – Hyper-Virile Behaviour or Enacting Femininity

In the German texts, the urge to compensate a seemingly deviant behaviour by an overtly manly attitude plays a significant role in childhood and youth.

Ulrika writes, 'I did things that were completely outlandish to me just to belong. I never really felt as a boy, as a pubescent teenager with everything that goes with it' (18). She further says,

> In retrospect, I think it was the will to be 150 percent man, and to erase all doubts about the past. The doubts about the man in me never completely disappeared. [. . .] But I tried to conceal that with even more work and success. As a result, I changed considerably. I became more assertive and assumed a certain arrogance with success.
>
> *(22)*

Livia remembers acting up to perform as a real boy. The eight-year-old boy likes to draw supermen with strong muscles and dreams of being one of them. The ten-year-old participates in wrestling matches during school recess, able to inspire awe with agility. The adolescent develops an obsession in assembling toy war planes and tanks, collecting militaria and re-enacting battle formations. The 18-year-old is voluntary reporting to the *Bundeswehr* (army) but is rejected (30).

Jean, too, directly addresses the urge to stylise herself as a male hero:

> To protect myself, I acquired a kind of pseudo-masculinity for dealing with my peers, which I moulded according to the models of the adventure stories I read. I was afraid that my playmates might discover that I was a girl. I filled this role of pseudo-masculinity so well that I began to believe in it myself. But I always had the feeling that my friends could not really believe in my bold masculinity, and neither could my father. This became clear to me when they excluded me, just as boys exclude girls when it comes to the really 'manly' things.
>
> *(166)*

In the Indian texts, a remarkable part in all three childhood narrations goes back to happy memories about performances enacting a female role, socially accepted during religious dramas and temple ceremonies or during Bollywood dance performances at school fests. The admiration the children get for their talent compensates for the humiliations suffered otherwise; on the other hand, the feminine behaviour of the child is further exposed, rendering it even more vulnerable to suspicion and mockery.

For Revathi, annually performing in the religious Mariamman festival allowed ritual cross-dressing:

> I wore a blouse stuffed with cloth balls. With the skirt, anklets, long false braid decorated with paper flowers and painted lips, I knew I looked beautiful. I looked at myself in the mirror, astonished at what I had become. [. . .] In my *kurathi's* garb, I could express all those female feelings I usually had to suppress.
>
> *(11)*

Vidya remembers how the siblings loved to rush to the TV-equipped house of their grandmother, who gets slightly worried when she discovers the tendency of her cinema-crazy grandson to masquerade as popular film heroines. As a result, the child performs secretly:

> The radio was playing the popular film song and I was dancing to the tune, wearing Manju's skirt. At six or seven, I did not fully understand the meaning of the words, but I enjoyed their lilt and tenderness. I usually locked myself inside once all of them had gone out, put on girl's clothes and sang and danced. I loved it [. . .] I asked Appa to buy me a midi and a gown [. . .] I wasn't prepared for the terrible beating that followed. Deciding it was unsafe to wear a skirt and dance, I enjoyed other pleasures in private.
>
> *(18–23)*

Every now and then onlookers would tease me during rehearsals when my femininity came out without my knowledge. Once, I had lost myself before the mirror in admiration after the make-up artist had put lipstick on me. The mirror may reflect your outer appearance to you and other like you, but in the case of tirunangais it portrays the innermost feelings and turbulence, their essential femininity, displaying all.

(53)

For Laxmi, being selected for and excelling in Bollywood dance performances during school festivities laid the foundation for a life-long career in dancing:

I love dancing. As a result, I was always selected by my teachers to perform on stage. [. . .] I thus came to regard the stage as an oasis in the desert of ill health. [. . .] I was teased. People began calling me homo, they couldn't see the cathartic and therapeutic effect that my art had on me.

(4)

In a way, it was my dancing, complete with my feminine moves of the waist, that contributed to my being thought of as effeminate. But I didn't care. [. . .] Dancing transported me to another world where I could be my true self.

(23)

[B]ut then I was a man, and dancing feminized my body.

(27)

Early Bodily Awareness

Against these fundamentally different aspects of trans childhood in Indian and German narratives, amazingly conform features of early bodily awareness, often in combination with the quintessential 'mirror scenes'[25] can be isolated. In spite of being loved and taken care of, for all of them childhood is marked as a phase of extremely difficult memories.

Ulrika says: 'I was born in a male body, but from the beginning had very feminine and soft features. According to the stories, and there are also photos, I was a golden-haired angel (*Rauschgoldengel*) who was always mistaken for a girl'. As a child, 'I thought I was all kinds of things, but the thought that I was possibly in a boy's body as a girl [. . .] that was as far away as the moon from the earth at the time'. Early notions of being 'in the wrong body' are interpreted from an adult perspective:

When I looked in the mirror I saw a penis, but it was unimportant to me. My ratio of thighs, hips and waist had rather feminine shapes, but I

became aware of this only later. The result of such a scrutiny in the mirror was frustrating in any case. I felt wrong without knowing what was actually wrong. [. . .] Secretly trying on my mother's clothes felt somehow good, on the other hand also very strange. Moreover, I had to be careful not to get caught doing it.

Livia's narrates how when being about five years old, her mother wants her son to play with a little girl: 'Something was strange. It didn't fit, or rather, I didn't fit. Was it because my mother couldn't part with my pretty curls and those around me thought I was a girl?' A key memory concerns a situation while playing war with toy soldiers. The child thinks up a punishment for the 'prisoners' and imagines turning them into women. With this thought, it develops 'warm, positive feelings that unstoppably rise in waves from the belly to the top'. From the adult perspective the comment is added, 'I don't continue to play, I sit on the floor for several hours doing suppression work [*leiste Verdrängungsarbeit*]. I feel dirty, bad. I'm embarrassed because I'm a boy. I'm scary to myself' (25).

Jean's mother would have preferred a daughter, but accepted the son. 'I suppose, that when she later caught me in her clothes – besides the shock that I might be a pervert – she also felt guilty' (37). The child secretly hopes to be 'discovered' by the mother in order to 'really' live together as mother and daughter (38). The unprepared sight of the father's penis triggers horror and the hope that one's own small 'Schnibbes' may not continue to grow. Early memory recalls her longing to be a girl:

I am six years old and I see Monika. Monika has blond hair and wears a little red dress. She is a pretty girl, about four or five years old. This encounter is unforgettable to me to this day. Until then, I didn't really know whether I was a boy or a girl. I just was. But if someone had asked me what I was or what I would like to be, I'm pretty sure I would have said I would like to be like Monika. In fact, I would like to *be* Monika. But I wasn't allowed.

(35)

Laxmi due to her fragile health never plays with boys. The child is being teased for her feminine ways: 'My mannerism, my walking and talking style were all feminine. But why was it so? I did not know. I wasn't of the age to answer this question. Loner that I already was, I drifted even further into my cocoon' (4).

Revathi envies girls from early on. She remembers how, when about ten years old, she goes to the village school with the girls, plays their games and loves to engage in household work and decoration. After school, the boy dresses in his sister's skirt and blouse and winds a long towel around his head

imitating long pleats (4). 'In class, I would sit staring at the girls, taking note of the way their braids fell, their colourful ribbons, the jasmine they wore in their hair . . . I longed to be like them and suffered that I could not dress so'. The boy is being teased, called names, yet feels faintly gratified at being recognised as female (6).

Vidya remembers:

> My habits of wearing drag, bathing with a towel around my chest, tying a towel around my head to dry my imaginary long hair – all this was now public knowledge. My voice was still soft and effeminate, and I tended to blush, gesture, and walk like a woman, too. [. . .] Actually I didn't mind being called 'girly' or 'sissy' – it gave me a secret thrill. The teasing did not hurt me, it pleased me. It made me happy that at least some onlookers understood what I was feeling. I preferred to join the girls at their games [. . .] and being one of them.
>
> *(Vidya 18–23)*

Puberty, Confusion, and Problems at School

The confusion at the onset of puberty about one's desires and bodily changes is characteristic for all of the narrations, the memories being frequently interrelated with traumatising experiences at school. The discovery of being drawn towards boys and the latent 'fear of being gay' is a prominent motif, as is the disturbing sensation of desiring girls, not as possible partners but with the strong wish to merge with them; both variants complicating the process towards sexual orientation considerably.

Livia as a 13-year-old experiences the strong urge to transform into a girl in the shower: 'I use strings to create artificial breasts and squeeze my penis between my legs' (25). 'I'm probably neurotic or even pervert'. The relationship with girls in puberty is characterised by fear and the wish to escape, especially at school parties. 'I look at the girls in their tight jeans, their firm bottoms. I desire them. But there's something I don't understand'. Again, from retrospective comes the explanatory comment: 'I reconstruct this later. I want them not only as girlfriends, but I want to merge with them. Both exist simultaneously: the boy who desires a girl, and the boy who wants to be a girl. I can't wrap my head around that' (27).

In Ulrika's case, contacts to girls proved to be complicated.

> I was now increasingly looking for contact with girls, but they also did not really want to get along with me. For them, I was an effeminate boy who absolutely did not fit into their pubescent world. The girls were around 14 or 15 years old and looking for sexual experiences with older boys. So the girls wanted nothing to do with me, and I wanted nothing to do with the

boys – the dilemma was perfect. There was no one I could talk to about it, neither my parents nor acquaintances.

Jean narrates how during puberty, the teenager becomes emotionally unstable.

I didn't like my penis. If I didn't want something like that, I had to be a girl. But as it was, I wasn't one. I felt lost, lonely. I wasn't supposed to exist, but I did. My existence had to be a mistake. God must have been mistaken. It was this Catholic consciousness that I was a sin that marked my childhood, adolescence, the beginning of puberty. This original sin, this knowledge of being born guilty. [. . .] I was afraid that God would punish me because of my sinful soul. I spent sleepless nights. When I was thirteen years old, the family doctor prescribed me tranquilizers.

(152)

Laxmi remembers that in fourth standard, the 'boy' starts desiring other boys and is guided to contact gay circles by an English teacher (11). Being initiated into the group is a relief: 'I had met people who were my kind. They shared my sexual attraction for members of my own sex. I learnt a new word, gay. I was gay, not abnormal' (12). But 'being gay' couldn't settle the nagging doubts within: 'Slowly, gradually I came to the conclusion, that I wasn't a boy. I was a girl. But then I had a penis and testicles, not breasts. [. . .] I did not have the answers to these difficult questions. I wanted to end my life' (22).

Revathi was confused over being attracted to men when approaching puberty. 'Whenever I saw young men, I automatically lowered my head. Why did I love men? Was I mad? Was I the only one? Were there others like me, elsewhere in the world?' (14). 'I could not study, yet pretended to, and all the time I was obsessed, confused and anxious' (15). From higher classes onwards, 'a sense of irrepressible femaleness' haunts the boy: 'A woman trapped in a man's body was how I thought of myself'. The boy learns from his *tozhi* friends, who secretly meet and act in a feminine way, that it was not all that easy to become a woman. One would have to go to Mumbai and Delhi and stay for years with 'those who wore saris and had undergone "operations"'. (19)

School years for Vidya only aggravated the exposure to teasing and bullying, especially after studying at an all-boys school in Tiruchi from ninth grade onwards, where the boy becomes the target of his class-mates taunts (24–26). During school days, there is a brief episode of a first tender love, when Vidya, 'generally reserved with men', gets to know the young man Ilango, who converses freely with her. While Ilango talks to her about the girl he loved, she

wishes that one day he would 'feast on me the way he enjoyed watching other girls. [. . .] What I felt for Ilango was neither love nor lust. [. . .] Ilango was the man who made me feel whole as a woman' (28).

Second Birth, Lost Childhood

The motif of the second birth through surgery and adopting a new name is prominent in all the narratives except Laxmi's, as she declares to be content with her in-between position in gender identity.

Vidya's book opens with a chapter extrapolated from the chronological narrative, advancing the narrative climax of her operation. As the second chapter sets in with 'When I was born the first time', her second birth is supposed to have taken place in the operation theatre. The narration recalls the unbearable pain during and after the surgery, but is dominated by the sensation of euphoria:

> They had removed that part of me over which I had shed silent tears of rejection from as far back as I can remember – my penis and my testicles had been excised. [. . .] Ah! Nirvana! The ultimate peace! [. . .] It was a huge relief. I was now a woman: mine was a woman's body. I have become a woman. I am not Saravanan anymore, I am Vidya – a complete Vidya – a whole woman.
>
> *(9)*

Revathi describes her transformation as a spiritual process in the context of a string of rituals, performed within the community 40 days after her *nirvaanam* (emasculation surgery), culminating in a symbolical merging with the image of the goddess:

> Back in front of Mata's image, we were asked to uncover our faces and look at her glorious image. We were asked to recite: 'Take me away and give yourself to me'. [. . .] A mirror was then thrust into my hands – I had to look at myself, and I had not looked into a mirror for forty days. [. . .] I could not recognize myself. My face had changed! I felt like a flower that had just blossomed. It seemed to me that my earlier male form had disappeared and in its place was a woman. I felt exultant.
>
> *(87–88)*

In Livia's text, reading Rauchfleisch's book on trans identity makes her feel that she has found the 'key to a door' behind which 'the woman who has been locked up for years' was waiting. 'Before me stood a woman whom I had not treated well. This woman now stepped out of the darkness (33). [. . .]

She is nameless at first. It is not without danger to let her out, and even after her embrace it is an adventure that I experience with her' (39). The change of name had been an emotional decision even before coming out.

> I never liked the stiff and unusual double name 'Cay-Rüdiger'. And the new name absolutely had to be a woman's name ending in 'a'. The rest happened with female name directories and impulsively. It's important that the new name is not quite 'common', but not wacky either. A new building block of my identity.
>
> *(59)*

In Ulrika's case, the relation to her former existence as a male person is described in some detail in the context of changing the civil status[26] officially in 2017. Initially overwhelmed by the fact, that 'from now one I will have two birthdays', she starts to rewrite her CV 'as if I had been a woman since birth' when applying for another job. While changing the German terms for 'consultant' or 'technician' into the female form poses no problem, her time in the army is difficult to explain as women were rare in the army earlier. Accordingly, she extends her years of training and studies to gloss over the crucial period. During the job interview, however, she comes out with the truth. 'I decided to leave this rubbish of manipulating my CV. My life began as a "man" and now I am the woman I always wanted to be. Full stop!' After posting her critical opinion regarding the 'extinction of one's former life' on trans internet platforms, she receives a shitstorm, predominantly from younger trans people. For her at 58, however, she sees absolutely no sense in extinguishing all traces of a life-long career and familial status.

Jean's is the most reflective memoir when it comes to review a long life as a trans person at 68. After her successful SRS operation, it took her a while to realise that she was recognised as a woman all right, but always remained a trans woman, since she lacked a proper girl's childhood: 'Everyone knew what I knew: I was not born a woman, I was never a little girl. [. . .] That's why I envy every woman who was born as such' (79). She demands for herself an emergence beyond this status of a 'made woman': namely, to acknowledge the sum of her being. 'This also includes the little boy or the little girl, what we once were' (80). In her eyes, there can be no way to conceal and deny that one was once a man and pretend 'as in a witness protection program, to extinguish the past, like a former mafioso' (25). During the time when, out of love for her wife, Mori, she decided to live as a man again even after her bodily transition to female, worst doubts affected her. In the process she realised how problematic it was to discard the male past and childhood altogether:

> I began to think about the fact that I might not have been a real transsexual. I realized that it had been wrong, that I had forced myself to pretend

that this boy I had been at some point never existed. That I pretended that I had not been born in Remagen on the Rhine in 1942, but in Casablanca in 1973. That everything that had been before was a mistake, not right. Like most of the transsexuals, I had erased my life that was before the surgery. Today I think it was this emptiness that made me feel so unhappy. I missed my childhood. I had thrown it away.

(15)

Conclusion

These first-hand accounts, beyond their special disposition of dealing with childhood and youth coming to terms with gender dysphoria, allow invaluable insights into a wide array of societal frameworks that govern individual modes of growing up in India and Germany, this, too, over a span of around 50 years. In the sense of Bourdieu's 'life as an intentional project', we read out of these life-scripts how the authors want themselves to be seen in the world and how disparate biographies are arranged as a meaningful narrative. Prosser's 'body narrative of transition' might be most prominently realised in Ulrika's text, with 'bodily construction sites'[27] to be successfully tackled on the way to a female identity; to some extent also, Livia's text complies with the medical roadmap, her manuals on 'passing' being in strange opposition to her otherwise critically informed perspective. Jean, on the contrary, voices concerns regarding the 'beauty trap' of excessive follow-up feminisation surgeries. The *nirvana* surgery figures as a narrative climax of transition in the autobiographies of Vidya and Revathi, beyond their tales of violence in childhood and suffering in the lives of *hijras*. Laxmi's text in contrast seeks to overcome the danger of self-victimisation[28] and comes across as a self-assertive and glamorous success story of a *hijra* without bodily transformations.

Comparing the texts, awareness of trans issues and access to medical and psychological expertise are certainly governed by respective national health regulations, social position, and financial possibilities. In the German texts, achieving awareness is mostly shown as the result of intensive reading, against the practice of the child 'being read' by elders narrated in the Indian context. But it is the difference in generations and temporalities that really propel the change in the agency of the child. If we read of a childhood spent in the early 1950s in a parochial and homophobic German village or of another in the early GDR with rigid visions of a virile masculinity, with no one to talk to and no access to information, we hardly find any option whatsoever for the struggling child other than to hide her identity; on the other hand, transident children in India and their families today manage to access a host of information and do not necessarily accept the difficult path 'laid out for them' to join *hijra* communities.

The quest for happiness (*Glück*) might be a prominent common denominator in all of the texts and the powerful underlying narrative of the

transgender's journey, as exemplified in Livia Prüll's interpretation of *Hans im Glück*.[29] Reliving and narrating childhood in itself propels a healing enterprise on the way to compose a complete self, as Prosser points out:

> And herein (in the narrative's intrinsic capacity to construct identity) surely, lies the lure of the genre of autobiography for the transsexual, a key reason why many transsexuals return to the narrative form after their diagnosis to write their lives. If autobiography in the clinician's office allows the subject to begin the transition, the published autobiographical narrative (through the revision of writing even more than the recursion of speech) allows the transsexual to integrate the self after transition: to make sense of a dramatic shift in sexed plots, to produce continuity in the face of change. Narrative *composes* the self. [. . .] This is not simply to remark autobiography as healing [. . .] but autobiography as constitutive.
>
> *(Prosser 1998: 123)*

Moreover, as there is a growing demand to acknowledge the 'life-long self-knowing'[30] of trans persons of belonging to the other sex since childhood instead of dismissing this first-hand knowledge outrightly 'as powerful fiction, retroactively constructed through interaction with the transgender community',[31] we could come up with the disturbing question: What if someone had actually listened to and believed these six children? What if they did not have to grow up thinking of themselves as pervert? What if there had been a competent counselling and open conversation about possible options, allowing also parental concerns? The growing awareness of parents towards trusting their trans children of 'knowing' themselves what is best for them is impressively documented in a recent German TV production about ten-year-old Sophia, who was born male but decides for herself at a very young age to be a girl, and is now tackling, supported by her parents, her approaching puberty. She does not say, 'I want *to become* Sophia', but insists, 'I *am* Sophia'.[32] To include the child in the assessment of its possible medical treatment is also central to the plea of Gill-Peterson: 'As simple as it sounds, pediatric trans medicine would be radically transformed by actually asking trans children what they want and truly basing care on that knowledge'.[33] Being included in vital decisions would perhaps also allow a more lenient reconciliation with one's former wrongly assigned gendered self in childhood, as 17-year-old German autobiographer Moritz considers:

> Of course, sometimes I wish I could forget my past, where I had to grow up in the wrong gender, erase all the images [. . .] But such a thing is not possible, throwing away and disposing of everything does not change the fact that it existed. Be so fair and give your environment the chance to

remember this chapter. It is not only your life, but also that of your loved ones. You can put things behind you, but that doesn't mean you have to banish them from your life. After all, sometimes it's nice to look back and see what you've already accomplished yourself.[34]

Notes

1 The recent new edition of *Lili Elbe* by Neckelmann (2019) gives insights into the complex process of text composition.

2 Susan Stryker, 'On Transgender Life Today', 6.3.2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZ7JfjnuxeU

3 Moritz A. Krumpholz transitioned from female to male and published his autobiography in 2020 at the age of 17 as e-book.

4 See journalist and filmmaker Juliet Jacques' reflections on writing her book *Trans. A Memoir* (2015) which grew out of her *Transgender Journey* column series for the *Guardian*.

5 'I got life', presented at Filmfest München 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilPZzKhZsok

6 See debates in German feminist magazine *EMMA* (2020), partly contributing to the transphobic discourse of trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs); Germaine Greer, 'Transgender Women Are "Not Women"', *BBC Newsnight*, 24.10.2015. www.youtube.com/watch?v=7B8Q6D4a6TM

7 L.S. Vidya (2007). *I Am Vidya. A Transgender's Journey*. New Delhi: Rupa (First published by New Horizon Media, 2007).
A. Revathi (2010). *The Truth about Me. A Hijra Life Story*. Translated from Tamil by V. Geetha. New Delhi: Penguin (Publ. 2011 in Tamil as *Vellai Mozhi*).
L. Tripathi (2015). *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*. Translated from the Marathi original by R. Raj Rao and P.G. Joshi. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
J. Lessenich (2012). *Die transzendierte Frau. Eine Autobiografie*. Mit einem Nachwort von Friedemann Pfäfflin. Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag.
L. Prüll (2016). *Trans* im Glück. Geschlechtsangleichung als Chance. Autobiographie, Medizingeschichte, Medizinethik*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
U. Schöllner (2019). *Transfrau? Ja, genau! Auf dem Weg zu meiner Identität*. München: Ernst Reinhardt Verlag.

8 The German titles appeared in non-fiction publishing houses associated with the psycho-medical field; the Indian titles were published by Rupa, Penguin, and OUP.

9 See interviews by Kowalska (2014) and Prabhu (2014); afterword by the translator in Laxmi's autobiography or statements by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi and R. Raj Rao in conversation with Jerry Pinto, 'Panel on Jaipur Literature Festival', 29.2.2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSAx1Q-boJ4 (last checked 6.3.2021).

10 Stryker (2006: 4).

11 Whittle (2006: xi).

12 The *hijra* emasculation rite (*nirvana*) consists of the removal of the penis and testicles, but no construction of a vagina, resulting in their ambiguous sexual nature as 'third gender'. Not all *hijras* opt for *nirvana*. Oscillating in society between their ascribed 'link to the divine' and an ostracised status exposed to violence and humiliation, they are mostly living in metropolitan ghettos, earning on *badhai* (performing after the birth of a child, at weddings), begging, and prostitution. The community is organised along the traditional Indian *guru-chela* (teacher-student) principle, where newcomers, usually in their teens, are adopted

as the *chela*-daughter by her *guru*-mother and live in a household along with her clan sisters, grandmothers, and aunts.

13 The category of 'third gender' ('*tritiya prakriti*' in Sanskrit sources) has been presented as a unique space for transident people in India, transcending binary constructions of the West (Nanda 1999; Fels 2005; Syed 2013). However, 'romancing the transgender native' (Towle and Morgan 2006: 676), with the use of the term 'third gender' bears the potential of essentialising other cultures by propelling categories of Western as binary and oppressive, against non-Western as potentially liberatory gender systems. The narrative of the 'spiritual' transformation in India versus the 'clinical' process in the West is carried forward also in Laxmi's autobiography (87).

14 'Those patients (like true transsexuals), invariably date the beginning of their deviation to earliest childhood. [. . .] As long as I can remember, I wanted to be a girl' is a frequent part of their history (Benjamin 1966: 8, 23).

15 Bernice L. Hausman points out how collecting transsexual autobiographies constituted an important part of transsexual self education for encounters with the clinic personnel and was indicative of the establishment of an official discourse: 'Transsexuals are a notoriously well-read patient population' (Hausman 2006: 337).

16 See extensive studies on childhood memory and (auto)biographical narration in I. Behnken & J. Zinnecker (Eds.) (2001). *Kinder. Kindheit. Lebensgeschichte. Ein Handbuch*. Seelze-Velber: Kallmeyersche Verlagsbuchhandlung.

17 She acted in the 2017 documentary film 'Is it too much to ask?' by Leena Manimekalai. 'Housing discrimination' has been a prominent topic in Smiley's fight for transgender rights in India.

18 Since she mentions the year of her *nirvana* as 1986 when she was about 16 years of age, her birth year will be around 1970.

19 In 2018 she drew sharp critique from the (traditionally syncretic) community for supporting the Ram temple construction in Ayodhya; in 2019 she established the first *Kinnar* camp at the Kumbh Mela in Prayag.

20 *Between the Lines. Indiens drittes Geschlecht*. Ein Film von Thomas Wortmann, 2005.

21 [*The Transcended Woman. An Autobiography*. With an afterword by Friedemann Pfäfflin.]

22 [*Trans* in Happyness. Sex Reassignment as Chance. Autobiography, Medical History, Medial Ethics*.] The title is an allusion to the German fairy tale 'Hans im Glück', about the happy-go-lucky boy Hans, who returns home after working in a foreign land and is tricked into trading his hard-earned lump of gold against things of increasingly lesser value until he returns empty-handed, but he is happy throughout. Prüll takes up this tale as a metaphor for the transident person, who has to shed 'precious loads' on the way to happiness.

23 [*Transwoman? Yes, exactly! On the Way to my Identity*.]

24 'A guru was like a mother [. . .] I felt an inexplicable love between us, it was as if God has created such hearts as these to protect and care for those like me, who had come there leaving their families and homes' (Revathi: 23).

25 As Runte before him, Prosser points out the significance of the mirror scene in trans autobiographies: 'From the transitional point in Morris' autobiographical narrative, the 'mirror scene', the 'me' written about (James Morris) and the 'I' that writes (Jan Morris) so far separated by sex – are fused into a singly sexed autobiographical subject, an integral 'I'. [. . .] Almost to the degree of surgery scenes, mirror scenes, we might say, constitute a convention of transsexual autobiography' (100).

26 *Personenstands- und Vornamensänderung*, 79–81.

27 'Fünf körperliche Hauptbaustellen' (Schöllner 2019: 90).

28 This is at least what Laxmi's translator Raj Rao states; in contrast, he criticises Revathi's narrative that 'never strays from the chosen course of depicting the humiliation and violence that hijras face' (Tripathi 2015: 188). Rao, however, strangely ignores the glaring difference in class and caste reflected in these two biographies.
29 One is reminded of the empathic assessment by Benjamin: 'There is hardly a person so constantly unhappy (before sex change) as the transsexual. Only for short periods of his (or her) life, such as those rare moments of hope when a conversion operation seems attainable or when, successfully assuming the identity of a woman in name, dress, and social acceptance, is he able to forget his misery' (Benjamin 1966: 30).
30 'Many academics have focussed on the transsexual transition process to argue that gender does not arise "naturally", but that it is learned, practiced, and performed. However, the same academics tend to overlook (or dismiss outright) the fact that most transsexuals experience a lifelong self-knowing that they should be the other sex' (Serano 2016: 210).
31 Catherwood (2015: 37).
32 'Ich bin Sophia! Leben als Transgender-Kind', *Film von Norbert Lübbers. WDR Doku*, 23.09.2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rFSotQ-RSo (last checked 20.2.2021).
33 Gill-Peterson (2018: 198).
34 Krumpholz (2020: 31–32).

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12

'I LOST MY SON WHOM I RAISED FOR 12 YEARS' – ANXIETIES AMONG PARENTS OF TRANS CHILDREN[1]

Elisabeth Schömbucher

Introduction

Transgender persons, persons who do not identify with the sex that has been assigned to them at birth, are a very small minority, comprising around 0.6–0.8% of the world's population.[2] Over the past years, gender incongruence among children and adolescents in Germany and other European countries has increased fivefold. Moreover, the number of female-assigned children who ask for transition is now five times as high as the number of male-assigned children. There are similar tendencies in India. Whereas trans women have a long tradition as hijras, there is now a growing number of trans men as well as trans women who are not part of hijra culture. Medical treatment and legal measures allow new ways of approaching transition which go beyond the binary order. Easy access to globally available information on gender diversity in the internet and social media makes children more knowledgeable than their parents. The present generation of children and young adults are well informed about gender diversity, about the many different forms of gender identity, with binary transgender identity being only one form, alongside non-binary gender fluidity, or agender and post-gender identity, to mention just a few.

What does '*doing gender*' then mean for parents of trans children? How do parents cope with gender variance in their child, which is still perceived as a deviance from the heteronormative order of society? Heteronormativity is defined as 'a gender binary and heterosexually organised and organising pattern of perception, action and thought, which as a fundamental social institution contributes to the naturalisation of heterosexuality and binary gender classification and to the reduction of complexity' (Degele 2008, p. 89).[3]

Parents have to rethink gender concepts, they have 'to learn a lot', as one German mother puts it. In this chapter I will examine how parents react to their trans children. How do they deal with the fact that the sexual body is experienced as inappropriate by their child? Why do many more children and adolescents want to go for sex reassignment than ten years ago? Does it make a difference for parents (and for society) whether a girl transitions to a boy or a boy transitions to a girl? Will the increase in gender non-binary identities have a transformative influence on the heteronormative (and gender-oppressive) social order? Do children have agency in deciding what kind of sex reassignment they want to have? Do they have a choice whether to go for gender-binary reassignment or to be gender-fluid and decide among various options?[4]

Narrative interviews with trans-identified persons have been recorded over four years between 2016 and 2021 in India and Germany.[5] They have been supplemented with oral narratives in audio-visual documentaries.[6] Ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in Bangalore, Chennai, Pondicherry, Coimbatore, Delhi, and Trivandrum. Multi-sited ethnography allowed me to understand the impact of global networks and the integration of local actors in global contexts. Multi-sited ethnography was also necessary because trans persons are highly mobile, migrating from villages and small towns to big cities but also between metro cities. Whenever I returned to India after a six-month absence, some of the people I had interviewed previously had changed their place of residence in search of better earning opportunities. Some went back to their birth families to live with their aging parents.

Most of the trans persons I have interviewed have met with me several times over these years. I was invited to their homes; I met their birth families. We visited temples, or I met them at their workplaces and in NGOs. I was allowed to be present at their rituals. I met their adoptive mothers and sisters and was patiently educated about the rules of their community and its alternative kinship system. So far, 39 persons have shared their life histories with me.[7] Personal narratives are multi-vocal and subjective. In many but not all cases, I have been listening to the voices of the marginalised (Burghart 1996, p. 300). They speak about resistance against hegemonic norms, about distinctions based on differences of class and gender, with trans men having different stories to tell than trans women. Although their narratives are based on individual experiences, showing various ways of living with non-normative gender identities, there are also recurring themes in their biographies – violence, shame, depression, loss, insecurity, hope, pride, love, self-confidence, optimism, and new beginnings. Childhood experiences are narrated retrospectively. Adult or adolescent trans persons recall memories of their childhood. Trans persons who are now in their 30s or 40s have different memories about coping with their gender incongruence than trans persons who are now in their teens or early twenties.

It might appear arbitrary to conduct comparative research on trans lives in India and Germany, especially since India has a long tradition of a third gender, *tritīya prakriti*. However, I feel that limiting field research to the traditional culture of third gender in India bears the danger of exoticising the Other. Traditional communities, such as hijras, aravanis, and jogappas, are interconnected with each other as well as with trans persons who are not part of these communities. Moreover, discourses on gender diversity are taking place on a global level. Various transcultural entanglements influence the way trans identity is dealt with worldwide. Medical treatment of transsexuality is standardised globally. The general guidelines published in the ICD-10[8] enhance a binary concept of gender, whereas non-normative concepts of gender such as non-binary or gender-fluid identities are widely spread within the trans community, mostly through social media. They affect the way trans identity is perceived, and they allow people to deal with their gender identity in very different ways. In addition, human rights, human dignity, and the welfare of children are further demands that are made globally. In an interview in the magazine *HIV* of the Deutsche Aidshilfe, Jeffrey, a 35-year-old trans man from Borneo, is quoted saying, 'I dream of the same rights. I wish for freedom. I mean, I would like to have my sex entry in my passport changed. Or get married sometime in the future. Or at least have a life partnership registered. As it is possible with you in the West. I dream of the same rights'.[9]

Performing Gender With the Body

'Trans* is the state of experiencing your sexual body as inappropriate', as stated by Till Randolf Amelung (2020a, 2020b), a German trans man in his 30s.[10] 'You know, I am suffering from body dysphoria. I do not want to see my private parts in the mirror. I have to get rid of it', I was told by Rojana, a trans woman in her 20s who is waiting for her sex reassignment surgery to be performed in Kerala. Behind these clear and simple statements, however, lies a multitude of problems, conflicts, and insecurities on the part of trans persons and their parents.

Medical achievements in hormone treatment and cosmetic and plastic surgeries allow body modifications that seemed unimaginable a few decades ago and influenced the treatment of trans children and adolescents (Meyer, Boczek & Bojunga 2020). Whereas for a long time, trans persons could only access sex reassignment surgery as adults, it is now possible for children and adolescents to start this process much earlier. In 2011, the Amsterdam Gender Identity Clinic developed the so-called Dutch protocol, a guideline for dealing with gender dysphoria[11] at an early age. According to the Dutch protocol, children below age 12 are not treated medically. Their parents are advised to adopt an attitude of *watchful waiting*. At age 12, transitioning starts with medical interventions which are defined as *completely reversible*

interventions (intake of hormone blockers). At age 16, *partially reversible interventions* are carried out (intake of cross-sex hormones), and at age 18 *completely irreversible gender reassignment surgery* is carried out. For trans men, this would mean mastectomy, hysterectomy, and phalloplasty. Trans women might undergo penectomy, orchiectomy, vaginoplasty, and breast augmentation.

Narratives of four adolescents, three German and one Indian, who are being treated according to the Dutch protocol show how they perform gender with their bodies.

Fynn, 19 years old, narrates:[12]

> It is not the body that I wanted, but I can adapt my body in such a way that I like it. I am Fynn. In fact, I am just a normal boy but there was a time when I didn't know it. I lived almost 14 years as a girl, before I found out that perhaps I am not a girl. When I looked into the mirror, there was a rather pretty girl but it didn't feel right at all. I thought that, actually, I should be happy with this body, but I never was. [. . .] For many people it is still impossible to understand that gender does not necessarily depend on genitals or what is written on a birth certificate. There are still many people to whom I have to explain this. I am fed up with all these explanations.

Fynn has been taking hormones for three years. He likes to sew his own clothes. He did this already when he was a girl and he asks, 'Why should I give up sewing? You are not a different person, that's not possible. It's a cliché that boys don't sew'. After taking testosterone for three years, as a next step he underwent a mastectomy (breast surgery). He had to be of legal age for this. He feels that the breast is the most important attribute of femininity.

> 'If a person is puzzled about my gender identity, this person looks into my face and then down on my body to see if there are breasts. This really sucks. I don't like my breasts, I didn't want them and therefore I would like to get rid of it. The reason why I accept my breasts right now, is the certainty that I won't have them forever'. He wants a male body and he hopes that other people will finally see him as a man. He does not plan to change anything else on his body. 'I am male before and after the operation, but I will probably be happier with my body'.

Alexander, age 14, narrates:

> 'I am 14 years old and I have lived as a boy for two years now. Before that, I lived for 12 years as a girl. It felt wrong that I was called Anna. It didn't match at all, but the others didn't understand. They couldn't understand,

because they didn't know. The day when I got . . . women's problems [menstruation] for the first time, I couldn't stop crying. I somehow thought and begged that this won't happen to me. Because I thought that since I am a boy, this couldn't happen to me'. Alexander became depressed, got nervous breakdowns, didn't go to school anymore. 'I didn't understand why I felt like a boy and my body was a female body. My body is like an empty shell. I cannot live in this shell all my life. It would be so disgusting. I am not like this and I don't want to be like this'.

Now, at age 14, he has started taking testosterone. He is looking forward to the breaking of his voice, growing of body hair and a beard, and 'that something will change in me, inside and also outside my body. That the upper half of my body will look male, with muscles'. He is happy because he couldn't imagine that the changes would be so fast and that he would be able to recognise them already after three months. Alexander went to a new school where he realised that being trans*gender is no topic at all, neither with teachers nor with pupils. Therefore, he felt lost until he had his coming out in front of his classmates. 'Things changed for me, I was not depressed anymore, and I felt relieved. Before that, I had no friends, no contacts'.

Klara, age 15, narrates:

'Since I was 13, I have been living as a girl. Before that I lived as a boy for twelve years. I started wearing girls' dresses and let my hair grow. When I look at myself in the mirror, I see that it is right. I can present myself as I am. And I am comfortable as how I am now. The boy on the photos has only a little bit to do with me. He exists only in my memories but not as a person anymore'. Klara talks about her former self only in the third person: 'He tried to identify as a boy, but it felt wrong for him, it was a necessity for him to be a boy, because he didn't know how it feels to be trans'. At age 13, she got puberty blockers since she didn't want to undergo puberty in a male body. At age 15, she started taking estrogen. 'It is my aim to get a female body. That my body adapts to what I feel'.

Alan, age 17: When I met Alan and his mother in February 2020 in Trivandrum, he was 17 years old.[13] His transition was just completed and his experience is similar to Fynn's, Alexander's, and Klara's. He, too, is being treated according to the guidelines formulated in the Dutch protocol. Sex reassignment surgery was completed before age 18, after intense counselling. A very friendly and supportive plastic surgeon told him, 'I will make you a beautiful man'. Alan reflects:

When I was transitioning, gender was all I was, I couldn't think of anything else. Everybody thinks only of transgender, you are reduced to

transgender. Nothing else matters. I know that I am not limited to being transgender. Many kids are very talented, but they can't do anything, because they are limited to being transgender.

In my childhood, I was fine. I was a tomboy and I wore male clothes. Even when I started menstruating, I would wear a vest and shorts. I think menstruating didn't really bother me. But when my breasts started growing, and my voice was becoming more feminine, I covered it with my tomboyish way. I used to play a lot of sports, like cycling and cricket. I was binding my breasts. I never heard about transitioning or transgender. One day, I was searching breast removal surgery in the internet. I came across transitioning and transgender, and I started reading about it. I thought it would be very easy, without a doctor. I contacted this clinic in Delhi, Olmec, it's only for transgender surgeries. They gave me information about the costs.

When I asked whether the internet was helpful for his search, Alan replied:

The internet was good for basic information, but I learned more through the community. We have a trans men community. They meet once every two months. After my coming out, they educated me. They taught me everything: about surgery, about the gender identity certificate, about hormones, about social transitioning. Internet gives you information about what is happening outside India, they don't give you information about transgender in India. For the United States, there is a lot of information about costs, medical information, or that you have to be of legal age, etc. In Wikipedia, the only information regarding India is about the NALSA judgement.[14]

Alan, Fynn, Alexander, and Klara are self-confident and happy about their bodily transitions. From their narratives, it is evident that they selected carefully and consciously among the various options available. Sculpting the gendered body is a highly individualistic affair. Mastectomy is seen as a form of cosmetic surgery. 'If eyelid and nose correction, liposuction, breast enhancement, or Brazilian butt are carried out easily, why not change the gendered body?' I was asked by a young German gender-fluid person.

Mixed Feelings Among Parents

The children and adolescents who transitioned in the years 2019 to 2020 are enthusiastic about the changes in their bodies which they had eagerly awaited. But what about parents of trans children, and their responsibilities and anxieties? Parents have to redefine their duty to act in the best interest of the child. They have to give or withhold their consent to legal procedures

and medical therapy. They have to support their child against all kinds of discrimination in school and everyday life. After the initial shock, parents oscillate between mourning the loss of their gendered child and supporting it (Busch 2020, p. 170).

Fynn's parents accompanied him to the hospital for his breast surgery. They agree with Fynn that it is his body and that he has to be happy with it. In anticipation of his breast surgery, his mother said that she is happy for him.

> He really wants it, urgently. He is really longing for it. It is his life, he decides over his body with all the consequences, I can't take the risk from him and I don't want to do that. 'If you are sure, if you want to do this, if you are happy now, I will accompany you, I will support you on your way'.

Fynn's father adds:

> I am convinced that he is doing the right thing. In the beginning we were concerned about the effects of hormones and operations, but there is no alternative. So grit your teeth and get to it.

Supporting Fynn was not easy for his parents, as his mother explains:

> Sometimes, I wished it could have been a normal teenage life. There was a lot of hassle, lots of letters, lots of applications, lots of appointments. Change of names, hormone treatment, and health insurance. It was hard work to support Fynn. Over and over again, Fynn had to declare himself for his gender identity.

Klara had her coming out to her parents at the age of 12. Her parents are very clear about their feelings.

> Her mother says: 'It is still hard for me. I get tears in my eyes when I look at old photographs. There was a life before Klara'. Her father added: 'I lost my son, whom I raised for twelve years. As a father I did all the things you do with a boy: swimming, camping, and all. We don't do this any-more. It is difficult. It is still difficult to call her Klara. I am getting used to it gradually. Time heals all wounds. But it is not easy for me, to be honest'.

A feeling of loss and mourning was stated also by the mother of Sophia, eight years old. Since the age of four, Sophia had identified as a girl. Her mother says:

> I mourned for my son for a long time. The more Sophia got happier, the more I suffered from the loss of my son. It was hard for me to cope with

the change. We had to remove everything that reminds her of her biological self, such as photos, her name, and her clothes.[15]

Alexander's mother ponders over her own potential responsibility. She always wanted a girl. Until age three, she dressed him in pink, for example. When he was three years old, he refused girls' dresses. Now his mother feels somewhat guilty, thinking 'maybe I forced him too much to become the girl I always wanted'. He is a single child; his father is absent. Thus, he depends on his mother, as he says. She is the only person who can support him. After he came out to his mother, she gave her consent to hormone therapy because she is convinced that otherwise it would have been an agony for him to go through puberty as a girl. Similar parental anxieties and a feeling of guilt are also mentioned by Arun,[16] a trans man in his early 20s whom I met in India: 'My mother always wanted a girl child. She felt guilty when I told her about my gender identity, because she thinks it might be her fault'.

When Alan came out to his mother at the age of 16, it came as a shock for her. He texted her, saying, 'in a few years I will remove my breasts and everything'. Her only question was 'Is there a cure for it?' Only after she collected information about gender dysphoria was she able to change her mind. Alan showed her videos about trans people in the UK, about trans men who get married and have children. She discussed this with Alan's siblings and they agreed that *his* happiness is important, not theirs. So they decided to support him in whatever he wanted. In August 2018, mother and son went together to their first Pride in Trivandrum. Alan says, 'Until then, I thought, I am the only trans man in Kerala. Before that I saw only trans women. Trans men I only saw in the internet, not in India'.

His mother explains:

> When he was 13, 14 years old, he was just like a tomboy. She cut her hair, was only in jeans and shorts and didn't wear earrings. I always thought she wants to follow her twin brother. I didn't know that this was the trans mind.

Alan adds:

> She stayed the whole time during the Pride talking to several trans men. When we were about to leave, she looked at all these trans people and said to me, 'If it makes you that happy, it's OK, then you can transition'.

Some months later, Alan started the transition process, by obtaining the gender identity disorder certificate (GID) from a psychiatrist, followed by his first injection of testosterone by an endocrinologist. Another few months later he went for top surgery (mastectomy). Nine months later, hysterectomy was performed. Both sex reassignment surgeries were performed

successfully in Kochi. When I asked his mother whether she mourned her daughter or felt as if she was losing her daughter (as other parents had related), she replied:

> No, I never felt like that, because I always saw him like a tomboy, I always thought, this child is like a boy only. Actually, I am very happy. Now I have two sons, one on each side, and one daughter behind.

In general, parents suffer the deprivation of their gendered child. A child is perceived either as daughter or son. Whereas parents seem to get over the 'loss' of a daughter when they 'gain' a son, 'losing' one's son is felt more severely than 'gaining' a daughter. Whereas trans children see no harm in adapting their body to what they feel, their parents are concerned about the health risk of what is considered to be a major medical intervention and mutilation of a healthy body. One more anxiety relates to the irrevocability of the surgical intervention. What if the child as an adult regrets the decision to undergo sex reassignment surgery? Even though this might happen, statistics show that there is only a slight probability that someone will wish to de-transition.

Social Exclusion of Trans Children and Adolescents

The preceding examples are of trans children who can rely on parental support for their transition. However, this won't protect a trans child from social exclusion. Trans children still have to cope with rejection. Problems with peers lead to social withdrawal and loneliness. All four of those discussed here had to cope with their anxieties about 'not being normal' and with bullying by schoolmates. Alan remembers: 'I lost all my friends. They were mocking me by deliberately calling me by my old name. I stopped meeting them and stayed at home. For a while I was lonely'.
  His mother told me:

> He used to be always outside, cycling, sports. Then, for one whole year he was only in the house. He was simply lying down, always sad, not talking to me. Then, slowly he started to move, started to talk to people in a new look, and friends started to call him Alan. [. . .] First, acceptance should be from parents and family. When my neighbors asked me, 'Why doesn't she go to school?' I told them: 'He is a trans man now. She is in the process of transitioning, she can't go to class, she is doing home schooling'. They understood and accepted. Now, everybody knows. Many tell me, 'You are right to support him'. Only some say, 'Why do you want to support him in this? Go to the temple, do *puja*, go to a *mantravadi*, then she will be OK'.

Klara narrates similar experiences of exclusion, affecting not only herself but also her parents:

> In the beginning, I was not self-confident. Now I am proud of my changing body. I am proud to show my breasts, I am happy about my feminine hips and waist [. . .] But it still takes a lot of effort and courage to present myself to others, because there are always people who stare at me and I might get harassed by them. Being different also means being vulnerable. There are comments at school. There is verbal and physical violence, abusive language and pushing around. [. . .] I knew that it would be a hard time. But I also knew that it would end.

School is a difficult place for Klara. She has to face bullying and verbal insults in social networks as well. She tries to ignore it. It is hard for her parents too:

> It really hurts us. We feel deeply hurt by this and we can't do anything against it. She tries to get stronger and more self-confident, but sometimes she comes home crying and asks: 'Why can't they accept me as I am?' This is the hardest thing for us as parents.

Adults Remembering Their Trans Childhood

The majority of trans persons I have met in India and Germany so far are adults in their 30s and 40s or even older. Their childhood memories are characterised by coping with insecurities and lack of knowledge about their gender identity. Since it was the early time of internet and social media, it was difficult for most of them to collect information about non-heteronormative gender identities. They had to cope with their anxieties of 'not being normal' and with bullying by teachers and fellow students at school. Although I collected several narratives of Indian trans persons who were eventually supported by their parents (or at least by their mothers), the master narrative was about the family's disapproval of their child's non-normative gender identity and the subsequent breakup with the family. This is expressed vividly by Sheethal, a trans woman born in 1978, executive staff in a hospital, head of an NGO, and *nayak*[17] and *guru* of numerous *chelas*,[18] when she says,

> I don't blame the society. I don't blame the Government. I only blame the parents. If they would accept us, we won't go for the State, we won't go for sex work and begging. We do this for our daily bread. Parents keep children with handicap, or if they are mentally ill. They keep them all, but not transgenders. We have good hands, good legs, and a good brain. Families should be responsible for transgender children as well.
>
> *(Sheethal, 17.2.2017)*

When I asked Living Smile Vidya (born in 1982) about her name, which sounded unusual to me, this was her answer:

> My biggest goal in life is: I want to live, not fighting for anything, not fighting for dignity, not for a nice livelihood, not for one's rights or any- thing, just live, a home for myself, one day I really want to live, without confusion, without pain, without fear, without insecurity. I am fighting for that. Happiness is really important for me. My childhood, I hardly can give you one example of a happy memory of my childhood. I am not mentally grown up, I never had a teenage life, I never had a childhood, I never lived my life. I was always scared, cautious; it was a miserable life. I always wanted to live happily, and I wanted to make my name universal, like Santoshi or Anandi, but not Sanskritized. Therefore, I chose Living Smile. During that time, I wanted to challenge things.[19]

Childhood memories of Indian trans persons resemble each other in many re- spects, starting with a laissez-faire attitude towards gender non-conforming behaviour in early childhood. Clothes could be casual and need not be in line with gender norms. The trans child him- or herself was unaware of the fact that his or her gender identity would create a problem. All this changed suddenly around puberty. Male-bodied youths would be scolded for their effemininity: 'Don't walk like that!' 'Don't speak like a girl!' Female-bodied youths would be forced to behave in a 'decent', i.e. feminine, way.

Ritu
Ritu (born in 1993; name changed) works as assistant to the manager of a multinational company in Chennai. When I asked Ritu when she came to know about her gender, she explained:

> You know, in my life, I didn't think for a single moment that I was a male. In childhood itself, I used to play with little girls, I didn't want to mingle with little boys. At the age of five, I knew about myself, that this is not my body.

When I asked how her parents reacted to her in childhood, she said:

> In India, parents give much love to a child, whatever the child is doing. They knew about my feminine character, but they were thinking, he will get good when he will be mature. When neighbors asked, my parents would say: 'my son will be ok when he gets mature'. I had complete affec- tion. I used to stay at home. I was very shy. My elder sister always went out, I stayed at home. When I told my elder sister about my gender, she said: 'I already knew about this. I was expecting you to come and tell me'.

Unlike many others, who have to leave their families and also their small towns or villages, Ritu could stay in Chennai and move to a transgender hostel.

> While I was in my parents' home, I didn't know any transgender. When I was in 12th standard, in 2008, there was a weekly series in a Tamil Newspaper on 'The wonder of Aravan's world' (Aravan Vulagathu Attirayan). Every Sunday, one trans woman was portrayed. All the powerful transgenders like Kalki, Alka ma'am, Priya Babu, Rose Venkatesh, I knew from reading this paper. There was also a TV show with Rose Venkatesh (Ilakapatty Rose) in 2008, which I watched every Sunday, to my parents' disapproval. [. . .] Later, I used to search in the internet whether there is any other person who is like me. The first person I met face-to-face is B.K. I got her name through Facebook. I had sent a friend request to her and she accepted. When she came to Chennai, it was the first time that I met a transgender. This was in my college time. At that time, I was so scared about transgender. So, when I saw B.K., I was so scared. She was wearing a churidar, a female dress, but I didn't find any feminine characteristics in her. Her gestures looked like a boy's, her words were those of a boy. She advised me very much. She was the first transgender I directly met. Only after that I had some contacts to transgender organisations like Tholi, Sahodaran. Only then I got to know my guru.

Leaving one's birth family very often means leaving one's hometown and the places of childhood. The big city as a place of refuge offers alternative ways to form social relationships. Since the 1990s various NGOs[20] have been established in Bangalore and Chennai as well as in other places, offering shelter, support, and jobs for gender-diverse persons. A more familiar alternative, with a very long tradition, is 'the community'. The traditional hijra community, or the *jamaat* as it is called in South India, consists of a new kinship system for trans women. The *parivar* (family) is an all-female multi-generational group with the *guru*, her *chelas* (daughters) and *nati chelas* (granddaughters), and the *guru*'s sisters as the *chelas*' aunts. The traditional *guru-chela* system has been described frequently as the foundation of hijra culture. It acts as support system for socially excluded trans women. On the other hand, trans men do not have a traditional support system but can only rely on NGOs. Although the *guru-chela* system provides financial and emotional support after the trans girl has been expelled from her biological family, it is considered as a highly exploitative system by some. In a quasi-feudal system, the *chelas* are expected to contribute a considerable amount of money by begging or sex work, while the *guru* arranges and pays for the *operation* or *nirvan* (removal of testes and penis).[21] Trans women might decide to leave their *guru* and start working in an NGO, which might result in conflicts between the guru and the

NGOs. However, NGOs depend on (international and national) funding and might be short-lived, whereas the *guru-chela* system is sustainable and provides social security. Ritu, who works in a multinational company, doesn't meet her *jamaat guru* right now, although she is aware of the danger of losing her job due to recession and cutting down jobs:

> I am part of the *jamaat* system, but I don't like the policy of it. I don't want to mingle with other trans people. I just want to live my life peacefully. In the *jamaat* system we have to pay money to them. I am working in a company, I am not begging, nor doing sex work. They have to give at least 1000 Rs to their leaders per day. I don't have contact to them. I don't pay anything.

Krishnakumar and Sneha

I met Krishnakumar[22] (born in 1978) for the first time in October 2016 in Bangalore. He was working in an NGO and introduced himself to me as transgender. Through his appearance with a full beard, a deep voice, his jeans, and his shirt, I read him as a cis man. Over the next four years we met several times and he narrated 'his journey' as a trans man to me. He was born in 1978 in a small village in Kerala and grew up with two elder sisters and one elder brother.

> I had a happy childhood. I got all the freedom. I didn't get so much restrictions. They didn't know about my gender, but they thought I would have the courage to fight if something happens to me. The only thing is that we were very poor. My father was a coolie worker, getting daily wages. It was not enough for our education. In my school time I had only two dresses. We were using and washing them alternately. In the rainy season it was difficult to dry, so sometimes we had to wear wet dresses.

Krishnakumar became aware of his male gender identity in fourth standard, at age seven or eight years. He didn't like girls' games. He got his first menstruation when he was in ninth standard. From then on, his mother was controlling him. He was not allowed to go out with his elder brother or his cousins. During menstruation, he was not allowed to enter the kitchen or the *puja* room or to go to the well. When his breasts were growing, he felt uncomfortable with his body. He stopped bathing with his friends in the river. When he was in 12th standard, his family came to know about his gender non-normative behaviour, but they didn't talk about it; they still controlled him like a daughter. That was the time when he fell in love with a neighbouring girl (Sneha, born in 1982) who was studying in the tenth standard.

> Until the age of 28, I lived in Kerala as a woman. I had long open hair, a churidar, and a frog-shirt. I didn't like Sari. I was doing coolie work,

construction work, loading, unloading, agricultural work, and government schemes for poor people. Most people in the village are Dalit. I am also Dalit.

In 2006 he 'ran away' – i.e. he left the house when nobody was at home – and went to Bangalore. One of his friends, another trans man from Kerala, who had gone to Bangalore earlier, told him, 'There are so many people like us in Bangalore. We can cut our hair, we can wear pant-shirt, we can drink and smoke, we have every freedom'. He read something on trans people in a magazine. Sneha,[23] his partner, adds: 'I knew that people like us live in the world, not in India, but in San Francisco. I read an article on a couple, a trans man and his wife living in San Francisco'.

> In 2010 Sneha joined me in Bangalore. In 2013 we went for top surgery. Friends recommended an experienced doctor in Gujarat. The cost was 70 000 Rs. SRS counseling[24] would have taken two years. I didn't want to wait for so long. After one year, I started with testosterone injections at Ramayyah Hospital in Bangalore. [. . .] In September 2015, we married. It was not a legal marriage, only outside a temple. [. . .] Our families in Kerala didn't know about this. In September 2018 we married legally. My gender is male, I have a new name. Now my elder brother knows, and my cousins, they all know. Only last month [in 2020], I told my elder sister that I am living with Sneha and that we are legally married. My father doesn't know. Now, nobody asks about my gender, nobody knows that I am a trans man. But still people think, 'Why don't they have children?' I don't want to tell in public that I am transgender. Still, people are not ready to give houses to trans men. I am afraid of safety also, there is a lot of rape in our society.

Sneha recalls a very happy childhood as an only daughter with several brothers.

> When I was in 10th standard, my family moved near his place. I saw him with his friends. They were all boys, he was in female dress, but not completely. There was something special about him. I never recognised that I am falling in love with a girl. I always thought of him as a man, or, I don't know if I categorised at that time, but I didn't feel anything wrong at that time. For several years, everybody thought that we were (female) friends. When my family came to know that we were in love, they didn't beat me. All were crying, it was very sentimental, very emotional. They thought that I fell in love with another female. I realised that they all loved me a lot and that I needed to break up our relationship. I went to another place for my studies. We didn't meet anymore. Then, after ten years, we met again and he proposed to me.

In November 2010, I came with him to Bangalore. After some time, I had to go back to my village because my mother fell ill. Back in Kerala, they house-arrested me and took me to a psychiatrist for a three-day medical test. When the doctor said that I am a normal person and can decide about my life, the emotions started. Again, they house-arrested me. The NGO Sahayathrika filed a habeas corpus petition in High Court to release me from illegal detention. The High Court decided that I can make my own decisions and live independently. With the help of Sahayathrika and after the Court decision I was able to come back to Bangalore. My right to make my own decisions was one thing, but there were also emotions, on my side as well as on my family's side. For six months there was no communication with my family. Then we started talking on the phone. They are pretending that I am staying alone. They are not asking about him. They are just talking about family matters and health issues. Now, I go to my home every month for 3 to 4 days. My mother passed away in 2016. I have to support them. Both his family and mine know that we are married. But they are not talking about it openly. They are pretending in front of me and other people that 'our daughter is staying alone, living independently, she has got a job in Bangalore'.

Krishnakumar had to leave his home and family in 2006. There was no physical violence in his family, he doesn't mention abuse or harassment. However, he couldn't come out to his family. There was no space for a trans man at that time. To live with his trans identity he had to go to the big city. Today, 15 years later, the situation in Kerala has changed. Kerala introduced its Transgender Policy in 2015, after the NALSA judgement of the Supreme Court in 2014. Since then, Kerala has launched several schemes for the welfare of the trans community. The state government finances sex reassignment surgery (SRS), and it provides self-employment loans to transgender persons, scholarships for students, financial support for trans couples, and shelter homes for trans women and trans men, where they can stay and get support after they have to leave their families. On 19 January 2021 the minister of health and social justice, Ms K.K. Shailaja, announced that the Kerala government will include transgender identity (transgender/trans women/trans men) in all government application forms.

These changes are reflected by Harish, when he says:

Family control of gender and sexuality is especially strong for female-assigned persons. Look at Kerala: When these people [Krishnakumar and others] came to Bangalore, there was no place to live in Kerala. Suddenly, the Kerala Government put up the work and started doing a lot of beneficial things. Now, nobody migrates to Bangalore, there are now large numbers of trans men there, also trans women, because they provide space.[25]

Alan is one of several trans men who profited from Kerala's transgender policy.

Rojana

Rojana (*1990; name changed) is a trans woman from Kerala whom I met for the first time in Bangalore in October 2019. She was interacting socially within trans community networks but also in Dalit networks. In her own words, she identifies as 'a proud Dalit Black trans woman'. During our first meeting, she outlined her perspective on the situation of trans persons in India. Her reflections were highly critical and outspoken. She is well-read in Black feminism and got inspired by the works of American Black civil rights activists Maya Angelou (1928–2014) and Rosa Parks (1913–2005). American trans women of colour and transgender rights activists like Janet Mock (2014) or Laverne Cox and their campaigns to eliminate discrimination against trans persons of colour had a deep impact on her thinking and social criticism. Rather than white hetero-cis-feminism, it is Black feminism, Black trans feminism, and its writings on the intersectionality of race, gender, capitalism, and patriarchy that she can apply to her own situation, adding casteism: 'Because I belong to the Dalit community, I always feel excluded'.

In several succeeding meetings, Rojana spoke about her childhood, her school time, and her body dysphoria.

In early childhood I was very happy. I never knew that I was trapped in a male body. At that time, I didn't feel that I was born in a different gender. I never knew that until I was in 5th standard, like when I was 11 or 12 years old. People wouldn't recognise our gender, I was not worrying about all this, my parents were happy, I was very safe. I didn't face any violence or abuse until I was eleven or twelve years old. Only at that age, society puts gender roles on the body. I completely walked like a woman, I completely talked like a woman. India is a highly cis-heterosexual patriarchal world. There is a belief that girls should walk like this, talk like this, do like this. There are strict gender roles. Since that time, I am in a constant gender crisis until my coming out. In 11th and 12th standard, I was struggling like hell. All the others were enjoying their life, they had love affairs, and they were okay with their studies, while I was fighting with myself about who I am. I was very religious; I didn't know about sex or anything until I reached 19. I always prayed to God that I want to become a man, I started fasting to become a man.

I used to spend all my time with my mom. I didn't want to go out and roam around. I didn't like adventure; I didn't know to ride a bike. I was a very scared person. I still have this shyness, mingling with boys. I was always in the kitchen, I used to take care of the kitchen. My mom saw me as a boy, so she restricted me from going to the kitchen, but she also somehow liked my feminine character. I was completely feminine, even my

voice in childhood was completely soft. Because of this I got harassed a lot from society when I was around 10, 11 years old. My first sexual abuse happened when I was 13, 14 years. It was a traumatic experience for me. My parents and sister would never believe that this could have happened to me.

I got admission to a government college for BSc in Biotechnology. I was a good student, had good marks. But I could not concentrate on my studies because of constant harassment. I was constantly struggling; I didn't know who I am. I wasn't able to sit with boys, I wasn't able to use the men's toilet. It was all getting worse, so I dropped out of college. Had I completed my studies, I would have a better life now. After I stopped college, I found a job in a shop. My company sent me to Bangalore. Only there have I seen transgender people. I never knew that these are transgender people. They call themselves Hijra in Bangalore. I saw them begging in the street and having food in some slum restaurant. I started hating them. Why are they begging in the streets? They can work. Why do they wear female clothes? I didn't know that they were women. Some of them came towards me. They knew. They started calling me 'hey, hey ma, how are you? Where do you work?' I said 'What? I am no ma', they said 'yes, you are'. They realised. But I wanted to be a male person, I wanted to stay with my parents, I didn't want to leave my parents. At first, I was a bit scared about them calling me ma. They were very kind, very emotional, I cannot expect this kind of experience from a cis person.

I had a good time in Bangalore having a romantic relationship with a man who saw me as a girl. When my parents got to know about me, that I am wearing saris, having a boyfriend and all, they came to Bangalore. The police came to my flat, I was taken to the police station and my parents took me back forcefully to Trivandrum. They brought me to a psychiatrist who admitted me to a hospital for treatment, a kind of mental hospital. When I came home after three months, my parents didn't ask me 'What happened to you, what are your problems?' They are illiterate people. I don't blame them. I love my parents. After collecting all my things from Bangalore, I applied for a visa and went to Qatar for work in 2015. Things went well for me there. Social acceptance was high. After nine months (in 2016) I had to go back to take care of my mother, who got cancer. During that time, I was looking for information about trans women. The first person I found was Geraldine Roman, the first transgender politician elected as Member of Parliament in Manila in 2016. Her speech about what she wanted to do for the LGBT community inspired me a lot.

In January 2021, Ratheesh met Rojana again in her parents' house in Kerala, where she narrated how she had experienced the effects of the transgender

policy in Kerala over the past year.[26] Since she was without work, she decided to leave Bangalore and move back to Kerala in February 2020.

> The beautiful thing in 2020 is that my parents completely accepted me as I am. It is very hard to do this in a highly transphobic society, especially in a place like my village, where they are very harsh on trans people. [. . .] My coming out was in 2016, at the age of 26. I was wearing pant-shirt until I was 25 years old. All this transphobia and cis-heteronormativity forced me to leave the house. I ran away, just roaming around in South India. Things have changed now. With my parents' support I started hormone therapy and medical transitioning. That was one of the revolutionary things. [. . .] In the meantime, lockdown began. The most marginalised people bear the most consequences of the lockdown, but for me, it was not only bad. Lockdown made me interact with my parents more and that helped me to speak about my mental instabilities. So now they feel more normal about transness than other people do.
>
> After I came back to my parents, people had changed a lot. The majority of them are not mocking me anymore, but many were still harsh on me and my parents. Neighbors kept asking my mother about me. One neighbor asked my parents 'You had a boy, who is becoming a girl, it is really sad to experience such a scenario in life'. My parents, especially my mother replied: 'It's okay for me. My kid is alright, living her own life. So, you need not bother about such things'. This is what my parents replied to them. It makes me feel happy and hopeful that many parents could stand up for their trans kids. [. . .] One more thing happened: I was constantly mocked and harassed by one of my neighbors. I was advised by an advocate that I should seek help from police. So, my mom and I went to the police station together and gave a written complaint. The police took the right action, they told them to shut their mouth, and they sensitised them. Since then, I feel peace, I am happy that things are happening in the right way. I hope that in 100 years or 200 years all these daily struggles could be beneficial for someone like me, and transness can be normal. That's what I want, just be treated normally. We have to live our life as normal life, with all the promises of the Constitution and rights and all these things.

When Rojana arrived in female dress and with long hair telling her parents that she was about to transition from male to female gender, it came as a shock to both parents. Rojana's mother recounted her experiences of what has happened in the family since Rojana came back in February 2020:

> Although I knew that she has something different about her, I wasn't able to find out what it was. Whenever she came from Bangalore, she went to the kitchen, she cooked food and cleaned up. She did all the female things,

like a girl. I could see that, but I didn't know that it is such a serious transformation.

To a certain extent, Rojana's mother also understands people's reactions:

I too would be surprised if I came to the house of another family and met a boy who was acting in a very strange way. It is very natural for me and other people who don't have awareness. They will be curious, they will be staring at the person and ask, what is happening to this boy? Even though they might not be bullying that person.

For Rojana, she has one wish. She prays that her daughter will get a good job and be financially stable. 'She should not be dependent on others; she should not be begging in the streets. Because that's what one usually sees'.

Medical Approaches to Gender Incongruence in Childhood

Although trans children and their transition 'journeys' have become visible and are ever-present in the media, medical treatment has a longer history. In the seminal book *Histories of the Transgender Child*, Julian Gill-Peterson shows that transgender children are not a new phenomenon that came into existence in the 21st century, but that '[t]rans children have a documentable past stretching the entirety of the twentieth century, long before today's trans and gender-variant adults were even born' (Gill-Peterson 2018, p. 8). Based on clinical archives of Johns Hopkins Hospital, Gill-Peterson presents a number of cases of trans and intersex children and their medical treatment, beginning in the 1930s.[27] These children and their bodies were key subjects in the formative decades of the medicalisation of sex change. Plasticity of sex in children with the help of synthetic hormones and surgery became the prevalent approach of medical science in dealing with gender incongruence. The most prominent proponent has become John Money, who 'coined the term "gender" [. . .] and famously affirms that it is possible (using surgical, endocrinological, and cultural techniques) to 'change the gender of any baby up to 18 months' (Preciado 2020, p. 88; Gill-Peterson 2018, p. 94). The archives also show that many children suffered from severe side effects due to hormone treatment, from persisting gender incongruence due to misdiagnosis of their gender identity, as well as from depression, which often resulted in suicidal attempts or suicide. Whereas in the first half of the 20th century trans and intersex children's bodies were considered as equal and interchangeable, the Gender Identity Clinic at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, which opened in 1966, deliberately dealt with 'transsexual' persons. The medical treatment comprised of psychiatric examination, hormone treatment, living publicly in one's gender identity for one year (real-life test), and finally sex

reassignment surgery. The surgery developed in those years is still prevalent today and part of ICD-10.

The research also shows that these children not only had an enormous amount of embodied self-knowledge but also collected as much information as they could get hold of. Agnes is the most famous example of the agency of a 13-year-old trans child. She used the intersex narrative, along with her mother's oestrogen pills, to convince doctors at UCLA in the 1950s to perform sex reassignment surgery on her 'intersex' body (Gill-Peterson 2018, p. 123). She could pass socially and medically as a 'female person, being completely feminized in her secondary sex characteristics with a nonetheless normal sized penis and testes', which resulted in the diagnosis of a rare disorder, testicular feminisation syndrome. It was only some years later that she 'confessed' her trans identity to her doctor (Garfinkel 1967, p. 285).

Although Gill-Peterson is right in arguing that with their bodies as a site of plasticity, trans, and intersex children of the 20th century paved the way for the children with gender incongruence, today's trans children have different options. They decide selectively about how to change their bodies. They may reject heteronormative gender-binary concepts and may identify more specifically as gender-fluid, post-gender, or agender. The revised edition of the ICD-11, which was published by the WHO in 2018, reflects with its change of terminology a paradigmatic shift in the medical treatment of variations of gender identity. The diagnosis 'transsexuality' and its distinction between male-to-female (m-t-f) and female-to-male (f-t-m) transsexuality is replaced with 'gender incongruence' in the new ICD-11, based on the distinction between 'gender assigned at birth' and 'gender identity'. Newly added is the diagnosis 'gender incongruence of childhood' in order to de-pathologise trans and reclassify it as gender variance. Trans is seen as a variant of the (binary) norm, which is not in itself pathological but could develop into a pathological state due to social distress and body dysphoria (Jacke 2019, p. 61). The new version of ICD-11 argues that incongruence between a person's experienced gender identity and the gender assigned at birth leads to suffering from psychological distress. As a consequence, suffering should be prevented before it sets in. Therapy should begin preventatively, i.e. before puberty. Therapy is now individualised, not a transition in the form of a rigid system of SRS with an adaptation of gender heteronormative bodies to the 'opposite' sex, reinforcing the desire of passing after SRS.

In the past, the rigid binary system led to strategically constructed trans biographies because non-binary persons were afraid that they 'would not get what they want' if they did not fit in the medical regime of binary gender categories (Nunez, Meier & Schaefer 2019, p. 44). In a study based on focus group interviews with 15 trans youths in 2015 in Germany, the youths reflected critically on the role of psychotherapists, who act as gatekeepers for sex reassignment therapy (Sauer & Meyer 2019, p. 148ff). Many of the

youths felt that they could not mention their real problems but had to construct an adequate narrative, which they perceived as a strategy to handle structural conditions. Severin, 21 years old, puts it as follows:

> I'm sure that if I tell my story the way I am and tell it authentically, then I won't get that [testosterone] because, for them, it's not trans enough [. . .] and that I'll have to say something I don't really want to say in order to get testosterone. I think that's kind of crap, because I don't want to lie either.[28]

Other trans persons mentioned that a psychotherapeutic process without structural dependency between therapist and trans person could be helpful since it could enable one to reflect on one's self from another perspective (ibid., p. 151).

Conclusion

What insights do we gain from life narratives of trans children and adolescents if we let them speak for themselves about their childhood memories? From the narratives mentioned in this chapter, we can see that gender incongruence in childhood is not as uniform as it might appear at first sight but encompasses a wide spectrum of experiences. Some children know at a very early age that their assigned body gender does not match with their identity gender. Still then, they recall a happy early childhood with indulgent and loving parents. Only with the onset of puberty do they experience significant psychological distress about the fact that their body does not match their inner sense of gender. Shame about being excluded from and mobbed by heteronormative society leads to depressive symptoms, body uneasiness, and a sense of insecurity and not belonging. They seek gender-affirming treatment to match their body with their sense of gender identity. Others recall uncertainty and discomfort with their assigned gender until early adulthood: 'I knew that my sexual body doesn't fit me, but I couldn't name it. I had no words for it' (Amelung 2020a, 2020b). 'It took me more than two decades of loneliness to find other trans men. This was of course, before the internet' (Gee Imaan Semmalar, in Revathi 2016, p. 195). Many trans persons couldn't recognise their gender identity for a long time, as mentioned by Benjamin Melzer, a German trans man: 'I did not know what transgender actually is. I only knew: There is something wrong with me, I am different. I was 18 and up to then did not know at all what was wrong with me. Then I saw the report about Chastity Bono on television'.[29] Another German trans man, 38-year-old Alexander, told me: 'I thought, that's how it is. I have to accept it. I didn't know about SRS and hormones. When I came to know about all that, I hesitated for a long time before I decided to transition'.

Transgender as a lens of analysis for the study of gender diversity among children also sheds light on the challenges parents have to face. The binary gender order still forms the basis of society. The child is constituted by the parents as either son or daughter. Gender diversity challenges this foundation. Parents of a gender-diverse child must therefore not only deal with health risks of gender reassignment therapy but also advocate for social acceptance of gender diversity. In many cases it is verbal insults such as 'Don't walk like that' from parents or teachers that are the first and central acts of exclusion from the heterosexual system which characterises public life. This defamation has a formative influence on the further life, self-esteem, self-confidence, and self of a trans person (Eribon 2019, pp. 12, 25). There seems to be a difference between effemininity in male-assigned teens and tomboyishness in female-assigned persons. Tomboyishness and subsequent transition from a female-bodied person to a trans man seem to be accepted more easily, whereas effemininity in a male-bodied person and transition to a trans woman are more difficult for parents and society to accept. Since trans youth are dependent on parents or guardians as well as on teachers and on peers, their psycho-social strain is considerably high. Minority stress based on discrimination, marginalisation, and traumatisation can manifest itself in various ways, such as depression, anxiety, or addictive disorders, as well as suicidal tendencies (Neander 2019, p. 125).[30]

We can also see a difference in gender-diverse childhoods in recent times as compared to a generation ago. The number of children and adolescents with gender incongruence has increased in the last ten years. One reason could be the fact that society is more open, more attentive, and more tolerant regarding gender diversity. Another reason could be the media presence of trans identity. Information about gender diversity, about various gender identities, and about medical transition are available on a global level and are easily accessible virtually. Several trans persons act as influencers in social media. Trans persons are not in the closet anymore; they are 'out' – as politicians, actors, performers, artists, and writers. The internet is an important source of information not only for trans persons themselves but also for their friends, family members, teachers, and even psychotherapists and doctors. Besides that, the LGBTQIA+ community[31] gives important support, safe space, information, encouragement, and mediation with parents. Parents have 'to learn a lot'. Comprehending it as their responsibility to guarantee the happiness and well-being of their child, they have to reorient themselves. They have to give their consent to major medical interventions, such as hormone therapy and surgery, despite potential medical risks. They have to protect their child against manifold discriminations. They have to reformulate the parental expectations that they had tied to their child's gendered body, as formulated by Klara's father as he mourns the loss of his son. Gee Imaan Semmalar recalls, 'Once when I went home, I found my school uniform neatly folded up in my

mother's cupboard. I realised then, that even as she struggled to embrace the son, I had become to her, she still mourned the loss of the daughter she once thought she had given birth to' (Revathi 2016, p. 199). A long process of awareness-building is needed until a mother can publicly announce, 'I am a queer mom and I have a queer son', as Alan's mother did.

Medical treatment of Differences of Sex Development (DSD) has changed to a great extent. New medical guidelines as formulated in the forthcoming ICD-11 (and DSM-5)[32] have developed an individualised trans care, acknowledging individual needs for transitioning, and individualised treatment on the basis of 'informed consent'. It is not anymore as paternalistic and patronising as it is described by Gill-Peterson. The right to bodily autonomy and self-determination contributes to de-essentialising the binary system of gender identities. Medicine and society have started accepting a wide variation of gender-incongruent conditions, such as expressing gender in a non-binary way, as for example trans persons who choose to have only partial operations or trans men who become pregnant fathers. Trans pregnancies are an obvious manifestation of non-binary gender concepts, as the examples of trans men Thomas Beatie (Spahn 2019, p. 167) and Freddy McConnell show.[33]

Several persons who identify as non-binary or gender-fluid have published their life stories and disseminated non-heteronormative gender perceptions. Rain Dove is an American gender-nonconforming model. Assigned female at birth, Rain Dove identifies as gender-fluid and declares: 'It took a lot of running into walls for me to get to where I am now. I went from being like a butch lesbian to then just being like an androgynous person, to being non-binary, gender queer, gender fluid, and now my identity is as simple as it's gonna be and I feel pretty solid in just saying 'I am I''.[34] Audrey Tang, software programmer and digital minister of Taiwan since 2016, whose gender was assigned male at birth in 1981, identifies as post-gender. In 2005, at age 24, Audrey changed their gender and name and went through hormone therapy and female puberty.[35] 'I don't think that people in Taiwan care about the fact that I am post-gender. It's just normal and reflects Taiwan's inclusivity, tolerance and respect for diverse sexual orientations or gender identity. [. . .] I think transgender rights is just a part of human rights'.[36]

One major demand on a global level is the formulation of new guidelines for transitioning. Most important would be the right to self-identify. An 'informed consent' would presume equal rights for all genders, also for non-normative gender, and eventually result in gender equality. Gender identity does not depend on bodily characteristics as a precondition for individual transitions. Therefore, flexible and individual steps of transition are possible. Reproductive capacity can be maintained. Doing gender can mean sticking to binary gender norms with heteronormative manners and appearance, or it could mean consciously transgressing norms. Many trans persons opt for gender binary and want to identify with the opposite sex.

Alexander, a German trans man who transitioned only at age 38, told me that after he grew a beard and had undergone a mastectomy, he changed his job and place of residence. He decided not to out himself generally but only to family members and to people in his close vicinity. People should not know that he is a trans man. His girlfriend told me that she had no idea about his trans identity when they began dating each other. For fear of various disadvantages, Arun and Krishnakumar decided not to come out to the general public but just to their near environment. All three pass as cis men after their transition.

Others who identify as gender-fluid adapt their body with greater autonomy, like Fynn, who says, 'It is not the body that I wanted, but I can adapt my body in such a way that I like it'. Luisa, a German female-born person in her twenties who identifies as gender-fluid, told me that she had just undergone breast removal. For her it is not constructing normative male gender but she made this choice with great self-confidence. She takes it as one possibility offered by plastic surgery: breast removal, breast enhancement, breast reduction, or constructing a male-looking breast. Constructing gender has gotten a new meaning. It is a construction in the sense of 'I take part in constructing my gender. I decide whether I can identify with it. The biological sex is not a fact, it is only assigned at birth. Only I know my gender' (Kovats 2020, p. 96).

Although transgender activists have achieved considerable success in their fight for transgender equality and Human Rights, they have to face transphobic attacks from various agents. Most bizarre are trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs),[37] who reject the concept of a self-determined gender identity independent of anatomy. As determinant of gender, they only accept the sex assigned at birth. They fear that the concept of self-identification will increase the risk that men will deliberately identify as trans women to gain access to women's spaces and that the women will not be able to be protected from sexualised violence anymore.[38] Particularly harsh criticism refers to transitioning among children, as outlined in the German feminist magazine *EMMA*.[39] Media publicity and the sharing of glamorous 'sunshine stories' is blamed responsible for the high incidence of gender transitioning among children and adolescents. The right to self-determination of gender identity regardless of one's biological sex, as demanded by transgender activists, should not be granted, say these critics, because they understand children to be developmentally incapable of giving their considered free and informed consent to sex reassignment therapy, which can lead to permanent damage and sterility. Narratives about de-transitioners are taken as examples of irresponsible treatment of children and adolescents who have been given puberty blockers and have undergone gender reassignment surgery. In 2018, concerned parents in Sweden launched the initiative Gender Identity Challenge Sweden (GENID). Together with feminist activists, they were able to

prevent the right to self-identify from going into effect until further notice. Nor was the age for hormone treatment and gender reassignment surgery lowered, on the grounds of insufficient scientific data and a lack of long-term studies.[40] In Europe, self-identification of one's gender is legally possible in Denmark, Ireland, and Portugal, whereas a revised transgender bill has been passed in Germany in August 2023.

Notes

1 I would like to thank Janaki Nair, Mary E. John, Barbara Lotz, Charu Gupta, and Anne Feldhaus for their critical comments.
2 Appenroth and Castro Varela (2019, p. 26).
3 Heteronormativität ist ein binäres, zweigeschlechtlich und heterosexuell organisiertes und organisierendes Wahrnehmungs-, Handlungs- und Denkschema, das als grundlegende gesellschaftliche Institution durch eine Naturalisierung von Heterosexualität und Zweigeschlechtlichkeit zu deren Verselbstverständlichung und zur Reduktion von Komplexität beiträgt. (Degele 2008, p. 89)
4 'Child' is used here as a legal category for minor persons under the age of 18, who need parental consent for medical interventions such as surgery and hormone treatment as well as legal change of name and gender.
5 This research is part of ICAS:MP, Metamorphoses of the Political, TM5: The Challenge of Gender. https://micasmp.hypotheses.org/ Field work in India was funded by BMBF.
6 Menschen hautnah: Mädchen oder Junge? Documentary, WDR-Köln 2017.
7 Most interviews have been conducted by me in English. In some cases, they were conducted in Tamil with the help of Latha Vaishnav and in Malayalam with the help of the photographer Ratheesh Sundaram. I am deeply grateful for their collaboration. Without their enthusiasm, empathy, and friendship, I couldn't have succeeded.
8 International Classification of Disease, World Health Organization, 10th revision.
9 „Ich träume von denselben Rechten. Ich wünsche mir Freiheit. Ich meine, ich würde gerne meinen Geschlechtseintrag im Pass ändern lassen. Oder irgendwann einmal heiraten. Oder zumindest eine Lebensgemeinschaft eintragen lassen. So, wie es bei euch im Westen möglich ist. Von denselben Rechten träume ich.' Magazin. HIV der Deutschen Aidshilfe. 31. Juli 2020 Trans* global. https://magazin.hiv/2020/07/31/trans-mann-borneo/
10 Trans* – Aspekte einer Lebensform. https://taz.de/Gespraech-mit-Till-Randolf-Amelung/ 21.9.2020
11 The Dutch protocol is part of internationally observed medical guidelines. Gender dysphoria is considered to be the most extreme form of gender incongruence or gender identity disorder (GID). (de Vries & Cohen-Kettenies 2012)
12 Quotations from Fynn, Alexander, and Klara and their parents are taken from the German documentary *Menschen hautnah: Mädchen oder Junge?*, WDR Köln 2017. Translation E.S.
13 Name changed. Since Alan was not of legal age at the time of the interview, we asked him whether he would like to talk to us, and at the same time we asked his mother for permission. She not only gave her permission; she was also willing to join. We met at Thanal, a shelter home for trans men in Trivandrum. Alan has an elder sister and a twin brother. His parents have separated and he lives with his mother.
14 The NALSA judgement (National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India), which was passed by the Supreme Court in India on 15 April 2014, recognised the fundamental constitutional rights of transgender people as a 'third gender'.

15 *„Menschen hautnah: Mädchen oder Junge*?', WDR Köln 2017. Translation E.S.
16 Name changed.
17 *Nayak*, most senior leader within the traditional *jamaat* system. *Nayaks* regularly hold councils to maintain the social order of the community.
18 *Chelas*, adopted daughters by their *gurus* within the traditional *jamaat* system.
19 Vidya is the name given to her by her Hijra guru during the adoption ceremony in Pune (Living Smile Vidya 2013). The interview took place on 26.2.2017.
20 Non-governmental organisations.
21 In addition to begging and sex work, hijras in North India perform at weddings and house-warming ceremonies and bless newborn babies. The amount collected during these performances of singing and dancing is also handed over to the *guru*.
22 Name changed.
23 Name changed.
24 SRS, sex reassignment surgery. According to medical guidelines, SRS can only be performed after extensive psychological counselling.
25 (13.2.2020)
26 Interviews with Rojana and her mother on 15 and 16 January 2021 were video-recorded by Ratheesh Sundaram. Rojana spoke English. The statements of her mother, Malayalam, was translated into English by Ratheesh.
27 A child is defined as 'anyone under the medical age of consent during the twentieth century – typically twenty-one, but sometimes eighteen' (Gill-Peterson 2018, p. 9).
28 Ich bin sicher, dass ich, wenn ich meine Geschichte so erzähle, wie ich bin, und authentisch erzähle, dann bekomme ich das nicht, weil, für die ist das nicht trans* genug [. . .] und dass ich dann was sagen muss, was ich eigentlich nicht will, damit ich an Testosteron komme. Das finde ich so irgendwie Scheiße, weil, ich will auch nicht lügen. (Sauer & Meyer 2019, p. 150)
29 https://magazin.hiv/2016/07/29/ich-wusste-gar-nicht-was-transgender-eigentlich-ist-ich-wusste-nur-ich-bin-anders/
30 These are the results of a US Transgender Survey in 2015. A Study on Being Trans in the European Union in 2014 has similar results (Appenroth & Lottmann 2019, p. 289 ff).
31 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual/agender/aromantic, and the unnamed/unlabelled others within this community.
32 *DSM-5*, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, used by health professionals in the United States.
33 *Seahorse*. A documentary film on the pregnancy of Freddy McConnell, directed by Jeanie Finlay, 2019.
34 www.youtube.com/watch?v=TacsO7re2Nk
35 As post-gender, Audrey doesn't use gendered personal pronouns 'he' or 'she' but 'they'. Audrey did not undergo SRS.
36 www.gaystarnews.com/article/what-you-didnt-know-about-the-worlds-first-non-binary-minister/
37 They are criticised for their transphobic rhetoric. J.K. Rowling and Kathleen Stock, professor of philosophy, University of Sussex, are presently the most well-known persons accused to be TERFs.
38 Meister in EMMA 2021(3): 78.
39 EMMA No 3, May/June 2021. Articles by Chantal Louis, Josephine Bartosch, Christine Westerhaus, Martina Meister
40 Westerhaus in EMMA 2021 (3): 74–75

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13

CONTESTED EQUALITY

Co-Parenting, Child Welfare, and Gender Politics in Contemporary History

Jana Tschurenev

Introduction

In 2014, the Law Commission of India issued a consultation paper on shared parentage systems. 'The face of child custody arrangements is changing', it argued. 'Numerous countries across the globe have adopted a preference for shared parentage systems over sole custody arrangements for child custody disputes post-divorce'. The paper explained that '[t]his trend has arisen largely in a response to changing familial roles (male care takers taking on more child rearing responsibilities) as well psychological studies revealing that the involvement of both parents in child rearing is preferable to sole custody arrangements'. The paper invited the public to submit their opinion on the question '[w]hether shared parenting should be an option and/or a preference for the [Indian] courts' (Law Commission of India 2014: 1, 14).

In 2015, a publication issued by the scientific research services of the German Bundestag discussed a similar question. Was 'co-parenting' in the form of a 'dual residence' of separated parents' children preferable to their primary or 'single residence' with one of the parents? (Deutscher Bundestag 2015: 1). More recently, an expert survey for the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs discussed how to best 'raise children separately together'. Today, they observed, 'the conditions under which separated parents must plan to share their tasks are very different from even 20 years ago'. While 'the filiation reform (*Kindschaftsrechtsreform*) of 1998 already strengthened the shared responsibility of both parents by making shared legal custody the default option after divorce', the issue was now 'how to split the everyday care and upbringing tasks' among co-parents. Against this background, the Ministry

for Family Affairs had to reconsider what kinds of support 'separated families' needed (Walper et al. 2021; transl. JT).

The fact that jurists and policymakers in India and Germany are simultaneously evaluating models of 'equally shared parenting' (Deutsch 2001), while looking at other countries' experiences for guidance, is no coincidence. Since the 1990s, many countries adopted shared parenting as the standard orientation for post-divorce settlements. Starting in North America (Bala et al. 2017; Mason 1994), Australia (Parkinson 2018), and the Nordic countries (Hakovirta & Rantalaiho 2011), a shift thereby occurred from *shared legal custody* (SLC) to *shared physical custody* (SPC). The concept of SPC has since gained currency in the UK (Haux et al. 2017), continental (including Eastern) Europe (Sünderhauf 2013; Kostka 2016; Habdas 2019), and East and South Asia (Chen 2016; Dayarathna 2016). It has been endorsed by international bodies. In 2015, the Council of Europe resolved that EU member states should 'introduce into their laws the principle of shared residence following a separation, [. . .] with the amount of time for which the child lives with each parent being adjusted according to the child's needs and interest'. Exceptions to this principle were to be limited 'to cases of child abuse or neglect, or domestic violence' (Council of Europe 2015). In SPC models, both parents are considered carers and earners on equal terms, with the children commuting on a regular schedule between the households of their separately living co-parents (Deutsch 2001).

The recent child custody regulations and contestations in India and Germany, I argue, point towards the emergence of a new regulatory regime of separate-but-equal co-parenting in contemporary global history. This regulatory regime of *non-marital* co-parenting responds – and further contributes to – the radical changes in reproductive and care relations which started with the 'social revolution' after the Second World War (Hobsbawm 1995, 287–343). Globally, workers shifted from agrarian to industrial and service sectors and from the rural to the urban. This contributed to shrinking household size and function, and to new individualised lifestyles. Mothers, including those with young children, entered the labour market in unprecedented numbers (Hobsbawm 1995, 287–343). In the Anglosphere and in Europe, reproductive practices changed in the context of the second demographic transition. This was reflected in increasing divorce rates, a loosened temporal link between marriage and childbearing, a loosened link between sexual intercourse and fertility, rise in non-marital fertility, and the decline in fertility below the replacement level (Lück et al. 2021: 94–95). Due to individualisation processes, and the liberalisation of sexual relations, diverse 'post-familial' arrangements came to characterise love, care, and kinship relations (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2016). Even in Indian society, still characterised by near-universal early marriage (Sen & Ghosh 2021), divorce and separation were on the rise since the 1980s (Dommaraju 2016). Since the

1990s, individualised lifestyles and dating practices became more common among urban middle-class milieus and in media representation, fuelling conservative fears of a decline of the 'Indian family' in the wake of liberalisation and globalisation (Chowdhury 2014).

Since the early 2000s, the concept of *parenting* gained currency both in social science research and in policy discourse (Crespi et al. 2021: 7; Macvarish & Martin 2021). It suggests a new societal focus on the practices, responsibilities, and competencies of child-rearing. In family law and policy, the focus shifted from marital relations to parent-child relations (Carbone 2000). Through the concept of parenting, the activities of mothers and fathers were reconceptualised as universalised, de-gendered tasks, detached from questions of the societal and (post-)familial division of labour, power, and financial resources (Macvarish & Martin 2021: 441). Through parenting, individual adults hope to share in a rare, emotionally rewarding experience, of which they must not be deprived (Flaquer 2021).

In this chapter, I discuss three interlinked dynamics of family change in contemporary history, which converged in the development of the 21st century's co-parenting regime. Together, they also produced some of its core tensions. First, I look at the *harmonisation and degenderisation of mothers' and fathers' rights* over their marital and extramarital children (on the 'degenderisation' of family policies: Saxonberg & Szelewa 2021). Second, I explore the *governance of separate-but-equal co-parenting* between legal and extra-legal regulation, conflict mediating agencies, and competing expert cultures. Finally, I analyse the making of co-parenting regulations in the context of *gender-political mobilisation*. Since the 1960s, child custody emerged as a battleground in contestations over gender equality (Scheiwe 2006). Thus, I discuss the dynamics of the politicisation of child custody between women's liberation movements, and fathers' and men's rights campaigns.

In a comparative-transregional framework, I trace these dynamics – the harmonisation of parental rights, the governance of non-marital co-parenting, and the gender-political mobilisation of parental interest – from the 1950s onwards across different political-economic regimes and across the realms of codified civil law, common law, and religious-based personal law. I look at family law and governance in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and the Republic of India during the cold war period before turning to the globalised exchange and politicisation dynamics of the 'internet age' (Castells 2012). This global framework has been especially relevant for the spread of SPC concepts and policies over the last two decades, and the emergence of various local, regional, and transnational civil society networks which mobilise for legal change.

The Harmonisation and Degenderisation of Parental Rights

In the 'long 20th century', political and social movements around the world mobilised around ideas of equal rights. Prominently, this included the struggles for universal adult suffrage, and equal citizenship. From the interwar period onwards, women's and children's rights were addressed in the framework of modernising and 'democratising inner-familial relations' (Scheiwe 2006: 50; transl. JT). Women's movements demanded equality within marriage, which entailed a mother's 'equal rights of guardianships with the father', and the immediate custody over her children, if there was no 'just cause' for withholding it (All-India Women's Conference 1936: 176, 1937: 117). The drive towards the democratisation of personal relations built on the principle of political equality. International organisations furthered this drive. In 1967, delegates to the United Nation's Commission on the Status of Women 'commented favourably on the trend [. . .] towards an improvement in many legal systems of the mother's position in the family'. In fact, it seemed 'illogical to give women equal political rights and at the same time to relegate them to an interior position in the family' (Commission on the Status of Women 1967: 52).

Starting with the Soviet Union (SU) in 1918, governments began to endorse men and women's equality in marriage and, equally important, abandon the legal distinctions between marital and extramarital children – even if such endorsements remained unstable and their social effects contradictory (Goldman 1993). Oriented towards the SU, the GDR's constitution of 1949 emphasised the equality of the sexes and declared all laws which contradicted it inoperative. Thus, several paragraphs from the German Civil Code (*Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*, BGB) – which had been in effect since 1900 – were immediately invalid. This included the husband's decision-making power over the family's residence (§ 10 BGB), his wife's professional life (§ 1358), and her obligation to work gratis in the familial household and the husband's business (§§ 1354, 1356) (Grandke 2010: 22). The Family Law (*Familiengesetzbuch*) of 1965 considered married parents equally responsible for the care and maintenance of their children. The concept of *parental authority* (*elterliche Gewalt*) gave way to parents' *right* to raise their children (*Erziehungsrecht*) (Obertreis 1985: 4–5). Unmarried mothers were given full, single custody of their children. In the case of divorced parents only one, usually the mother, was given legal and physical custody. Parents were expected to arrange visitations with the children among themselves. While they were entitled to some child support, but not alimony for themselves, mothers were expected to earn their own living (Obertreis 1985; Grandke 2010).

This expectation was linked to a specificity in East German family law, compared to its West German counterpart. The Family Law of 1965 required

spouses to organise their domestic life in a way which would enable the woman to 'harmonise her professional and societal activity with motherhood' (Grandke 2010: 115–116; transl. JT). Crèches and kindergartens were to facilitate mothers' full-time employment. In fact, the much-needed economic contribution of mothers outside the household was a major motivator for the governmental politics of women's emancipation in the GDR. They resulted in a high rate of full-time employment among mothers. In 1990, female labour force participation rates among prime age women (25–59) in socialist Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were the highest in the world (Klasen 2019: 3).

During the four decades of the GDR's existence, paradoxically, intimate relations were substantially liberalised, despite the illiberalism of the political sphere. Women's economic independence from husbands or male family members was a major factor in this (Ghodsee 2018; Kraft 2006). Divorce, remarriage, unmarried cohabitation, and single parenthood became to some extent normalised in the 1980s. Marriage lost its economic function of ensuring a women's subsistence, and – to some extent – its reproductive and child-care functions. Some of these functions were, however, reinstalled with the GDR joining the FRG, and, hence, the area of application of the German Civil Code (Grandke 2010: 224).

In 1949, the FRG too passed its Basic Law, in lieu of a constitution. It included the principle that men and women are equals before the law and that no one was to be privileged or disadvantaged on account of their sex, birth, race, or other social markers.[1] In contrast to the GDR, where a new family law was created, the FRG took a gradual approach to reforming the existing Civil Code. Despite intense political contestations, also West German husbands lost the legal authority, which the original BGB had granted them as the head of a legitimate family (Ruble 2019; Willekens 2006). In 1957, married parents' custodial rights were equalised. A hastily added new paragraph (§ 1628 I BGB) which gave the husband a final say in settling a marital dispute, was cancelled by the FRG's Federal Constitutional Court in 1959 (Plötz 2006: 65). Unmarried mothers did not hold full legal custody over their children but remained under the formal authority of a court-appointed legal guardian (until 1970) or under the supervision of a youth welfare officer (until 1997) (Scheiwe 2006).

With the First Marriage Reform Law (1. EheRG) coming into effect (1977), the FRG's family policy shifted towards the so-called *paritätisches Ehemodell* (equal marriage model). According to this reform, wives were granted the right to seek gainful employment. Moreover, they were no longer required by law to bear the single responsibility for the household labour.[2] In contrast to the GDR's policies, however, which aimed to bring mothers into the labour market, the post-war decades in the FRG were the heyday of the male-breadwinner/female-homemaker 'normal family', around which

the welfare-state was organised (Plötz 2006: 57; Leitner et al. 2004). This facilitated the persistence of a gender division of labour in the household and in society, and left women economically dependent on their (ex-)husbands. This division of labour was reflected in post-divorce custody settlements: most children continued to live with the mother as the primary caregiver (Breithaupt 1993). Like the earlier Family Law of the GDR, the FRG's Marriage Reform Law foresaw only single custody in case of divorced or unmarried parents. In the late 1970s and 1980s, mothers were given priority in post-divorce child custody settlements in both the FRG and the GDR (Breithaupt 1993; Scheiwe 2006; Grandke 2010).

This practice, however, was highly contested from the beginning. Already the passing of the Marriage Reform Law of 1977 was accompanied by public demands to introduce a shared custody (SLC) option. In 1982, the FRG's Federal Constitutional Court declared it unconstitutional to restrict the possibility of sharing custody to married couples. Since then, shared custody (SLC) was steadily on the rise (Breithaupt 1993). With the Filiation Reform of 1998 – which is the legal basis for the current debates about SPC – SLC became the default option for divorced parents. Moreover, fathers who were never married to the mother of their child in the first place could now share custody (Scheiwe 2006). These regulations imply two important transformations in parental and parent-child relations. On the one hand, they point to a radical change in the conception of fatherhood: it was no longer marriage to the mother, which constituted the father's authority over the child. Instead, a biological relationship – for which the marital or extramarital birth of the child was irrelevant – justified his duty to (financially) care for the child, but also his entitlement to spend time with, and enjoy an emotional relationship with them (Willekens 2006). On the other hand, parents' rights were, for the first time, cast in gender-neutral terms, abstracting from social inequalities and reproductive differences (Scheiwe 2006). Normatively, family politics in the FRG shifted towards an 'integral' dual-earner family model – partners were expected to both earn (as in the GDR) and share unpaid domestic labour and care work (on which GDR family policies remained quite ambiguous); this model, however, was hardly realised in practice (Arn & Walter 2004; Wolde 2008: 13). At the beginning of the 21st century, a gap thus appeared between the new gender-neutral parenting laws, which no longer presume a gender division of labour, and the social reality of women remaining primary carers in the family and secondary, disadvantaged earners on the labour market.

Like the GDR, and the FRG, the Republic of India (1947) committed to gender equality on a constitutional level. The constitution (1950) included the principle of non-discrimination by sex. In the late colonial and early post-colonial years, gender equality and family law were intensely politicised topics. Continuing transformative processes from the colonial period, the

'normative national family' (Subramanian 2014) took shape as a nuclear family, structured 'around the authority of the propertied husband' (Newbigin 2010). Diverse reforms of gender and sexual relations framed monogamous marriage as the privileged institution for ensuring all women's 'respectable' livelihood (Sreenivas 2008). Marriage and family remained crucial for women's economic subsistence, especially against the background of continuously low female employment rates, and a persistent high 'property gap' between Indian men and women. The property gap was heightened by the fact that women's unpaid domestic labour does not legitimate a claim to a share of the marital income (Klasen 2019; Gaddis et al. 2020).

India's legal system, in summary, combines the common law tradition with religious-based personal law. Colonial governance had placed matters relating to the family under the jurisdiction of Hindu and Muslim religious laws, as defined and enforced by the colonial state (Sturman 2012: 2). The new republic inherited colonial India's plural and unequal personal laws, which continued to ensure women's subordinate position in the family (Nair 2000: 7). Feminists have, therefore, long demanded the passing of a uniform civil code, detailing the rights of all women in the domain of family law. This demand, however, was played off against the rights of India's religious minorities, especially the Muslim community. In the context of India's post-colonial legal pluralism, women's rights were juxtaposed against the freedom of religion. Due to Hindu-nationalistic appropriations of the feminist demand of a uniform civil code, women's rights advocates have become more cautious, exploring alternative pathways of legal reform. The Supreme Court, however, pushes towards a uniform civil code (Law Commission of India 2018; Herklotz 2016).

In the absence of a uniform civil code, post-colonial Indian law reform proceeded by strengthening women's rights within religious-based personal law. For Hindus (a category which in this context included Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Lingayats, and Dalits), the highly contested Hindu Code Bills (1955–1956) provided a new framework for the regulation of familial relations. While the Hindu Marriage Act (1955) introduced the concept of the equality of husband and wife and made Hindu marriages dissoluble through divorce (Agnes 2011: 22–24), the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956) – which built on the colonial Guardians and Wards Act (1890) – maintained the superior position of the husband. It considered the father the 'natural guardian' of his marital children. The mother was the 'natural guardian' of her non-marital children. Only in the case of a father's death or absence did women hold custodial rights over their children's person and property (Committee on the Status of Women in India 1974: 126). Muslim law recognised a mother's 'prime right' to the physical custody over minor children (*hizanat*), at least during infancy (in case of a boy) or until the onset of puberty (in case of a girl). The mother was, however, not the legal guardian of her children, a

position given to the father and, in case of his death, the paternal grandfather or a guardian appointed by the father (Committee on the Status of Women in India 1974: 127).

Supreme Court decisions and legal precedent were alternative pathways to personal law reform. The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act did not only clarify who held custody over minor children; it also subjected adult women to the supervision of male guardians. Indian courts have, however, repeatedly emphasised 'that once a girl attains majority, she has the full autonomy of herself'. She was allowed to marry the life partner of her choice or live with a partner without marriage (Law Commission of India 2018: 73–74). While the Law Commission unsuccessfully promoted the 'Removal of Discrimination Against Women in Matters Relating to Guardianship and Custody of Minor Children' in 1989 (Law Commission of India 2018: 70), the Supreme Court of India deduced that in view of the paramount importance of child welfare, no preferential right should be given to any of the parents (Law Commission of India 2018, 67–68). Building on this, the Law Commission's recommended 'to constitute both the father and the mother as being natural guardians "jointly and severally", having equal rights in respect of a minor and his property' (Law Commission of India 2018: 70). In 2015, it further specified that 'parents are not only equal in terms of roles and responsibilities but also with regard to [their] rights and legal position' (Law Commission of India 2018: 70–71). In 2018, the new recommendation was that this principle should be formulated without any 'gender bias'. Hence, the terms father and mother were to be substituted by the gender-neutral term 'parent' (Law Commission of India 2018: 71). It is in this context, of the hitherto unachieved equalisation of parental rights in *codified* law, that a 'shared parentage system' is discussed as a potential new option (Chadha-Sridhar & Choudhuri 2016).

The Governance of Co-Parenting

The trend towards the harmonisation parental rights was accompanied by the emergence of new mechanisms to settle parental dispute. Increasing divorce rates and the growing number of children born outside formal marriages were met with diverse legal, governmental, and informal regulations of (post-)familial reproductive and care relations. 'Separated families' – as the German expert survey cited in the beginning of this chapter (Walper et al. 2021) puts it – became a domain of governance. How were separate-but-equal co-parents to organise their joint child-rearing tasks and divide time and money between themselves?

With the introduction of the concept of marital breakdown as a reasonable ground for divorce – 1955 in the GDR (Berghahn & Wickert 2021) and 1977 in the FRG – the couple's past actions towards one another were

no longer considered relevant for custodial settlements. There was no question of fault, which could inform a single custody decision. Instead, the new expectation was that parents put their grievances behind and collaborate in the best interest of their children. Children were not to be made 'the object of parental bankruptcy battles' (*Der Spiegel* 1980). In consequence, considerations of child welfare remained the only legitimate ground to give single custody to one of the parents or to decide where the children were primarily to live. In India, divorce law so far does not recognise the principle of marital breakdown. However, the Indian Law Commission has reiterated its recommendation to shift to 'the breakdown principle in matrimonial law' since 1978. Such a divorce, it found, was best suited to bring 'the parties and the children to terms with the new situation and working out a satisfactory basis for regulating relationships in the changed circumstances' instead of dwelling on the wrongs of the past (Law Commission of India 2018: 73–74).

The responsibility to settle parental conflict in the light of children's 'best interest', theoretically, rested in the judiciary. In British India, the Guardians and Wards Act (1890) saw the state as a *parens patriae*, whose appointed courts were responsible for ensuring minors' welfare (Law Commission of India 2018: 65). This position was enhanced from the 1960s onwards, with the increased emphasis on child welfare, which – and this is important – trumped 'paternal right' (Committee on the Status of Women in India 1974: 126); courts were to decide what was 'best for the child', in case of the parents' conflicting interests (Law Commission of India 2018: 61). Family courts were created in the FRG (in 1975) and in India (in 1984) to concentrate competency and speed up the management of familial conflict. In India, however, even today 'the network of such courts is not dense enough to meet the needs of the entire population' (Vatuk 2013: 80). Moreover, women's advocates were critical of family courts since judges were found to use their power to the disadvantage of women. In reaction, women's groups for counselling and legal advice were founded (Nair 2000: 239).

Since the early post-colonial years, the Indian state created new types of dispute resolution bodies to supplement the inefficient state-sponsored judiciary. Sharia courts and caste councils (*panchayats*) emerged as further alternatives to family conflict resolution, which were cheaper and easier to access. These customary quasi-courts, however, were found no less patriarchal than the state judiciary. Women's courts were set up in the late 1980s to specifically address women's needs (Vatuk 2013: 78–84). Thus, official courts, even if theoretically responsible for safeguarding child welfare in case of parental conflict, are by far not the only institution involved in it.

The co-existence of diverse institutions with diverse socio-political and religious orientations poses challenges to the legal standardisation of co-parenting. It reflects a context of social and economic inequality, where the state judiciary remains inaccessible beyond urban middle-class/upper-caste social milieus.

This variety, however, can also provide different options for people to seek separation settlements according to their own interest.

To ensure or even enforce parental cooperation, multi-institutional mediation processes were instituted to supplement court judgements. A diversity of actors can become simultaneously involved in parental dispute resolution. The 2006 law reforms in Australia combined substantive law changes with amendments in procedure, such as the introduction of mandatory mediation and the simultaneous introduction of a network of family relationship centres, which aimed to assist parents in resolving conflicts concerning child custody (Habdas 2019: 352). The Cochem model of multi-institutional, multi-professional collaboration, which was developed in the West German town of Cochem since 1992, has since gained national and international prominence. The aim of this model was to speed up custody settlements through mandatory mediation procedures, organised by the *Jugendamt* (child welfare services), in collaboration with a counselling agency for parents. Court procedures were streamlined towards enforcing parental cooperation in the form of shared parenting agreements (Füchsle-Voigt 2012; Kostka 2011). Such continued enforced cooperation can be a severe restriction on parents' autonomy, especially limiting their option to move, for better employment opportunities or improved family support (Scheiwe 2018). Critics of the Cochem model have also pointed out, that children were usually not heard, or represented by their own guardian ad litem (*Verfahrensbeistand*) in the court proceedings (Kostka 2011).

In 2008, the new German Law on Court Proceedings in Family Matters (FamFG) took up suggestions from the Cochem model to speed up child custody, contact and access settlements.[3] In 2015, the Council of Europe's above-cited Resolution 2079 called on member states to 'develop [. . .] mediation within the framework of judicial proceedings in family cases involving children'. They should institute 'a court-ordered mandatory information session, in order to make the parents aware that shared residence may be an appropriate option in the best interests of the child, and to work towards such a solution'. To facilitate this, they should also encourage 'multidisciplinary co-operation based on the "Cochem model"' (Council of Europe 2015). Recently, the Cochem model entered legal practice and theory in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Kočí 2018; Kopčanová 2021).

Underlying the Cochem model was a specific conception of child welfare, which necessarily included a regular and frequent contact to both parents (Kostka 2011). Such a concept of child welfare was also the starting point of the Indian Law Commission's above-cited consultation paper (2014: 1). Child welfare, however, is not only a rather unspecific legal term (Scheiwe 2013) but also a highly contested category among child psychologists, social workers, and parental interest groups. The question of which parenting arrangement would best ensure it is controversial. Until the 1980s, implicit and explicit

attachment theories, which – in short – emphasised the importance of the mother-child bond for human development (Bowlby et al. 1976; Bowlby 1988), had motivated child custody legislation and court decisions (*Der Spiegel* 1980).[4] Since parental conflict during and after divorce was considered both unavoidable and harmful for the children, even shared *legal* custody was not an option in the GDR. Since the 1990s, the family reform debates in continental Europe and the Anglosphere shifted to another theory of child welfare, which considered both parents of equal importance to the child's maturation and adjustment. Against this background, the separation from the non-custodial parent – usually the father – could be interpreted as a violation of the child welfare principle. This means that a lack of contact with the non-custodial parent could be seen by the court as the custodial parent's – usually the mother's – endangerment of the child's wellbeing, which could be penalised in the form of the loss of her own custodial rights.

The highly controversial concept of 'parental alienation', developed in the US in the 1980s, gained popularity among the proponents for SPC (Gardner 1987). It presumed that the primary caregiving parent (mostly the mother) could cause serious harm to the children if she disrupted their relationship with the other parent (mostly the father). Radical proponents of parental alienation theory recommended the withdrawal of the 'alienating' parent's custodial rights and the transfer of the child into the other parent's custody. Mothers were thus held responsible for the quality of the relationship between the child(ren) and the (less present) father and accountable for children's refusal to see him according to the established plan (Adams 2006; Meier 2009).

SPC is presented by its advocates as the best preventive of parental alienation. Since the 2000s, international expert networks and internet-based advocacy groups were formed to lobby for the application of parental alienation theory in family law and custody litigation. Unsuccessfully, they sought medical recognition of a parental alienation syndrome (PAS) in children who refused contact with one of the parents. The international PAS expert William Bernet, emeritus professor of psychiatry at Vanderbilt University, has pushed for the introduction of PAS in the DSM-5. Among the groups who invited his expertise and advocates for the PAS theory were the US-American *National Parents Organization* (founded in 1998), the *International Council on Shared Parenting* (ICSP, founded in 2014), the German *Väteraufbruch für Kinder, e.V.* (VAfK, 1988) (Fathers Rise Up for Children), and the *Bamboo Tree Children's Foundation* (2014) in India, which aims to 'research, advocate, formulate programs and set up centers of excellence that promote child-focused scientifically validated parenting' (Hubin 2020; Väteraufbruch für Kinder, Kreisverein Köln e.V. 2013; Bamboo Tree Children's Foundation 2021). All these associations are strong advocates for SPC.

Despite its increased usage in courts, especially in the US, scholars have been highly critical of PAS (Mercer & Drew 2022). US-American scholars described it as a 'poorly defined, poorly researched, and controversial pseudoscientific construct arising primarily in the context of child custody disputes' (Willis & O'Donohue 2018: 75), which has been rejected by the scientific community (Willis & O'Donohue 2018; Pepiton et al. 2012). They pointed out that a child's refusal of contact with one parent might not be the result of the other parent's alienating behaviour but of complex psychological and loyalty conflicts (Warshak 2001). Critics of PAS have analysed its strategical usage in family court. Mothers who came forward with domestic abuse accusations were in turn accused of alienating the children from the father and framed as uncooperative; in some cases, this led to a loss of child custody in favour of the father. PAS was thus weaponised against the safeguarding of women and children (Adams 2006; Meier 2009).

The very definition of child welfare, which is at least rhetorically the centre of the governance of co-parenting, has become intensely politicised. The linkages between PAS theories, SPC advocacy, and – as I will show – fathers' rights movements are one case in point. There are, moreover, various intersections between academic SPC research, political lobbying, and policy-making. Since the 1990s, a growing, increasingly differentiated body of international expert literature has discussed the question if, and under which circumstances, the commuting of children between two parental households was beneficial for their emotional and psychological well-being (Bauserman 2002; Braver & Lamb 2018; Fransson et al. 2018; Kostka 2016; Mahrer et al. 2018). New insights and arguments from this expert literature entered policy discourse. The paper on shared parenting, which scientific research services compiled for the German Parliament (Deutscher Bundestag 2015), especially considered the scientific controversy between the experts Hildegund Sünderhauf-Kravets (Sünderhauf 2013), professor for family law at the *Evangelische Hochschule Nürnberg*, and educationalist Kerima Kostka (Kostka 2014). Sünderhauf-Kravets is one of the major advocates for SPC in Germany. Currently, she is a board member of the ICSP,[5] which has grown out of the German Father's Rights Initiative VAfK (Krieg 2014). Her position is, in summary, that SPC is always the preferred option for the children of separated parents since it improves children's physical and psychological health, reduces loyalty conflict, leads to stable bonding, and the continuity of care. Moreover, parents benefit from a gender-just division of care, and financial autonomy. In situations of heightened political conflict, SPC can improve communication and ensure the collaboration of the parents. Kostka, in contrast, holds that SPC is only recommendable under specific conditions, namely, that the parents are willing and able to share physical custody; that they maintain an intensive, productive communication; and that they live close to one another. Moreover, they needed to be willing and able to flexibly

adjust commuting schedules to the changing needs of children. Kostka finds that the quality of the relationships with the parents is more important for child welfare than the quantity of contact. Hence, SPC should only be stipulated by courts after a careful consideration of the individual family's situation (Deutscher Bundestag 2015: 14–16). The experts advising the German Parliament seemed to favour Kostka's differentiated approach. The Law Commission of India (2014), also warned against a 'mechanical' understanding of parental equality and stressed the need to look at the family's condition case-by-case. Both publications took into consideration that SPC is on the rise, internationally, but also controversially discussed among scholars.

The Gender Politics of Shared Parenting

In the commentary on the Law Commission's (2014) consultation paper on shared parenting, two gender-political positions confronted each other: men's rights activists, who favoured shared parenting, and feminists, who opposed it. The Father's Rights Wing of the Save Indian Family Foundation (SIFF) argued in an open letter to the Commission that SPC 'must be the *default* arrangement of parenting if there is a separation or divorce'. Shared parenting should not 'be dependent on the age or gender of the child' and be granted 'irrespective of the status of marriage' (Save Indian Family Foundation 2014; emphasis JT). Founded in 2005, SIFF's country-wide network of associated NGOs and allies has been the major driving force in the formation of a visible men's rights movement in India (Basu 2015; Chowdhury 2014; Lodhia 2014). Since Indian family courts – according to SIFF – were blatantly 'pro-women', there should be no option to 'deny fathers the access to their children'. Nothing should, therefore, be left 'to the discretion of the judge' (Save Indian Family Foundation 2014). Men's rights activist Vivek Deveshwar published a model letter for NGO's sending responses to the Law Commission, emphasising that parents must share both legal and physical custody equally, for children of any age and gender. Since children's minds were too easily 'poisoned' by a parent, he argued, their preference should not be taken into consideration (Deveshwar 2014).

Flavia Agnes (2014), in contrast, argued that 'orders of joint custody can be made only when the parents are amicable' and could not be implemented in cases the parents were 'antagonistic to each other and demonstrate an inability to cooperate'; hence, it was unsuitable for most cases which ended up in court. A feminist legal scholar, Agnes is also the founder of the Majlis Legal Centre in Mumbai, a forum for women's rights debate and legal initiatives. She argued that a preference for shared parenting would 'take away the uncertainty involved in the principle of best interest and make custody predictable'. This very shift from a 'father is the natural guardian' premise to a 'child welfare is paramount' principle, however, had been a major step

towards gender equality. A *presumption* of shared parenting, thus, would be a setback to hard-won feminist gains.[6] Another point which Agnes made was that custody litigation in official government courts occurred only 'in urban areas, among the affluent class' and was a 'non issue for the poor' (Agnes 2014).

This curious constellation, of fathers' rights activists advocating for gender-neutral parenting legislation, framed in terms of gender equality, and feminists being sceptical or critical of it is by no means unique to India. In fact, internationally there is a significant overlap between the advocacy for shared parenting (SLC and SPC) and organised fathers' (or in the Indian case: men's) rights movements. I want to emphasise that these two causes are not identical. Liberal women's groups, such as the German *Verband berufstätiger Mütter* (Employed Mothers' Association), see potential in SPC for a redivision of familial care work and the closing of the gender pay gap (VBM 2016). However, there is a gendered dynamic in the politicisation of parental rights. The initial drive towards the harmonisation of parental rights, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter, came from the demand for *mothers'* equality in the family. The later drive towards the degenderisation of parental rights came from a concern for *fathers'* rights.

Internationally, men started to organise against the loss of their head of household position, while women were still fighting for equal rights. In 1960, an advocacy group was formed in California, the *Divorce Racket Busters*. Under the more respectable name of *United States Marriage Reform* (1961), they established a country-wide network. Their primary aim was to reduce divorced fathers' financial responsibilities towards their former spouse and their children. Men, they argued, had lost their paternal authority and fallen victim to female exploitation (Metz 1968; see Crowley 2003). Since the 1970s, fathers' rights advocacy groups have emerged, for instance, in the UK (Jordan 2019), Australia (Flood 2010, 2012), Canada (Boyd 2004a), Germany (Wolde 2008), and Taiwan (Chen 2016). By now, they have become a global phenomenon (Alschech & Saini 2019).

Some scholars have interpreted these movements as ambiguous agents of modernisation, endorsing new styles of caring masculinity (Wolde 2006; Jordan 2019). Others have placed them clearly in the context of a backlash against women's rights achievements (Boyd 2004b; Dragiewicz 2011; Flood 2012; Halperin-Kaddari & Freeman 2016). The emerging Indian men's rights movement is a case in point. Since the 1990s, local men's groups organised to combat what they saw as an infringement of men's rights through pro-women legislation. In the 1980s, several legal reforms had aimed to better protect women against domestic violence. Among them, the introduction of the new Section 498A into the Indian Penal Code provided for criminal sanctions against domestic violence and allowed for a woman's husband as well as her in-laws to be jailed based on a verbal allegation (Vatuk 2013:

80; Basu 2015: 70). Since 2005, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDMA) provided 'a comprehensive set of civil remedies for victims of domestic abuse' (Chowdhury 2014: 42). SIFF was founded in a direct response to the PWDMA. Mimicking the women's liberation movement's language of human rights and gender equality, they argued that Section 498A and the PWDMA were discriminatory towards men since they protected only one gender from abuse but not the other. Men's rights activists accused women to strategically, and falsely, allege domestic abuse to bargain for higher maintenance payments after the divorce. This trope of 'false allegations' must be contextualised in a cultural context, where a husband beating his wife in the name of 'domestic discipline' was still widely accepted. Husbands and in-laws were suddenly confronted with a new legal reality, which criminalised actions they found customary and legitimate (Basu 2015; Chowdhury 2014; Lodhia 2014).

In men's rights perspectives, women's demand for equality in the family and legal protection from domestic violence was interpreted not as an abolition but as an inversion of male domination. In Central Eastern Europe, fathers' rights activists saw themselves standing up to a powerful 'femo-fascist' state (Saxonberg 2017). German fathers' rights activists, too, polemicised against 'feminist mother-power' (Matussek 1997, trans. JT). In Germany, the figure of 'the disposed father' (*der entsorgte Vater*) (ibid.) came to symbolise men's cause, in contrast to the 'harassed husband' in India. The term *entsorgt* literally means 'disposed of', in the context of waste removal; however, it is also a wordplay on the loss of child custody, which, in German, is called *Sorgerecht* ('right to care').

In both, Germany and India, scholars have found that the fathers' and men's rights organisations which lobby for SPC are dominated by professional middle-class men. A pioneering sociological study on the VAfK – the oldest country-wide fathers' rights organisation in the FRG – found that many of its representatives had an academic background. They were educated on political and legal processes. The men who attend local meetings were socially more diverse, including skilled workers, white-collar employees, and entrepreneurs (Wolde 2008: 56). An anthropological study of SIFF's Delhi branch summarised that SIFF representatives were often 'upper middle-class men, engineers, marketing executives, small business owners, IT workers, academics, and doctors', who liberally used their financial resources for their cause. Economically marginal men frequented local meetings, too. Speaking about the country-wide network, many groups were 'ethno-linguistically diverse and upper-caste when Hindu, but many were multireligious, with several Muslim men occupying leadership positions' (Basu 2015: 70). Like VAfK-members, many SIFF activists are tech-savvy and rely on the internet for organising, mobilising, and campaigning purposes (Chowdhury 2014). While SIFF remained 'resolutely unaffiliated with political parties' (Basu

2015: 70), German fathers' rights and SPC advocates entertain relations with the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP). However, there are clear overlaps between liberal men's and fathers' rights advocates and right-wing networks of anti-feminist and 'anti-gender' mobilisation in Germany and the EU (Ginsburg 2021).

In the SPC debates of the past decade, several common points of contention can be identified. The first can be summarised as familial authority versus individual autonomy. Fathers' rights activists – in India as well as in Central Eastern Europe – present themselves as defenders of the family, as the foundation of the nation (Lodhia 2014; Chowdhury 2014; Bekiesza-Korolczuk & Hryciuk 2017) or, in Germany, evoke the spectre of a 'fatherless society' (Matussek 1998). They endorse SPC as the default custody settlement because it ensures fathers' access to the child, independent from the mothers' wishes. Feminists, in contrast, defend women's autonomy against the claims of familialism and demand recognition of single motherhood as a legitimate family form (Heiliger 1993). Hence, they do not oppose the *option* of SPC in cases of voluntary parental cooperation but the *enforcement* of SPC in situations of conflict, where it can be used to establish coercive control over an ex-partner.

This closely relates to the second point, the protection of women against domestic violence. The question if 'violent men' can be 'good-enough fathers' is politically contested (Erikson & Hester 2001; Rakil 2006). In their report on Reforms in Guardianship and Custody Laws in India (2015) which followed up the 2014 consultation paper, the Indian Law Commission listed 'any family violence involving the child or a member of the child's family' as a 'factor to be considered in grant for joined custody' (Law Commission of India 2015: 73–74). Commenting on this, feminists instead demanded 'a *presumption against joint custody arrangements* in situations where there has been a history of domestic violence in the family' (Chadha-Sridhar & Choudhuri 2016: 180; emphasis JT). Mothers' rights advocates in Germany have demanded a better protection for separated mothers, too. Last year, the *Mütterinitiative für Alleinerziehende* (MIA) (Mother's Initiative for Single Parents) started an internet campaign 'against institutional violence against women in family law'. Enforcing co-parenting settlements with violent ex-partners, they argued, led to a continuation of domestic violence in the courtroom (MIA 2021). Another core issue is the protection of children against violence, including sexual abuse. Through the theory of parental alienation and the trope of 'false allegations', fathers' rights activists have struggled to counter women's abuse allegations in custody litigation as well as protective legislation. Indian men's rights activist Deveshwar (2014) argued that if a mother alleged domestic violence or child abuse without providing sufficient evidence, *she* should be penalised by reduced child access. Indeed, feminists in Germany have documented cases in which mothers were

penalised for alleging child abuse and in which children's contact to an abusive father was legally enforced. Feminists saw this as 'betrayal' of the child welfare principle (Heiliger & Wischnewski 2003).

The third point of contention is the maintenance of separated women and the children living in their household in the context of economic gender inequality. Indeed, the rejection of cash versus care arrangements always has been a critical issue in modern fathers' rights activism (Matussek 1997; see Wolde 2008). Husbands and ex-husbands should not be reduced to the function of 'ATMs' (Save Indian Family Foundation 2014). Indian feminists, in contrast, highlighted the need to plan for separated mothers' future financial security, especially since divorce settlements in India do not include a division of matrimonial property. Financial safety was a necessary condition for child welfare (Agnes 2014). In Germany, feminists have argued that SPC increases child poverty, since the amount of child support payments is tied to the time children spend in each parental household. While children spend more time in the paternal household, however, the mother's earning options remain restricted by her geographical immobility, her earlier choice of a part-time employment (as the primary carer), and employers' unwillingness to change part-time into full-time contracts. These leaves legally equal co-parents in unequal economic conditions (Baudelaire 2019).

This leads to the final point of contestation, the problem of formal equality. Indian feminists argued that there was still a 'lack of formal equality in India'; there were still laws discriminating against women. Moreover, there was a 'lack of substantive equality' both in the public and private domains of life (Chadha-Sridhar & Choudhuri 2016: 160; cf. Nair 2000: 6–7). This lack of equality, they argued, had to be reflected in the regulation of co-parental settlements. As Flavia Agnes remarked, '[a]pplying the standard of equality to those who are situated unequally serves only to widen the gulf of inequality' (Agnes 2011: xxiv). Moreover, a contribution to MIA's blog emphasised that child welfare was probably the most unsuitable platform to bring about legal equality between women and men (Baudelaire 2019).

Conclusion

At the beginning of the 21st century, some common features of a new regime of separate-but-equal co-parenting have taken shape in both India and Germany, in a global context of policy discourse, academic debate, and political mobilisation. The first feature is a changing framework of parental rights. Between 1949 and 1950, the countries especially considered in this chapter – the GDR, the FRG, and the Republic of India – committed to gender equality on a constitutional level; in this, they followed a global trend. Against this background, parental rights were equalised within and outside marriage, according to different timelines, and through different legal

reform strategies. Within one to two generations, the husband and father lost his legal head-of-household status, with decision-making and disciplining authority over his wife and children. In law, the family was reconceptualised as a system of relationships between individuals with different rights and interests. This does, however, not mean that it ceased to exist as a hierarchical unit in social practice. With the rise of SLC/SPC since the 1980s, parental rights were recast in gender-neutral terms; this was a radical departure from most family laws before the 1950s, which foresaw a gender division of labour among the parents, and regulated physical custody – i.e. the actual care for the child – according to the gender of the parent, the age of the child, and, in some regulations in India, the gender of the child. The formal equality of separate co-parents, however, abstracts from reproductive differences, from the gender division of labour among couples pre-divorce, from societal patterns of economic gender inequality, and from gendered patterns of domestic violence.

The equalisation of parental rights produced a new potential for conflict, both on an individual and on a societal level. With the harmonisation of parental rights, jurists and policymakers were confronted with the historically new problem of how to settle parental conflict between legal equals. Since the 1950s, 'child welfare' emerged as the paramount principle in custody litigation, which trumped parental rights. This, however, posed new challenges for the regulation of co-parenting. The intensified, multi-institutional governance of co-parenting is the second feature which I want to highlight. In this chapter, I have looked at the institutionalisation of mandatory mediation processes, which aimed at convincing parents to abstract from their own individual interests and from the reasons for which they separated and to share custody in their child's best interest. Regulatory apparatuses, combining judicial authority, governmental child welfare services, and non-governmental mediation agencies, were developed, which could enforce compliance to parenting agreements. The idea that parents could be *forced* to collaborate in the best interest of their child shows that parental rights were both *equalised* and *restricted*. Parents were, in turn, responsible to enforce their children's compliance with the plan agreed upon in the name of their welfare, which was, in this case, understood in rather formal terms as regular contact to both parents. The question of legal equality was, in some ways, juxtaposed against individual autonomy of one or both parents and/or the child(ren).

Against this background, it is unsurprising that child welfare became a controversial and politicised category. International psychological and legal expert cultures grew around the question of which co-parenting models were best suited to guarantee child welfare, which informed both litigation and policymaking processes. Definitions of child welfare became part of the gender-political contestations over parental rights. This is the third feature of the new co-parenting regime: It was fundamentally shaped by

women's liberation movements and by competing movements challenging them on their own terrain. In the FRG, fathers started pushing back against maternal rights in the short historical movement (the 1970s and 1980s) when mothers – as primary caregivers – were indeed prioritised custodians of their children, while fathers were expected to financially contribute to their maintenance. In India, the men's rights movement organised against the laws aiming to protect women against domestic violence, which they criticised for their gender bias. The reduction of post-divorce maintenance payments was another concern. Only later, ensuring fathers' child custody became part of their cause. In fathers' rights perspectives, child welfare was best ensured through a frequent, regular contact with both parents. Among fathers' rights activists, theories of parental alienation were frequently endorsed. The alleged manipulation of the child into refusing contact with the father, to them, constituted child abuse, for which the mother should be penalised through loss of custody or visitation rights. Feminists, in contrast, rejected parental alienation theories; for them, the quality of parent-child relations, the protection of both mother and child(ren) against domestic violence and sexual abuse, and the absence of child poverty are conductive towards children's welfare. A general problem of the current discourse constellation is that articulating parental interest separate from the child is highly difficult. Many parental interest groups thus aim to show that their own interests are congruent with the welfare of their children (even if not necessarily with the children's stated preferences). Studying and ensuring child welfare against this background remains a highly challenging task.

Notes

1 Art. 3 (2), (3).
2 § 1356 BGB: „Die Ehegatten regeln die Haushaltsführung in gegenseitigem Einvernehmen. [. . .] Beide Ehegatten sind berechtigt, erwerbstätig zu sein." www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bgb/__1356.html
3 www.gesetze-im-internet.de/famfg/index.html
4 The cited regulation in Muslim personal law in India, which leaves young children in the immediate care of the mother, reflects a similar underlying assumption.
5 www.twohomes.org/icsp-board-of-directors/
6 Indeed, the authors of SIFF's open letter distance themselves from the principle of child welfare. For them, the prevention of the 'cruelty' of a father's loss of access to the child was the paramount concern, not the best interest of the child, which could easily be instrumentalised (Save Indian Family Foundation 2014).

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