RESEARCH

Hia Sen

‘Time-Out’ in the Land of Apu

Childhoods, Bildungsmoratorium and the Middle Classes of Urban West Bengal

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Foreword by Professor Dr. Hermann Schwengel

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Foreword

This book belongs to the genre of recent research which, without prejudice, builds intellectual bridges between the traditions of knowledge and education in what was once called the First World and what are today known as *emerging societies*. This building of bridges is not easy, it requires an empathy with intellectual traditions which are very different from each other, a social-structural analysis which is substantially regional, and the consideration of a time-frame which is essential for a sociological-anthropological study of this kind. One could not have otherwise imagined that the figure of the *Bildungsmoratorium*, which provoked much discussion decades ago in a particular context, would re-emerge in the new global social context.

In recent years, the consideration of 'other childhoods' in sociological research has increased and the influence of classical Orientalism has receded from this field. The interest in other models of childhood in the social sciences today is unquestionably greater than before. But this development, along with the earlier models for the differentiation of childhood and youth, which emerged in the Occident, has not necessarily reduced the 'otherness'. In Germany, the *Bildungsmoratorium* was extended from childhood to youth late in the twentieth century and was systematically connected to educational processes. Its conceptualization, which in this age of global, knowledge-driven economy appears to be downright romantic, is of immense relevance even in contemporary society as this study of children in middle class families in West Bengal shows.

The central themes of the book are childhood and social inequality, where crucial questions of the child's agency and the relationship of childhood experience to specific class situations, cultural and economic capital have been raised, the primary question of the research being whether it is possible to speak of a *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood in the context of urban West Bengal. Sociologists of childhood would be particularly interested in the narratives of 10-12 year old children and the generation which grew up in West Bengal in the 1950s - the counterpart of the post-war generation of children in Europe. Particularly remarkable is the underlying methodology. The centrality of children's narratives

as opposed to an adultist perspective is seldom found even now, particularly in studies on childood in the South Asian region.

A middle class culture of childhood in the region of Bengal has been explored in this book, emphasizing the history of the region and the emergence of the *bhadralok* in colonial Bengal, as well as the transformation in the region in recent decades after economic liberalization. It very adeptly weaves in both the worlds - that of Bengal with a very specific history and an ethos of education which are specific to the region, and the European-German discussion on childhood, in its startling application of the concept of the *Bildungsmoratorium* to childhoods in West Bengal. This study is not simply a research of an emerging society in India, but instead, it takes into account an educationally intensive region in West Bengal. Moreover, it eschews a premature syncretistic analysis, and instead, with courage and insight resists a global or a regional analysis. It is the tension between a global-universalistic and a region- and culture-specific analysis which is the greatest strength of this book.

Freiburg, March 2013

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Hia Sen

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1. Introduction

This book explores the culture of childhood among a section of the Indian middle class which has long been the subject of extensive academic debate owing to its close association with colonial rule. The interest in culturally conditioned diverse biographical phases of 'youth' or 'childhood' might have lost some of its shine decades after Margaret Mead's seminal work on Samoa but it has far from run out of steam in the contemporary social science research on childhood and children. The aim of this book however, is not to posit through another monograph, an alternate picture of childhood in a developing country as opposed to any standardized image of scholarized domestic childhood that readers from any other industrialized developed society might be assumed to entertain. It maps the everyday lives of children, especially the time spent out of school and the leisure culture of children in contemporary urban West Bengal. Instead of restricting itself to an analysis of children's culture or going by expert interviews with parents, teachers and pedagogues, the accounts of children have been sought and those of two older generations to explore the everyday lives of children and to assemble an idea of childhoods in Bengal[1] in the 1950s and 1970s. It has been a primary concern of this book to situate them within the social history of the Bengali middle class which, from the nineteenth century has a distinct identity particularly owing to its long and intense experience of colonial rule.

It is surprising that in the context of India, research on contemporary childhoods are often uninterested in how and to what extent the colonial experience might have sculpted the terrain on which childhoods in some regions are experienced or played out in contemporary Indian society. The negligence of social history, not just of colonial rule *per se* in sociological research on childhoods in India is glaring barring a few exceptions. Addressing this gap in the research on childhoods in India is one of the concerns of this book.

1 The term Bengal has been used in the book to refer to the region of Bengal in India. While after Independence, this corresponds to the State of West Bengal in contemporary India, the erstwhile province of Bengal before Partition, comprised of West Bengal as well as East Bengal, which is now Bangladesh .

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The book has two primary concerns. One is the need to develop a critical stance towards the quest for 'other' childhoods in contemporary social science research, especially in the developing countries. The appetite with which 'non western', 'non scholarized' childhoods have been sought out in developing countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan and India in the past decades has produced images and allegories of childhoods which would not be easy for the South Asian countries to shake off, and which for the greater part are uncontested.

The second impetus comes from a scepticism of some theoretical shifts in the contemporary research on childhood. The 'new' Childhood Research which emerged in the western academia speaks out in a different voice than the earlier, largely anthropology-tinged research on childhood and children that was dominant till the 1960s. It 'sees' children as actors rather than treating them as end products of child rearing and pedagogical practices, it is sensitive to different experiences of childhood, and most importantly it has scrubbed itself clean of the vocabulary of the earlier 'socialization' perspective, shifting the floodlights on new processes, spaces and concepts to theorize childhood. My engagement with this 'new' discourse, both in the German and Anglo-Saxon academia, gave rise to a degree of unease about this shift in which some earlier concepts or theories were quickly discarded or forgotten in the project of making the agency of child actors visible, perhaps all the more as they appeared to be potentially inimical to the concept of agency.

Engaging with the discourse on childhoods in South Asian countries and with the experience of the field work on which this book is based only exacerbated this feeling of unease. This second discourse was not particularly concerned with agency even if it spoke of a child's 'right' to childhood. It spoke a language of rights, poverty and a commonality of life situations of children in developing countries (Burra 2003), and though the issues it raised were pertinent, it was impossible to cut through this language and make children's voices be heard except as a drone in unison, beckoning to the UNICEF or charitable impulses of humanity to free them from their dreary Third Worldness. This book emerged partly out of this disquietude.

Childhoods in Bengal: Past and Present

In November 2011, on the occasion of Children's Day[2] a Kolkata based weekly brought out an edition themed 'Talent Hunt'. The issue, as suggested by the title, addresses the growing phenomenon of televised talent-hunts in West Bengal. The 'hunt' refers not to teen idol contests, but to the shows which ferreted out artistic

2 The birthday of the first Prime Minister of Independent India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on the 14th of November is celebrated nationwide as Children's Day.

talents and showmanship among children as young as three. The contributors to the issue were prominent figures of West Bengal's intelligentsia, whose erudition and social-criticism have been the hallmark of Bengal's[3] middle class culture from the time of the colonial administration. Most of the articles deplored the loss of 'purity' of childhood in present times and the declining 'taste' of the Bengali middle class. The criticism was also directed against the shameful avarice of the parents, ready to trade the 'childhood' of their offspring for brassy fame. One particular dance show for children drew the ire of the intelligentsia on account of the sexually implicit gestures that little girls were taught on the pretext of art', serving even the 'godly innocence of children' in eroticized form. One of the writers in this issue makes an impassioned plea for protecting the purity of childhoods:

'Would it not have been right to judge children with dance forms befitting children? Should they become disco dancers at five or six? It is not difficult to guess the philosophy of parents who at the hint of talent in their children groom them right from early childhood like race horses to be set loose on a field of competition' (Deb Sen 2011, p.12, Author's translation).

The tone of the argument bears a striking resemblance to the discussion about the eroticization of 'little girls' within the British media in the 1980s (Walkerdine 1997). Walkerdine explores the reception of Tony Basil's sexually explicit chart buster 'Oh Mickey' among six year old girls from working class families and the media debate on the children's show 'Minipops' drawing attention to the class character of this moral indignation about children in a popular culture which hustles them towards sexual precociousness. The disapproval of the media's sullying influence on childhood is therefore not exclusive to Bengal, the concern about five year olds losing their 'godly innocence' in contemporary Bengal or the disapproval aroused by Minipops in the United Kingdom where *The Observer* refers to the performance of little girls in the show as 'Kiddieporn' (cited in Walkerdine 1997) reflect how a particular sentiment about childhood is assaulted. If one probes the source of this indignation it would appear hardly accidental that the critics of the talent hunt who contributed to the special issue are not from the same social section from which the parents of these children come – the suburbs and the districts of West Bengal. Rather, the sentiments correspond to the social section from which the critics of this 'sullied childhood' come, the educated middle and upper middle classes of urban West Bengal, particularly of Kolkata. If the idea of a commercial culture is abhorrent to them, it is because this is an integral aspect of the self fashioning of this social section from the nineteenth century as has been extensively documented by social historians of Bengal. The presence of children from Bengali middle class households makes

3 Bengal here is used to refer to the state of West Bengal in India. However, when pre-Partition India is talked about, the region of undivided Bengal, comprising both the current Bangladesh and West Bengal is referred to, that together made up the province of Bengal in colonial India.

any assertion of *pecunia non olet* all the more weak among this section. That this commercial exploitation or showcasing of young people's talents for TRP ratings implies eroticization of childish mannerisms and gestures, added to their consternation.

This book is not about children and popular culture in Bengal nor about moral concerns related to childhood *per se*. The realm of lived experiences of childhood in day to day affairs among those growing up or who have grown up in middle class families in contemporary West Bengal has been the subject of this book. While the middle classes of India have received considerable attention in the social sciences particularly after the economic liberalization, and domestic life of the middle class in Bengal has been extensively researched by social historians, there has been very little work which connects the two in mapping the landscape of childhoods *in the present*.

The moral outrage of the intellectuals against the eroticization of children draws attention to a striking turn in the social landscape of Bengal. The horror evoked by little girls, imitating sexually explicit dance moves with ease or singing ribald songs from the cinema, might have otherwise belonged to the order of mundane moralizing or a high brow perspective of popular culture had it not been for Bengal's curious history with regard to childhood and sexuality. The outright condemnation of destroying the 'godly innocence of childhood' is made in the very region of India where young girls were possibly not strangers to sexual experience given that many high caste Hindu girls were married as children. This was the region where in the late nineteenth century an eleven year old child bride, Phulmoni, bled to death following sexual intercourse with her nineteen year old husband – an incident that drew pointed attention to the fate of many other young girls from high caste Hindu families and triggered a series of events leading to the introduction of the controversial Age of Consent Bill in 1891 by the colonial administration in India (Sinha 1995).

Although the practices of child marriage or existence of child widows are part of the specificity of the caste system – this incomprehensible difference between past and contemporary childhoods is not limited to India. The transformation of children's place in western societies has been researched extensively and in great detail, the work of the historian Ariès being of crucial significance. An oft quoted excerpt from Ariès's work is Montaigne's statement in the sixteenth century that he lost some of his children in their infancy, „not without regret but without great sorrow“ (Ariès 1973), a statement in striking contrast to the sentimentalization of the child and of child death in the following centuries. A comparable transformation of the notion of childhood is explored by Zelizer (1994), who, focusing on the context of the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, points to a similar indication of the new status of the child, in the moral outrage evoked by accidental deaths of children. As Zeilzer

points out, child deaths and the sentiments evoked by them are one of the many reflections of the shifts in the status of childhood in modern western societies. The moralization of childhood in public debate in these societies is manifest in a variety of themes, emerging from as well as reflecting the special status of the child and of childhood, replete with specific characteristics and images attributed to it, images which became more distinct in the twentieth century.

The reaction of the contributors of the weekly to little girls dancing suggestively and the discussion about the tainted 'innocence' of childhood in West Bengal point to a comparable process of the 'sacralization' (Zelizer 1994) of childhood in Bengal. This book however is not directly concerned with the process by which this sentimentalization of childhood has emerged, nor with the utility of childhood as a moral 'Chiffre'[4]. Rather it situates itself within a context that emerged in part owing to these two aspects – the predominant sentiments of the Bengali middle class about childhood and the lived experiences of those whose childhoods come closest to the well known scholarized, domesticated ideal.

'The Walled Garden' of Childhoods

Ariès, in his work documenting the gradual unfolding of the sentiment about childhood offers among other things a description of the behaviour of Louis the XIII as a child, in the records of Heroard, the physician of Henry IV (Ariès 1973). Heroard records details about the Dauphin showing his genitals to his nanny, parents and visitors, lifting his robes to show it, touching his genitals, as well as accounts of other adults touching it – all of it done in good humour. A crucial aspect in this description of Louis XIII's behaviour till the age of seven, that stands out and is intended by Ariès to stand out to his readers is the complete absence of any sentiment of modesty or propriety in the behaviour of the adults who encouraged him or witnessed the spectacle. It is this very lack of a sentiment, an attitude that is unquestioned in many contemporary societies, the perception of the inherent innocence of childhood that accentuates the difference between childhoods then and now and of societies within which these childhoods were circumscribed.

4 Bühler-Niederberger (2005) argues in *Macht der Unschuld: Das Kind als Chiffre* that the image of the 'innocence' of childhood was more than a romantic construct, but has served as a code, a *Chiffre* that is instrumentalized to serve different social interests. The reference to this constructed aspect of childhood, especially as a moral 'Chiffre' has been made in some of the following chapters in this work.

.„It was a common joke, repeated time and again, to say to him: 'Monsieur, you haven't got a cock'. Then 'he replied: „Hey, here it is!“ – laughing and lifting it up with one finger!. These jokes were not limited to the servants, or to brainless youths, or to women of easy virtue such as the King's mistress. The Queen, his mother, made the same sort of joke: 'The Queen, touching his cock, said: „Son, I am holding your spout“. Even more astonishing is this passage: 'He was undressed and Madame too [his sister], and they were placed naked in bed with the King, where they kissed and twittered and gave great amusement to the King. The King asked him: „Son, where is the Infanta's bundle?“ He showed it to him, saying: „There is no bone in it, Papa“. Then, as it was slightly distended, he added: „There is now, there is sometimes“.' „ (Ariès 1973:p.99).

Ariès plays with this contrast between the examples from the pre-seventeenth century period and the astonishment or disturbance they might stir in the 'modern' reader, to make his point. Aware of the possible revulsion felt by the reader he continues in this vein, addressing those situated in the present and far removed from the social context three and a half centuries later[5]. In doing so, he captures the essence of a past society which in its sheer absence of morality or perception of innocence of children is conspicuous in a present where this good humoured ribaldry in connection with children would not only be considered perverse but might well end in a lawsuit, a scandal and a social worker or a foster home for the child.

The perception of the childhood-adulthood distinction sharpened in the twentieth century in many social contexts, western and non-western. This notion was not articulated the same way in all societies as has been discussed later. But a basic framework was the same in many societies, particularly in parts of Europe and the United States, where the home and the school were the locus of an ideal childhood.

The family in medieval Europe which de Mause (1974) found to be abusive towards children or which in the Arièsian thesis did not have a special sensitivity towards children except for the very young, became transformed in the following centuries to a unit of affectionate care, upbringing and protection for the child from the outside world. The home became the nest (Robertson 1974). The school became increasingly significant as an institution for childhood, among more social sections than just the upper classes, and transcending perspectives of it being

5 Ariès contrasts the immodesty of the child Louis XIII with a more moralistic perception of childhood in some contexts in sixteenth century Europe where a greater sense of the 'indecent' existed where children were concerned. He gives the example of classics that were abridged among Protestants and Catholics in France and England from the end of the sixteenth century, until they were considered fit to be read by children (Ariès 1973,p.103). The reference to the awareness about moral purity of childhood in the Bengali context is similarly made by Mitra (1999) in *Shatabdir Shishu Shahitya* 1818-1960 (The Century's Children's Literature 1818-1960) in the context of abridged texts. Mitra says that in the era of Bengali children's literature that he calls the Vidyasagar era, after the social reformer and educationist Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, a number of classics from Hindi and Sanskrit, such as the *Betalpachisi* were abridged, and obscene phrases were removed in the versions made for children from 1857 onwards (Mitra 1999, p.58).

formidable or even 'jolly good fun', became by the twentieth century, unquestionably a significant space for childhood. The sentiment that children were 'different' and that childhood was a significant phase of life, separate from adulthood, has been far from a singular, uniformly articulated one, varying across and within historical and cultural contexts.

A historical perspective on childhoods in the Indian context is largely absent. But the image of childhoods in the past which can be gleaned from different sources hint at points of comparison between the trajectory of childhoods in the western and Indian social contexts. In his monograph *The Remembered Village* the anthropologist Srinivas describes an incident of a cow being mated glimpsed from his balcony, which to his surprise, took place in front of children and women.

> „I must recall here that there were open fields behind the Bullock House, less than thirty yards from Gudi Street. But apparently it had occurred to no one to take advantage of the quiet of the fields. The bull might have been more forthcoming in the lonely field than in a busy street. Again, no one seemed to think that it was not proper or aesthetic to arrange for the serving of a cow at a place frequented by women and children. I could not help wondering that no one seemed to view the incident as anything except ordinary“ (Srinivas 1980, p.148)

His commentary shows the extent to which the separation of children from the 'improper' was deeply ingrained among some sections of Indians in the twentieth century. Describing the mating which took place on a street facing a post office, Srinivas makes no disguise of the fact that he was perturbed that children gathered around to 'watch the fun' and that 'it occurred to no elder to shoo them off'. The explicit description is deliberately unsparing to heighten the contrast with what is unquestionably 'normal' in a style which is similar to Ariès'.

A telling imagery of 'modern childhood' is that of the 'garden of childhood'. The educationist Holt, in a critique of the excessive structuring of modern childhood uses the image of the 'walled garden' where, buttressed by the notion that children need to be protected from the harshness of the outside world until they are strong, many children are fenced in, within a protective space that keeps them captive. The garden becomes a prison (Holt 1974).

In the Indian context it is more difficult to determine the emergence of such partition being set up between children and the 'outside world'. One reason for this is the absence of sufficient historical data. The second reason is the existence of starkly different social and cultural contexts within India, which make it impossible to speak of the emergence of or even the lack of pedagogized 'walled gardens' of a singular 'Indian' childhood. In contemporary India, there exists a uniform system of schooling – regardless of the different experiences of schooling – whereby children of a certain age must enter school, appear for school final exams at a particular age. In addition, the emergence of a growing 'children's media' as well as popular culture aimed at particular age-groups consolidate and add

to a more distinct notion of childhood. At the same time, the different parts of India, owing to their diverse social customs – especially specific caste practices, their specific historical contexts – particularly their varied experiences of the Raj, and of Independence[6] and their different relations to contemporary economic transformations – offer different contexts in which childhoods are embedded in India.

Glimpses of past childhoods in Bengal are available from the works of social historians and from autobiographies and biographies. Even if the time when the notion of 'protected' childhood emerged cannot be ascertained, one thing is clear: the 'walls' of the garden were built selectively around specific groups of children than for the majority of people. If a greater number of groups have been included within the walled garden in contemporary Bengal, those who remain on the other side are prominent by their very exclusion.

Historical documentation of the public sphere debate surrounding the controversial Age of Consent Act of the late nineteenth century draws attention to one of the many ways in which the childhood of girls in contemporary West Bengal is a sharp break from the past, as opposed to the continuity in the pattern of childhood of boys. It was not uncommon for girls below the age of 15 to be married and enter motherhood well into the early twentieth century. The death of 11 year old Phulmoni triggered a fierce battle of morals and reasoning between nationalists, social reformers, colonial administrators about the age of cohabitation, consummation of marriage in the case of child brides, the social practice of *kulinism* among a section of Brahmins in Bengal. The discussion surrounding the Phulmoni incident or the Rukhmabai trial, as well as diaries and autobiographies by a few women from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century such as those by Rassundari Devi (Sarkar 1987), or Haimabati Sen (Sen, Forbes and Raychaudhuri 2000) attest to a different past of the childhoods of girls, especially from landowning upper caste families where caste practices often meant early marriage, sexual experience in one's pre or early teens as well as the early widowhood for many children.

The wall is also partial in contemporary India, where differences in social and economic positions mean that the protected, domesticated childhood is not becoming standardized across different sections of the society, but one which despite its gradual filtering through different social sections, remains out of bounds or even unthinkable for those from some of the lowest sections of society. The shocked commentary of the anthropologist who spent his own childhood in South India, or the distaste with which the Bengali intellectual speaks about tal-

6 A historical event that left its scar on freshly Independent India was the Partition. Two regions of India, the province of Bengal and that of the Punjab were most affected by the carving out of Pakistan, in the massive riots at the borders, where millions of lives were lost, the mass migration that occurred on both sides of the borders, and in the trauma and memories of leaving one's homeland behind, in what was to become, almost overnight, another country.

ent hunts show how diverse childhoods are even within the same historical and regional contexts, owing to social and economic inequalities. Yet, as Balagopalan (2011) points out, this difference is rarely contextualized, producing an image of a uniform 'Third World' childhood, whose difference even if respected, becomes an epitome of 'otherness' – of interest because of its very pathos.

The image of pedagogized, 'protected' childhood has become dominant to the extent that other forms of children's lives appear less of childhoods in comparison and lose their dignity (Zinnecker 1995, Balagopalan 2008, Boyden 2003). This standardization of a particular model of childhood has been criticized by Sociology and Social Anthropology which emphasize the diversity of childhoods as well as the need for contextualizing them socially and historically. While this has whet the appetite for different conceptualizations and locales of childhood in sociological and social-anthropological research and in principle heightened their sensitivity towards difference, it has also meant that contemporary research has in this spirit of seeking 'diversity' kept an eye out for locales other than the family and school, an effort which often results in an emphasis on children in the 'wrong place' (James, Jenks & Prout 1998,p.37) – the factory, in situations of armed conflict, the brothel, to name a few.

The formulation of childhood as a subject of social science research in India is to a great extent concerned with arguments of the 'wrong place' variety. As Nieuwenhuys says:

> „Constructing Indian childhood into a series of fundable 'issues' such as 'child labour' and 'street children' did little to undo the colonial imagination of India as a country lacking a proper notion of childhood. The issues cast children's lifeworlds in a series of binaries that divide their childhood into what is undesirable and therefore must be addressed and rectified and what is not and can therefore be ignored. Apart from its overly negative overtones, issue-oriented research submerges and marginalizes the everyday life of the vast majority, with the result that 'solutions' still hinge on the belief that Indian childhood is either non-existent or at most in such a distressed state as to need urgent intervention“ (Nieuwenhuys 2009, p. 148).

The different contexts in which Indian childhoods are not only embedded in society but also in which they become subjects of discussion – gender, caste, religion, poverty, untouchability – have significant theoretical implications, making them seem incommensurable with some of the main theoretical approaches used in the Sociology of Childhood. Referring to the apparent break between research areas and the 'new' paradigm of the Sociology of Childhood, Balagopalan says that in the Indian context „biological immaturity has seldom implied a passive role for children or signalled a denial of their agency: Given this context, concerns around privileging children's agency assume a different tenor and poses for Indian social sciences a set of different theoretical challenges“(Balagopalan 2011, p. 295).

The book attempts to situate itself between this gap, focusing on the everyday lives of children in a similar space as their counterparts in academic research in the western context – namely the home, the school, and in leisure culture.

The Bengali Bhadralok and the Romantic Imagery of Childhood

The Indian middle class has been subject to particular styles of portrayal in the social sciences. The colonial administration is a dominant theme in studies which historicize the contemporary middle classes (Joshi 2001, Joshi 2010, Roy 1993) The shift in the relationship between India and the British from trade relations with the East India Company in the 17th century to the establishment of a colonial administration meant structural changes with significant implications for India. The creation of a special social strata to aid the colonial administration who would be 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in words, and in intellect' (Macaulay cited in Barry 1966) changed the social landscape in different part of India, especially in the administrative centres of colonial rule.

The association with the colonial administration has put a stamp on the Indian middle classes both in terms of their self-fashioning as well as their representation in academia as cleft creatures caught between traditional caste practices, religious sentiments and the lure of a 'modernity' that was essentially foreign, that tempered tastes, practices and clothing, and also introduced a new language and new values associated with it. In recent years another kind of portrayal of the middle classes is noticed – that is celebrated by the media and also emphasized in the social sciences in the context of globalization. The image which is forged is that of the 'Indian middle class' in singular, an example of glocalization in its textured amalgam of Hindu festivals and cosmopolitanism (Brosius 2010), caste based arranged marriages and an MTV culture. This imagery, even if it heightens the peculiarity of cultural modernization of a South Asian people, puts the 'Indian middle class' at par with middle classes across the world, conceptualizing the possibility of a global middle class, based on a common consumption culture and conditions of a global economy. Although commonalities between middle classes in the different regions of India cannot be denied, stretching the limits of a generic 'middle classness' based on parameters of consumption and income causes one to lose perspective of regional histories, thereby losing its efficacy as an analytical category.

Notwithstanding the appeal of a transnational middle-classness, sociologists have sometimes located the emergence of a particular social strata or class-fraction within a specific historical and political context, for example the emergence

of the *cadres* in France in the 1930s (Boltanski 1987). This book too stems in part from a conviction that contemporary middle classes in their practices, sentiments and the elements of their self-images can only be understood through a historical perspective which takes into account the form and spirit of their predecessors and the conditions in which they emerged. From this perspective it explores a specific form of childhood among a social section with a heritage that is extensively documented, that of the Hindu Bengali *bhadralok*, whose legacy could be traced back to the nineteenth century.

The social reform movements of nineteenth century Bengal, spearheaded by the Bengali gentry had in many ways forged the parameters of the 'ideal Bengali childhood' which formed the blueprint of children's lives even a century and a half after. The section associated with the *Bramho Samaj* criticized many practices of the Hindu tradition, particularly the practices of early marriage of girls and the exclusion of girls from school education. The emergence of children's literature as early as the nineteenth century and the sentiment that felt the need for educational and leisure activities befitting children – were also possible because of this specific middle class. Documenting the history of children's literature in Bengal from 1818 to 1960, Mitra points to the significant role played by the Calcutta School Book Society[7] and the missionaries in Srirampore[8] in the printing of mostly textbooks for children. From the middle of the nineteenth century, particularly with the efforts of Vidyasagar, literature for children in the Bengali language reached a new point, moving beyond the moralizing or informative writings for children in the earlier phase (Mitra 1999). The ideals and efforts of the nineteenth and twentieth century Bengali *bhadralok* are in effect integral to the brick and mortar of contemporary middle class childhoods.

The colonial context of Bengal generated some dominant motifs reflecting the bourgeois sentiments about childhood. The idealization of childhood with an emphasis on innocence was not exclusive to the middle class or upper middle classes of Bengal. One need only to look at the yearning with which the romantic poets of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe such as the Schlegel brothers, Rousseau, Schiller and Hölderlin wrote about childhood (Baader 1996), where one's younger days were like an Eden left behind. But the icon of childhood in nineteenth and twentieth century Bengal, in addition to its idealization of innocence and nature, was crafted out of the experience of imperial rule and the socio-economic changes in urban and rural regions as much as out of the anxieties and fantasies of a precarious social stratum in Bengal.

7 The Calcutta School Book Society was set up in 1818 in Calcutta with the aim of creating text books and disseminating education in Bengal. According to Mitra (1999), the organization had European and Indian members.

8 Situated in the Hooghly district of current West Bengal, the town of Srirampore was the erstwhile Danish colony where missionaries set up a printing press, from which most of the books of the Calcutta Schoolbook Society were printed.

A reflection of these elements are found in the figure of Apu[9], whose portrayal in print and film captures the ethos and contradictions of middle class sentiments. The twelve year old boy Apu, short for Apurba in the novel *Pather Panchali* [10](English translation:Song of the Road) has an allegorical status, emphasising not just the ideals of innocence and an untainted childhood in the countryside, the figure also draws attention to the predicaments of the educated, rural, upper caste Bengalis in the early twentieth century (Bandopadhyay 1969). Apu's wide eyed innocence is not the only aspect that makes his figure iconic. The image of a pastoral childhood in a Brahmin family of dwindling means, that haunted following generations of Bengalis, has a tripartite significance as a symbol of Bengali middle class childhood[11]. The upper caste family's declining poverty in a context where traditional education had started to lose its standing to English education (Chatterji 2002); Apu's dreamy boyishness and intelligence, as well as the special position he occupied in his family on account of being the son which emphasized his childhood more than that of his elder sister Durga's – contributed to the motif of an essential Bengali respectability. Second, the idyllic pastoral background of Apu's childhood is itself associated with the romanticism of the early twentieth century Bengali middle class that was greatly urban in character (Chakrabarty 1996, 2004). A third aspect of the significance of Apu's symbolic status is associated with his creators – Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay, the author of *Pather Panchali* who was educated at Ripon College and worked as a teacher and clerk, and the film-maker Satyajit Ray[12] who created the trilogy of films tracing Apu's growth into manhood to his rejection of family life. The iconic status of Apu, therefore derives not just from any sentiments about the pristine forests of childhood, but also from the association with the predicaments of re-

9 Baader (1996) in *Die romantische Idee des Kindes und der Kindheit* gives a compelling and detailed account of the poesie and the poignancy in the imagery of childhood in Europe by the early romantics, particularly in the works of Schlegel and Novalis. Though it arose in a different context than the romantic imagination of Apu's childhood in Bengal, her work emphasizes the aspect of paradise lost in such romantic imagery of childhood.

10 The novel written by Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay was published in 1929 and captured the life of a rural Brahmin Bengali family, where Apu the son of a respectable but poor Bengali priest, was sent to Kolkata for an English education.

11 A romanticization of the pastoral child or the 'country' child is also found in Europe. Heidi, the character created by Swiss author Johanna Spyri in the late nineteenth century is one of the most celebrated examples of a romantic image of 'country childhood'. Romantic imageries of childhood are often tied to other issues, such as those of national or cultural identity, as was Heidi's. Apu, in this sense exemplifies romantic Bengali thinking of the nineteenth century, but not simply because of his pastoral childhood, but also because of what his his two creators (Bandopadhyay and Ray) in print and film stood for, to the educated Bengali middle class.

12 Ray himself came from a family that was renowned for some of the most prominent intellectuals of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal. The family was incidentally also known for its association with children's literature, especially in the founding of the children's magazine *Sandesh* (Sweet) by Ray's grandfather Upendrakishore Raychowdhury in 1913.

spectable people who are poor but educated and upper caste. The fictional treatment of the rural innocent boy by his intellectual and evidently urban 'fathers' in literature and film, strengthens the appeal of Apu as an apparition fed by *Bhadralok* fantasies.

The book is based largely on the everyday lives of children from urban middle class families in West Bengal, and to some extent on the accounts of two older cohorts, those who grew up in the 1950s, and the 1970s about their childhoods. The contemporary generation of children in their everyday lives between school, dance lessons, maneuevering through the traffic of Kolkata are in some ways far removed from the idyllic pastoral trope of *bhadralok* childhood that Apu stands for. Neither are the social and economic contexts in contemporary West Bengal comparable to that of the small village portrayed in Bandopadhyay's novel. But if the children of this study who join their counterparts in other societies in a scholarized, domesticated, pedagogized childhood represent one aspect of the 'time-out' or the 'walled garden' of childhood, standing at the other end where the distinctiveness of childhood is less pronounced and more gendered, is the iconic childhood of Apu, carrying the markers of Bengali middle class respectability from another period.

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The choice of West Bengal as a context of research was primarily because of the region's history of being one of the most important sites of the colonial experiment with education. The emergence of a distinctive middle class with a high emphasis on education and culture from the nineteenth century (Bhattacharya 2005) and remnants of this middle class culture in contemporary West Bengal which Chatterjee (1985) refers to as the 'fruits of Macaulay's poison tree' make it a significant context for the study of the *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood. This is not to make an argument that Bengal is the only or an unique example of protected, and scholarized childhood. But given the diversities within India, in the contemporary social context as well as in its experience of the colonial rule, one cannot on any account talk about 'Indian' childhood'.

In the industrialized societies the academic discourse has witnessed a shift from the discovery of childhood to its disappearance (Elkind 1981, Postman 1994). Though differently articulated and often critiquing the hurried child thesis, childhood researchers in the last two decades have pointed out a tendency among the middle classes in different social-cultural contexts to engage their children in 'enrichment activities and an increased emphasis on education (Ball,Vincent, Kemp, Pietikainen 2004; Ball & Vincent 2007; Donner 2008, Naftali 2010, Vincent & Ball 2007, Zinnecker 1995), a tendency manifest in the increasing number of after-school lessons, the emergence of 'leisure careers' (Zinnecker 1995) and as a consequence, the gradual disappearance of 'spontaneous'

play from the lives of children coming from urban middle class, lower middle-class backgrounds. Lamenting the erosion of innocent childhood is not the objective of these works, their focus being on the influence of class background, habitus and cultural capital on children's education. At the same time, all the studies indicate some patterns within the middle class, with respect to child-rearing or stances on childhood, that have, – judging by writings in the last few years – become comparable if not common to middle classes across western and non-western contexts.

This book explores the everyday lives of those whose childhoods approximate this standard, within a specific cultural context in India, – the middle classes in urban West Bengal. Following a conceptual outline that was developed to understand the phenomenon of extended and pedagogized youth and later on childhood in the erstwhile West Germany from the 1980s, the concept of the *Bildungsmoratorium* or childhood as a form of 'time out' from adult experiences and responsibilities developed by the educationist Zinnecker has been explored to understand the culture of childhood in Bengal. However, the emphasis on the 'moratorium' or the 'time out' does not imply an understanding of pedagogized middle class childhood as an idyllic childhood, nor the belief that the *Bildungsmoratorium* warrants an impeccable protection from adult life. In the face of the increased 'leisure stress', school work and the role of children as consumers, the question can be raised if pedagogized childhoods can be conceptualized at all as a 'moratorium'. As many contemporary studies on 'modern' middle class childhoods draw attention to the precarious and paradoxical character of 'adult' 'child' distinctions, especially in the context of the media consumption of children[13] – the present study also acknowledges that an image of a 'time out' does not translate into a strict fencing in of childhood from every threat to its sacred status. Rather, the 'time out' can be outlined at two levels – at the conceptual level, which is also not without its share of paradoxes, and at the level of everyday experiences of children. It is the intersection of the two that is the focus of this study, the lived experiences of childhood in a context that within and outside the family is influenced by an ideal of a 'time out' from adult life.

The 'new' paradigm of Childhood Studies emerged in the 1990s as a challenge to the earlier theories of socialization which were interested in children

13 The issue of children's media consumption and how it questions the conventional understanding of the 'distinctive' childhood has been discussed by some of the contributors in The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies (Qvortrup, Corsaro, and Honig 2009). While Cook (2009) talks about 'changed childhoods' in view of children's consumption of media, Buckingham (2009) focusing on children's television viewing and Drotner (2009) on the subject of children's consumption of digital media, particularly gaming, show how earlier understandings of childhood and of children need to be redefined in a context where children are economically significant in their role as consumers, and also consume media that is not specifically in keeping with the image of the 'protected' childhood.

principally as end products of the socialization process. The key assumptions of this 'new' Childhood Research and the debates in recent years in the Anglo Saxon and German academia about striking a balance between the agency centric approach and the socialization theories have been discussed in Chapter 2. The book situates itself within this 'new' sociological perspective on childhood but at the same time is wary of some of its theoretical and methodological implications. There is an underlying politics to each of the paradigms of Childhood Research, which cannot be ignored. There have been a few concepts which came in and went out of fashion in the Sociology of Childhood and in Social Pedagogy owing to an allegiance with one or other of the paradigms. The notion of the *Bildungsmoratorium* which emerged in German academia in the 1990s was among them and has been central to the study. Its emergence and its implications have been outlined in this chapter.

The concept of childhood as a *Bildungsmoratorium*, as well as the 'new' paradigm of Childhood Research have been hitherto applied in the context of a western industrialized society. Exploring children's everyday lives in West Bengal through their lens therefore begs a reconceptualization. The implications of applying the concept or the theoretical approach of the 'new' Childhood Research in the context of Bengal has been outlined in Chapter 3.

The study owes its framework to the *Projekt Bildungsmoratorium* (1994) and *Kindheit im Siegerland* (1991) – both projects of the University Gesamthochschule of Siegen. In view of the specific focus of this study some of the basic ideas have been borrowed in developing interview schedules and in conceptualizing the research methods. The methodological aspects of the study have been discussed in Chapter 4. Furthermore the different approaches of interviewing children about their everyday lives and listening to narratives of older generations about their childhoods have been addressed in this chapter.

The empirical research was conducted following some of the basic aspects of Zinnecker's concept of childhood as a *Bildungsmoratorium*. Although education is the key feature of contemporary pedagogized childhoods, it is not uniformly experienced nor are different systems and meanings of education uniform. Researchers of education have sometimes emphasized the existence of different 'educational regimes' (Jeffrey & Jeffrey 2005). As the study focuses on the historical specificity of Bengali middle class childhood, the historical literature about Bengal's specific social context of education has been discussed in Chapter 5 as a background. Narrative interviews on the theme of education and its significance of childhood have also been discussed in this chapter to capture the spirit of the scholarized childhood in Bengal.

'Leisure activities' are a key feature of contemporary childhoods. Chapter 6 and 7 are about different aspects of this leisure culture, Chapter 6 focusing primarily on spatial aspects and their changes in the three generations and the

practice of 'play' among children. Chapter 7 looks at 'leisure careers' or extra curricular classes and questions of 'cultural heritage' and explores patterns of uniformity and divergence across generation, family backgrounds and gender.
The 'leisure' that is the hallmark of 'modern' childhood does not just consist in sports or after-school lessons. Cultural artefacts such as clothes and books as well as an emerging media culture of consumption make up the 'children's culture'. Chapter 8 looks at the changing meanings of some of these insignia of Bengali childhood.

The *Bildungsmoratorium* is essentially a concept about transforming childhoods, implying a 'time out' as a societal shift in a context where a similar expression of differentiation of biological phases did not exist before. In Chapter 9 the perspectives of the older cohorts on transformation of childhood have been discussed to understand some of the basic elements of self-perceptions about childhood of those who grew up in the 1950s and 1980s. The use of the word 'generation' is made in this sense, to refer to the cohorts who collectively experienced childhood in the 1950s or the 1970s and not in the context of 'generational order' in contemporary Anglo-Saxon and German debates (Honig 2009b; Alanen 1994; Hengst 2009). The role of memory of the preceding generations, the dialectical relationship of experience and their relationship with the lived experience of the contemporary generation of children have been examined in Chapter 10.

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Though the study is based on empirical research chiefly in the form of narrative interviews with children and two older cohorts, it keeps returning to some certain theoretical questions at several points of the study, and not just in the formulation of its theoretical framework. The question of 'agency' is one of them. The relationship between children and agency is a fragile one in social science research. Haunted by the conspicuous one-sidedness of the socialization theories which portrayed children as 'passive receptacles' of adult socialization strategies, the 'new' paradigm of childhood research and the contemporary sociological perspective of childhood in both the Anglo-Saxon and German debates have become especially aware of the need to bring questions of children's 'agency' to the fore. Empirical research focusing on this aspect, although not vast, has in the last two and a half decades provided valuable glimpses of children's agency. An example of such a study that is startling in its rich details and moving in its perceptions, is that by Bluebond-Langner based on her ethnographic research of dying children in a private hospital (Bluebond-Langner 1980). One of the aspects that comes across in Bluebond-Langner's work is how children make sense of death – their own imminent end and that of fellow children despite the withheld communication from parents and caregivers on the subject.

The children in this study inhabit a different context than those in Bluebond-Langner's research. In a study exploring a protected childhood, one is already treading on grounds where socialization theories might rush forth and wrap themselves around the representation of the children, choking out any hint of agency. When children talk about their everyday schedules of school, tuitions, television, dance classes, reading books before going to bed – can one nevertheless read signs of 'agency' into such accounts? Are not lived experiences of pedagogized childhoods the other end of socialization string-pulling by adults? Finally, is the very situation of an agency-inclined study of children and childhoods within a social class not a self-destructive step, by subjugating children to a social structure which can, theoretically speaking, stifle even the agency of adults? This study has not attempted to 'resolve' these questions, if a 'resolution' is at all desirable. However, the realization has been significant that it would be misleading to equate the concept of agency with some image of applaudable resistance of children to adult manipulations or that of protest. Children who go to school, attend tuitions, turn off the television when scolded, would by this perspective be reduced to being 'without agency'. The agency that is of interest in the present study is rather in the children being considered a significant source of knowledge about their childhoods. In this sense, the focus on children's narratives of their everyday lives is a significant aspect of this study, and accounts by parents of parenting strategies have been therefore consciously avoided.

To go back to where one started from, the relations between certain pedagogic ideals and social class are strong, but are not always manifest in a straightforward manner. Also, 'class', 'media consumption', 'agency' are not impersonal, theoretical concepts – useful only on paper. There is a powerful emotional dimension in which social inequalities are lived by people, where television programmes might give children a space, however fictitious, to fantasize. In this context of everyday lives of real children, compliance to pedagogic strategies of adults or attraction towards television programmes is not a shamefaced lack of agency simply because it doesn't measure up to any hallowed 'counter culture' of children. Walkerdine combines all these aspects in her analysis of the popular culture of working class British children. Commenting on Willis' study of the 'counter culture' of resistance of working class boys (Willis 1977), she tries to locate the media consumption by the working class girls critiquing the 'rigid separation of the proto-radical sub-culture and the reactionary conformism' (Walkerdine 1997,pp.153-154). She says:

> „The girls use pop songs because they are glamorous and exciting, because they present a model of femininity which is far from the boring school girl, because they offer a promise of something else, something encapsulated by the words of 'Fame', that the little girls sing, 'Baby remember my name'. These girls struggle in a world full of apparently glamorous options to 'be' somebody and that is an adult sexual woman. Middle-class girls, as our research shows so clearly, do not

need to fantasize being somebody, they are told clearly at every turn that they already are: it is simply not a battle to be entered into“ (Walkerdine 1997, p.154).

Walkerdine's understanding of 'resistance' as well as her emphasis on the lived dimensions of social class are issues which have also been explored in this study of middle class childhood in urban West Bengal. But Walkerdine dismisses the fantasies and needs of 'middle class girls' very more easily as according to her they 'do not need to fantasize being somebody'. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that middle class children have for long been protagonists in academic research on childhoods in the United Kingdom and in the European academia, therefore a need is felt to put them in the background in order to make other children visible and audible. Or perhaps, middle class children in Britain really do not need to fantasize – an argument that is not entirely convincing. The current study can be seen as taking off from this point, drawing on the stereotypes, self perceptions, conflicts, practices and to some extent fantasies of children in West Bengal to understand the culture of middle class childhood.

That the middle class itself is not a uniform social section is a significant aspect in this study of childhood. A 'game of distinction' (Bourdieu 1996) is reflected in the practices and values of childhood not only between the different groups within the middle class, but also in the intentional attempts of sections of the middle class to distinguish themselves from the beliefs and sentiments of their previous generations.

In closing it might be said that the generational experiences of childhood that are passed down in the form of family stories or fiction are a significant aspect in the character of contemporary childhoods and in the everyday lives of children. In the talent hunt issue for instance, one of the contributors talks about the experiences of his generation and is less critical of the 'morally corrupt' media culture of childhood than the others who grew up three decades before him. He reflects that 'everything might not be such a rat race '. The cohort that grew up in the '90s have not been part of the study, owing to its scope – but in its heightened pedagogization and the conflicting influences of new cultural elements, particularly Bollywood films and non-British, non-Bengali comics – it was perhaps the first generation of children in post Independence Bengal who came of age in a society where the expectations of the previous generations, and the reality of their own worlds were most sharply at odds with each other. Instead of condemning talent hunt shows or the ugliness of parents overworking their children to learn 'obscene' dance forms, this particular contributor sees in this culture a space for escape that was denied to children from the middle class in his generation. Satirically, it speaks of the inability of those who grew up in this generation to mimic Hindi film actors or go on stage to dance to film songs or act. With a certain poignancy the piece is an illustration of how high the walls of the 'garden of childhood' can be, leaving its imprint on adulthood.

„I scream saying 'I cannot, I'm sorry' – my Baba has taught me that if you want to act for the theatre, do it with your own money, Ma has said 'What will come of writing poems, singing songs? The family needs your earnings. You have grown up, now earn'. Believe me, even I have wished that in the half time of my life an Amir Khan dressed as a joker[14] would enter – enter and stop everyone – and take me by the hand to a huge auditorium, where thousands of children are seated – from age four to sixteen, and where far away Mithunda will be sitting. I shall shout out on the stage, 'say D, say I, say S, say C, say O – Disco', and Mithunda will talk into the mike saying, 'Dance Bangla Dance'"(De 2011, p.24; author's translation).

The present study is neither a critique nor a eulogy of 'protected childhoods', rather it explores the way such childhoods were and are experienced by generations of children from a specific social section. What the comments on children's talent hunt shows point to is an intersection of dominant ideals of a pedagogized childhood and the experience of childhood. Though the ideal significantly affects the upbringing of children, shaping the experience of childhood to a great extent, for example removing children from the streets and putting them in the school or the playground, the way childhoods are actually lived, are not exact translations of this ideal. Similarly, the belief that a 'time out' from adult responsibilities or even adolescent experiences makes an 'ideal' childhood, a conviction that is usually specific to the educated middle classes, affects the everyday lives of children but is not articulated or lived in the same way. This intersection between a standard and lived experience of children of 10-12 years has been the main interest in this book.

While the interest in middle class children has been primarily responsible for this book, an equally important concern has been the politics underlying the theoretical shifts in Childhood Research. The forging of the concept of childhood as a *Bildungsmoratorium* in German academia in the 1990s, and its abrupt disappearance a decade after, following Zinnecker's illness were not a reflection of a capricious ebb and flow in sociological theory. It has been one of the primary objectives of this study to retrieve the concept which has some efficacy in the analysis of childhood in an Indian context – and not just for the sake of resurrecting it.

One of the central arguments of this book has been that a *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood can be identified in the context of urban Bengal from the accounts of the everyday lives of the children, given its specific history of educational and social reform movements from the nineteenth century, its economic and political background, and above all, of having a 'peculiar' middle class (Chatterjee 1985) that from its very origin in colonial Bengal, stood out in its relationship to education and in its pedagogic values. A related focus has been to identify a specific Bengali middle class culture of childhood based on this nature

14 This is a reference to the film *Taare Zameen Par* in which the art teacher, played by Amir Khan rescues the protagonist, a boy with dyslexia from the tyrannical regime of schools and parental attempts to bring him up 'right'.

of the *Bildungsmoratorium*, and to see if this culture is homogeneous or reflects the distinctions and shifts within the urban Bengali middle class.

The practices, values, artefacts and experiences that constitute the dominant middle class ideal of childhood in West Bengal thus form the context of this study. It is clear from the above mentioned quotation that an 'indulgent', education-centric childhood is not necessarily experienced by children as a soothing balm to all childish bruises and yearnings leaving no space for fantasies. Like the working class childhood Walkerdine talks about, middle class childhood produces its own genre of excitement, anxieties, exploits, disappointments, resistance and fantasies. Some of these have been explored in this book.

2. Growing Up Different: Childhoods and Social Inequalities

Childhood has for long been subject to various portrayals both within and outside academia. The association with innocence, godliness and being one with Nature for example, was powerful in the romantic tradition in west Europe in the works of poets and philosophers alike(Baader 1996). But each of these images have a deeper politics underlying them (Bühler-Niederberger 2005). Sociologists in recent years have analysed how the motif of the 'innocent' child was developed to support particular philosophies or agendas, the figure of Rousseau's *Èmile* – untainted, unfettered by excessive discipline, being a classic example (Tremp 2005).

From the early twentieth century, as children or childhood became more prominent in different fields of academic research, the development of a child became a predominant concern. This significance of childhood as a period of development produced specific images of the child, and inspired theoretical approaches to studying children and childhood especially in the areas of Social Pedagogy and Psychology. By the end of the twentieth century the concerns of Childhood Research had become very different with scholars being critical of the earlier 'developmental' approach. Proponents of this new approach redefined the significance of childhood as a topic of interest in itself and not for a future oriented interest in would-be-adults. This approach, became increasingly dominant in the English and non-English speaking academia in the western countries. Its proponents claimed the emergence of a 'new paradigm'[15] of childhood in the 1990s (James and Prout 2002). Two decades after its emergence, the glitter has worn off some of the core concepts of the 'new paradigm', and its former stance against socialization theories has softened to some extent. This is not to say that concepts such as the 'agency' of children have lost all theoretical value – far from

15 Ryan (2008) has criticized the claim that the turn in Childhood Research can be viewed as a paradigm shift in Kuhnian terms, especially because the contemporary approach uses some elements of the modern discourses of personhood, such as agency, in its arguments against the socialization theories of childhood.

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it. But it has been redefined over the years, as has the attitude of Childhood Research towards socialization theories. The present study borrows from some of the arguments of the 'new' sociological perspective, which is not the same as it was a decade ago. Moreover, it explores a social and cultural context that has not been discussed in the 'new' Sociological perspective which, despite the best of intentions has remained greatly inward looking, confining some themes specifically to childhood in the western industrialized societies.

The following sections look at some of the basic arguments of the contemporary Childhood Research, especially the cornerstone of the 'new' Childhood Sociology – that of 'agency', that are significant to the theoretical framework of the book.

2.1 Contextualizing Childhoods

The understanding of childhood as a biological phase and of children as a biological category was not the only understanding that was questioned in the social science research on childhood and children. The idea of a universal scholarized domesticated childhood was also challenged on account of being Eurocentric. The proponents of the 'new' Sociology of Childhood draw attention to the heterogeneity in childhoods (Frønes 1994) and have proposed the use of 'childhoods' than talk about a single childhood (James and Prout 2002).

Social inequalities, particularly social classes have been perceived in many studies as determining the various experiences of childhood (Willis 1981, Walkerdine 2001, 1997; Bühler-Niederberger 2008). The discussion about class, although addressed to some extent in studies in the context of the United States of America, parts of western Europe or Britain, is markedly absent in the discussion on childhoods and children in developing countries. What is emphasized is a perception of the 'denial' of childhoods to ragged South Asian children working in factories, or who are not sent to school, creating an image of a particularly dominant 'other' to the western middle class ideal of childhood. This perturbing presence of other childhoods has moved policy makers and different organizations to 'help' these children and also led to a discussion where childhood has become a moral issue:

> „The “child-at-risk,” i.e. the street child and the child laborer, is a pervasive presence in post-liberalization India – not in the obvious sense of such children’s numerical proliferation in the cities, but in terms of their appearing as a new “subject” of a moral discourse of “saving childhoods.” This discourse produces certain images of reform aimed at normalizing these poor Third World children, who it views as having “lost their childhood,” through locating them within the spaces of a bourgeois childhood (Balagopalan 2008, p.267-268).

The domestic scholarized image of childhood becomes a yardstick in this context, a guide to how children from poor countries could be given a childhood. The image of the child working in the factory or on the streets in India or South America is a powerful opponent of the image of the western urban middle class childhood, but the counter-posing of one image by another single-handedly bulldozes innumerable cultural, historical and political contexts that impede an understanding of how different childhoods are possible. In the western context, excepting a few studies where the primary focus is on class, the middle class backgrounds of the children studied are usually implicit. Some studies of course highlight the lives of children from the working class, or compare working class with the middle class childhoods (Willis 1981, Walkerdine 2001). The ones where social inequalities are considered significant in children's lives, are mostly focused on educational practices or differences in educational performance between children from working class and middle class backgrounds. But in most discussions about childhoods, especially in developing countries, the focus of the studies are such that poverty and squalor appear to be contexts in themselves, making questions of regional difference, or other kinds of social inequality unnecessary (Burra in Burra & Weiner 2006).

Theoretical discussion as well as empirical research about 'childhoods' need to go beyond binaries of race – 'black' and 'white', 'western childhood' and 'Third World childhood', of scholarized protected childhood and that of children who are not in school. Nations appear to encompass the general contexts of different childhoods, but the dynamics of social inequalities and distinctions within nations or within societies within which children's everyday lives are inscribed are often overlooked.

A discussion centering social class or social inequality can in this context enrich studies on childhood and children. Focusing on class as one of the contexts in which childhood can be studied also reduces the difficulties in images of 'other childhoods' which usually take poverty, and nationality as principal criteria of difference. In the last one and a half decades, social inequalities, particularly inter and intra-class differences have increasingly become a focus in studies about children, although many of them are concerned with cultural reproduction and education. It is perhaps this emphasis on class that partly explains why the relation between class and childhood is relatively less explored in the 'new' Childhood Research. The emphasis on agency in the 'new' Childhood Research, and its critique of the socialization paradigm allows little room for a friendly relationship with a class perspective, given its structural overtones.

The 'new' Childhood Research has reached a point when it is confident enough in its convictions about the agency of children, to be able to take up the issue of class instead of being silent on the relationship between social class and child-

hood for fear of the child's agency being compromised. In the following sections, the theoretical approach of the present study has been outlined.

2.1.1 The 'New' Sociology of Childhood and the Adult Gaze

The contemporary Childhood Research developed primarily as a critique of previous theoretical approaches to childhood, in particular, the socialization paradigm that dominated the sociological perspective on childhood and children up until the 1970s, and extended to other social science disciplines such as anthropology. A basic tenet of the socialization paradigm was that children internalize social values through various processes and institutions of socialization. The process by which children became socialized and inducted into society has been diversely conceptualized, and the socialization paradigm is far from being a uniform one with a single approach. Some of the earliest influences of the socialization paradigm came from psychology, particularly in the early twentieth century. Notable among them are the works of the psychologists Piaget who offered a staged developmental theory about the intellectual development of the child (Piaget 1968) and Vygotsky, who focused on children's development through the internalization of culture (Vygotsky 1978). The question of the socialization of the child in keeping with the functionalist preoccupations of the development paradigm was a question of social order which was either maintained or disturbed, depending on the success of cultural appropriation of the 'asocial' child by the socializing forces.

The proponents of the 'new' paradigm in Childhood Research raised their voices against the socialization paradigm in its formulation of the child and of childhood as objects of research. The strongest criticism directed against the socialization paradigm, and one that has shaped the current theorizing in Childhood Research, is aimed at the fundamental pillars on which these theories stood – its dualisms. In the earlier socialization theories, childhood or children when considered objects of study, became significant for the processes by which children were appropriated by culture and moved from being 'incomplete' to 'complete' members of society. This dualism between 'child' and 'adult', 'incomplete' and 'complete', 'learner' and 'learned', has been severely called into question by researchers, increasingly since the 1990s, and a central project of the new paradigm has been to carve out a theoretical space where children are seen as social actors in their own right. The critique of the socialization theories is however far from being a uniform one. While those within the 'new' Sociology of Childhood as well as from other disciplines influenced by the new paradigm have

grown wary of the threat to the agency of children in posing arguments about socialization, it has not meant a complete rejection of the socialization paradigm. An example of this is Corsaro, who distinguishes two distinct models – a deterministic and a constructivist one within the socialization theories of the past (Corsaro 1997). Apart from the functionalist theories in the tradition of Parsons mentioned under deterministic ones, the theory of cultural reproduction by Bourdieu and Passeron is also seen by Corsaro as a deterministic model of socialization. The social psychological approaches of Piaget (1968) and Vygotsky (1978) are emphasized by him as constituting the constructivist model of socialization and outlining his own theoretical approach, that of 'interpretive reproduction', Corsaro draws from Vygotsky's approach to some extent by talking about children's contribution to culture as well as their internalization of culture thus leaving the agency of children relatively uncompromised (Corsaro 1997).

The rejection of the 'implicit binarism' (James and Prout 2002) between 'adult-child','complete-incomplete', 'social-asocial' has meant two primary assertions by the proponents of the 'new' paradigm. One of them, as discussed above, is the question of the child's agency that social science research has become more sensitive to. The second assertion, which is related to the question of agency is that of childhood as a subject of research that is significant in itself and not as a temporary period of interest as a preparatory phase preceding adulthood. The contemporary Childhood Research has addressed this concern in no uncertain terms, unambiguously stating its focus on children and childhood, as subjects in themselves and not secondary to or inspired primarily by an interest in children's 'development' into adults. Theoretically and empirically, this assertion has taken two main forms.One of these consists of drawing attention to a culture, created by children with its own set of meanings and experiences (Hirschfeld 2002). Researchers have, through empirical studies conducted in the areas of children's games, particularly role-playing (Eßer 2009), as well as children's engagement with media, highlighted children's agency and sometimes even pointed to the existence of distinct and alternative worlds created by children. The conceptualization of a children's culture is one of the strongest assertions of children's agency made in Childhood Studies. By focusing on children as active participants in society, as creators and actors, this approach upends the adultism in the earlier socialization theories where children's position in such theorizing has been compared to that of 'laboratory rats' (James and Prout 2002).

The assertion against socialization theories also takes the form of an assertion about childhood as a social structure (Hardman 2001; Qvortrup 2002; 2007 & 2009). This approach outlined considerably by Qvortrup, sees childhood as a permanent segment of the social structure even when groups of children enter and leave it across time (Qvortrup 2009). Qvortrup argues for the 'conceptual liberation' of children (Qvortrup 2002) and conceptualizes childhood as a 'perman-

ent form' than a transient biographical phase "which never disappears, even if its memebers change continuously, and even if it is historically varied" (Ibid p.74). Here the counter to the socialization paradigm is constituted in the emphasis on childhood as an enduring structure rather than a fleeting period or an imperative for 'development'. The question of children's agency is also addressed in this context by some. Corsaro's theoretical alternative to the socialization perspective, which he calls 'interpretive reproduction', offers a mediating position between seeing childhood as a part of the social structure, and the role of children as social actors. In this framework the significance of social structures on childhood and children's lives is emphasized, without losing perspective of the child's agency:

> „The term *reproduction* captures the idea that children are not simply internalizing society and culture, but are actively *contributing to cultural production and change*. The term also implies that children are, by their very participation in society, *constrained by the existing social structure and by social reproduction*. That is, children and their childhoods are affected by the societies and cultures of which they are members. These societies and cultures have, in turn, been shaped and affected by processes of historical change“ (Corsaro 1997, p.18).

In this perspective it is possible to see children as actors in their own world, with meanings attributed to things that are different from an adult perspective. However, this is done within a broader social context with a macroperspective of not just social structures but also historical processes. Significantly, the children's contribution to culture is not subsumed in this perspective of social structure and historical processes which shape them, rather children are also identified as actively contributing to this cultural production.

The much rebutted socialization paradigm nevertheless casts a long shadow on the contemporary theoretical space cleared out by the proponents of the new paradigm. While the perspective of a children's culture gives voice to children, the second aspect, in which childhood or children's lives are studied within the context of the broader social structure, which includes the school, the family, the State and historical and global cultural processes opens it up to the danger of drowning the child's voice.The contemporary Childhood Research is perpetually wary of any such instance of 'symbolic' or 'conceptual violence' done to the child, that might plunge it into gross adultism. The boundaries around theorizing on childhood and children stem from this horror of adultism. This is not just true of the academic debate in Childhood Studies in the Anglo-Saxon debate, but is also reflected in the academic debate in other contexts, of which the debate in the German speaking academia is a significant example.

A key concept that has emerged in the social science debate on childhood in the last two decades, is that of generational relations. Alanen developed the idea of generational order in childhood comparable to that of the idea of gender in the social sciences (Alanen 1994). Different understandings of generation – both familial and non-familial have been used by different researchers, but its primary

significance in the 'new' sociological perspective is that it enables childhood to be empirically studied (Honig 2009; Närvanen & Näsman 2004). A significant influence on researchers like Alanen has been Mannheim's understanding of the collective experiences of a generation. In an agency centred perspective the concept of the generational order resolves the dichotomous understanding of 'adult' and 'child' and provides a context for understanding unequal childhoods alongside those of ethnicity and social milieu (Betz 2008).

If the adult gaze has been at the centre of criticism from proponents of the 'new' paradigm in the contemporary sociological perspective of childhood, it has also defined the line of ties between the 'new' Sociology of Childhood, other sociological traditions and the theoretical approaches of other disciplines. An exploration of some of these boundaries are also crucial for the development of new theoretical approaches to childhood, where an understanding of how the debate focusing on agency and criticizing 'dualism' can run up against approaches which are not particularly agency sensitive, leave alone child sensitive could offer a self-critical insight into the 'new paradigm' and open the way for reflexive theory building.

It is important to remember that two decades have passed since the emergence of the 'new' paradigm of childhood research. While the denaturalization of childhood, the agency of children continue to be some of the important themes in the contemporary Childhood Research, the theoretical approach of this interdisciplinary research area has moved beyond point blank criticism of the socialization approach and has grown increasingly self-reflective over the years, turning its gaze inwards at some of the implications and intentions behind stances made within itself in the past. Not the least significant is the role of other social science disciplines interested in childhood and children, that by actively engaging with the arguments of the new paradigm, and restructuring their own theoretical approaches have created the possibility of a more reflexive approach to the study of childhoods. Culture and class are two themes, often inextricably linked, which have invited enthusiasm as well as a measure of scepticism at different points of time, reflecting the different phases of the social science perspective on childhood that emerged in the 1990s. Arguing for childhood in connection with 'culture' as well as in the context of class, requires a discussion of how the new paradigm engages with these two themes. This has been done in the following sections.

2.1.2 Children, Agency and the Question of Culture

Childhood Research is far from alien to questions of cultural context. In fact, the idea at the very heart of contemporary social science research on children, – that childhood is a social and historical construct and not a biological given – makes childhood and children's lives a fecund disciplinary terrain for an ethnographic approach. As Levine points out, this cultural variability was the very attribute that some of the significant ethnographic studies from the anthropological tradition thrived on:

> „There would be no need for such descriptive accounts if childhood in ideal and practice were uniform across human populations and historical periods or if the developmental pathways for children were randomly distributed among humans. The ethnography of childhood,then, is based on the premise – constantly re-examined in empirical research – that the conditions and shape of childhood tend to vary in central tendency from one populationto another, are sensitive to population-specific contexts,and are not comprehensible without detailed knowledge of the socially and culturally organized contexts that give them meaning“ (Levine 2007,pp.247).

In the first half of the twentieth century, anthropological research on childhood returned to the question of culture several times, similar to how it approached other themes of economy or politics or social structure by focusing on the otherness of childhood, or children's position in different cultures, in comparison to that of the west. Mead's ethnographic study of children and adolescents in Samoa, Malinowski's observation of children of the Trobrianders were some of the earliest studies locating children in culture which emphasized their difference from the United States or Britain. The functionalist perspective that dominated the socialization paradigm, was also reflected in some of the anthropological research related to children in the 1950s and 1960s. The emphasis in such studies, echoing the sociological and social-psychological perspectives on children, was on 'child-rearing' practices in different cultures. Significant among them are the 'Six Cultures Studies' conducted by a group of American researchers in the 1960s, where a comparative framework was sought among six different cultures – one of which was the Rajput community of western India. The researchers used comparative scales in different aspects of child rearing such as maternal warmth, aggression training among others and also situated their findings in what they saw as dominant beliefs about children in these cultures (Minturn and Hitchcock 1966). This approach was also one that was primarily interested in how children were culturally inducted in 'other' societies, and if children in these studies were more visible than their counterparts in functionalist theories, they were yet to have a speaking part.

From the 1990s, the discussion about children and culture received a new turn –a discussion that was not confined to anthropology but was taken up by so-

ciology and social pedagogy, an engagement which opened up the contemporary theoretical space on childhood in the Anglo-Saxon as well as German debates.

Showing the agency centric approach of the 'new' paradigm, voices within the anthropological tradition emphasized the importance of anthropological studies on children and reconceptualized the relationship of children to culture in a novel way. Similar to the arguments raised in the 'new' Sociology of Childhood, critics accused the anthropological tradition of its adultism. As Hirschfeld says:

> „For cultural reproduction, overly generous appraisal of socialization is not only a function of *what* researchers look for but also *where* they look. On a widely accepted view, the appropriate environment in which to study cultural transmission/ acquisition is the one inhabited and controlled by adults, a strategy that makes sense if adults are the principle socializing agents. Accordingly, if it is assumed that adults create the cultural worlds into which children are inducted and that adults largely control the processes by which this happens, then attention to the adult world seems fitting. However, if the goal is to understand how children contribute to making culture, a more appropriate focus would be the arena in which children do most of their culture making: namely, in their lives with other children, what is sometimes called "children's culture“(Hirschfeld 2002,p.614).

The counter argument that was offered was not that of children's socialization into a culture, but of their creation of one. This was the emphasis on the 'hidden world' of children. The assertion was about a rich world of children's culture, or a 'children's world' created by children that anthropology would do well to explore (Hardman 2001, Hirschfeld 2002). A significant impulse to this argument came from a work by Iona and Peter Opie, published in 1959 that unwittingly became the fodder for the claim for later generations of anthropologists and other social science researchers about the existence of a culture that was exclusively for and by children. The Opies had in the 1950s, documented the existence of a rich oral tradition of children, based on conversations with schoolchildren from England, Scotland, Wales and a part of Dublin. The thrust of their argument was that rhymes and beliefs reflected in the lores of the schoolchildren could be traced back to as far as 400 years in England, sometimes parallels even being found in countries like Holland or Egypt. The children are characterized in this work as the keepers of a culture which is passed on from generation after generation of children, which adults are not a part of.

> "No matter how uncouth schoolchildren may outwardly appear, they remain tradition's warmest friends. Like the savage, they are the respecters, even venerators, of custom; and in their self-contained community their basic lore and language seems scarcely to alter from generation to generation. Boys continue to crack jokes that Swift collected from his friends in Queen Anne's time; they play tricks which lads used to play on each other in the heyday of Beau Brummel; they ask riddles which were posed when Henry VIII was a boy. Young girls continue to perform a magic feat (levitation) of which Pepys heard tell ('One of the strangest things I ever heard'); they hoard bus tickets and milk-bottle tops in distant memory of a love-lorn girl held to ransom by a tyrannical father; they learn to cure warts (and are successful in curing them) after the manner which Francis Bacon learnt when he was young. They call after the tearful the same jeer Charles Lamb recollected; they cry 'Halves!' for something found as Stuart children were accustomed to do; and they rebuke one of their number who seeks back a gift with a couplet used in

Shakespeare's day. They attempt, too, to learn their fortune from snails, nuts, and apple parings – divinations which the poet Gay described nearly two and a half centuries ago; they span wrists to know if someone loves them in the way that Southey used at school to tell if a boy was a bastard; and when they confide to each other that the Lord's Prayer said backwards will make Lucifer appear, they are perpetuating a story which was gossip in Elizabethan times" (Opie & Opie 1967, p.2).

This continuity and range of the beliefs and sayings reflected in the oral tradition – from burning a salt covered milk tooth to the practice of rubbing lard on a wart and then burying it to make the warts disappear – that can be traced back to even the childhood of Francis Bacon, has substantiated the 'exclusive children's culture' thesis. Hardman herself bases her arguments on the Opies' work although she criticizes their conceptualization of the child. Using Vygotski's perspective on children's language use, she examines the oral tradition of children documented by the Opies as well as her own observations at a playground to argue for a culture, reflected in the meanings, language use and practices of children, which begin „to appear at odds with any values which might be applied by a visitor“ (Hardman 2001, p.513). Premised on this idea of a culture which adults need to make sense of, the concept of a separate children's world not only represented the rejection of the previous images of the child as passive but it also reflected the dominant cause in the social science research on childhood –the championing of agency.

While the embracing of agency marked the 'new' paradigm of Childhood Research at one phase, translating into a criticism of the socialization paradigm, a critique was also directed against this 'new' tradition which cautioned against claims for children's agency leading to an exoticization of children's worlds. A particularly stimulating debate between the agency-centric approach and the socialization paradigm occurred in the German context, where the significance of Social Pedagogy and *Erziehungswissenschaft* possibly account for the liveliness of the debate, and the courage to open past wounds and look for answers.

The response in the field of Social Pedagogy and Education Research to the agency driven 'new paradigm' in Childhood Research typifies the German context. The 'paradigm-dispute' (*Paradigmenstreit*) (Zinnecker 1996b) that was addressed by researchers working on children from different disciplines such as Education, Family Studies, Psychology and Pedagogy in the 1990s, shortly after Prout and James' outline for a 'new paradigm' for the Sociology of Childhood appeared, is an indication of how the German social science context was shaken by the problem of representing children and childhood from a viewpoint that was inescapably an adult one, even if not adultist (Honig, Leu, Nissen 1996; Honig 2009). In disciplines such as Social Pedagogy, in which the dualism and the transition from 'being' to 'becoming' were key areas, the approach of the new Sociology of Childhood appeared irreconcilable. Social Pedagogy was in this respect almost the 'anti-thesis' with its emphasis on the forms of knowledge and

skills a child can benefit from in the future. At the same time amidst the ongoing debate, several paths have been suggested to overcome the dualism inherent in socialization theory for the construction of new theories in Childhood Research. While many childhood researchers in contemporary research agree that children's agency should be taken into account instead of studying children as developmental or educational projects, some scholars have also called for a deconstruction of socialization theory and asserted a need to redefine it by focusing on its flaws rather than rejecting it entirely (Zinnecker 1996b). Some emphasize the need to redefine aspects of Social Pedagogic theories and incorporate the focus on children's agency in them, not simply as a charitable act of balancing out the past adultism, but as a possible route of reflexive theory construction and empirical research (Eßer 2009).

This shift, in the contemporary theorizing on children and childhood from focusing on agency to a reformulation of the methodologies of socialization theory, has carved out a space won after much theoretical sparring where children in the context of culture can be talked about, where agency is acknowledged along with aspects of structure. Anthropology for example, has redefined its position on children and culture, and in the contemporary research on childhood the emphasis is not on perceiving children as passive receptacles nor is an exclusive children's culture championed. Instead, there is a marked inclination towards confronting problems of theorizing children, childhoods and methods of studying them. The new position is summed up by Bluebond-Langner and Korbin.

> „In the past few decades, anthropologists have both asserted and clearly documented children's agency, singly and in groups, in a number of situations. What is less clear is the degree of agency, the impact of the agency, let alone the nature of that agency – points that could also be made about the agency of adults – singly or in groups. Children, like adults, do not escape structural constraints. Adults' decisions and actions, be it about taking up arms or making decisions about care and treatment or the like, also are affected by emotional, social, and political pressure. Similarly, the effect that any one individual or groups of individuals can evince in a situation or society is variable and requires interrogation; so too with regard to children“ (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin 2007, p.242).

This perspective draws attention to not just questions of structure and agency but also cautions against the othering of children from adults, whether to make claims for representations of powerlessness or as creators of a separate culture. In the past few decades this stance has also been reflected in empirical research, Corsaro's study of children's language use and interaction (Corsaro 1979) and Bluebond-Langner's study of children in a private hospital (Bluebond-Langner 1978) being some of the most significant examples. It is from this theoretical premise that studies of children and childhoods can be situated within structure, without compromising with agency and without 'disinheriting' the child from its gender or external influences to make a case for authenticity (Honig 1999b). This

perspective is significant in the study of children and childhood in other contexts in which the agency of children have been often underplayed – that of class.

2.1.3 Childhood and Class

In the final section of his historical research on childhood in Europe, a dominant motif in Ariès' discussion of the emergence of the special place of the child and the 'modern' family as a domestic private unit is that of class. Ariès traces structural changes in European societies and shifts in the domain of 'manners' side by side, in connection to the emergence of the child as a protected sentimentalized figure. The changing domain of etiquette in European societies is held up alongside fundamental social changes, changes in health, the abolition of the law of primogeniture in France, the shrinking of the family from the wider, more social 'public house' to a small domestic space where the old hierarchies and sentiments were replaced by new ones. It is in the isolation of the modern family from the world that Ariès situates the rise of child-centred sentiments of the eighteenth century. A crucial concept in this historical emergence of childhood and children to a certain status in modern European societies, is the expansion of some practices to more of the social strata that were until the seventeenth century confined to the aristocracy and the middle classes. The middle class family was the space in which processes that changed practices of sending children away on apprenticeship, or of treating children unequally within the same family were staged. The significance of a specific class being the domain of structural and sentimental changes is highlighted all the more in his statement that in the early nineteenth century a greater part of the population – the poor, continued to live like the medieval families, with the children separated from the parents (Ariès 1973,p.390).

The significance of class for childhood in this modern sense therefore, is primarily in the now inseparable association between the child and 'home'. It is significant, that the middle class has prominence in historical research on childhood (Robertson 1974), especially in the context of the emergence of 'modern childhood' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of the most significant factors that account for the emergence of the 'modern' image of childhood as well as its practice might be summed up as: i) structural such as demographic and institutional changes eg. the Church; ii) changes in sentiments ushered in by these structural changes and dissemination of new ideas about the family and children in advice literature. These cannot be separated from one another nor arranged in chronological sequence because as historical research shows, they were all processes that acted upon each other. But the very space within which these forces impinged until the mid nineteenth century in parts of western

Europe and possibly in some other social contexts were the domestic life of the aristocrats and the middle classes. The new ideal of childhood – as separate from adulthood and more prolonged than infancy – would also have to be afforded, for it to be realized. In many social contexts – the European and British not being the least significant of them, giving way to a more pedagogized practice of childhood where children were possibly once economically productive, has deep implications for the economic and cultural boundaries of the social space in which this distinct childhood emerged in its earlier stages. The emphasis on school, play and indulgence characterizing this modern ideal of childhood, in their genesis and their sustenance retained for a long time a class character.

Social class, from a methodological point of view, is not of the least significance for childhood. A significant source of data about childhood earlier than the nineteenth century were diaries, letters, artefacts, biographies, advice literature and as Ariès had used, art – from which an idea about children – real, ideal, depicted could be formed. Particularly in the use of secondary data, much of the sources of information about childhood or children until a century ago – apart from official records such as those of deaths and deviant behaviour – are of such a nature that they are limited to some social sections – the literate as in the case of letters, diaries, advice literature, or the affluent – as in the case of family portraits, toys for children and so on. The issue of social class is all the more important in this context, to remember that one of the many 'childhoods' that exist at the same time within a society, is available for study in the kind of material available to historians. Equally of note is the historical evolution of some institutions and of the family as a domestic unit because of which the modern childhood became less of an exclusive phenomenon, as it spread to other social strata. However, despite its increased currency in societies with marked social-inequalities, the class character of childhoods have far from disappeared in contemporary non-western and western contexts,.

The 'home' or the family has for long been the space in which the class background of children have been ascertained and talked about. Yet, especially from the second half of the twentieth century, significantly in the aftermath of the Second World War – the school and education have become crucial themes that heighten the debate around social class and children's lives.

Which children grow up 'too fast' for the liking of a print media, and when is it understandable that some children have no choice but to grow up too fast? Why is it especially noticeable when a child whose parents are factory workers consistently does well in grammar school? The association of distinct cultural practices and resources with the class backgrounds of children, have spurred educationists to situate families of children within social class, focusing on effects of 'privilege' on educational achievement. In the last two decades, with the Bourdieusian turn in the theoretical approach to social inequalities, distinctions

within social class have also risen to prominence as have two other concepts, that of 'habitus' and 'cultural capital' (Betz 2008). All three concepts are used to understand processes of cultural reproduction, an underlying assumption of which is that children from culturally privileged families are in a position to utilize their inherited cultural resources and perform well in school than children from culturally poorer backgrounds. This at least is the main vein of argument that has been taken up by and runs through much of contemporary research on education and social inequalities. Childhood or children, in this context, become significant by virtue of their relationship with the family and the school in the standard ideal of modern childhood.

$It might be argued that the child in such a perspective is reduced to a receptacle as it was in the earlier socialization theories. The theory of cultural reproduction is unarguably, also a socialization theory itself (Corsaro 1997) and its application in the contemporary research on education affirms this. However, the kind of reductionism that such a perspective might entail, can be countered by specifying to what objective and to what extent it is being applied. In this book some elements of this theoretical approach have been borrowed, not to argue how cultural elites ensure their cultural reproduction or that children from lower middle class or working class families are always at a disadvantage compared to other children in rising from their social location. Though some of Bourdieu's writings are developed in the context of social inequalities and their reflection in education practices, children or childhood were not a central concern in these works. Rather, the use of some of the concepts developed by Bourdieu and some of his contemporaries like Wacquant (1991) and Boltanski (1987) have enriched the understanding of nuanced processes and distinction within social sections and has, most significantly, influenced a cultural approach to social class within which discussion about childhood and children have been addressed in the last two decades, even if it is in connection to educational practices. It is in this discussion of children's everyday lives in a class context that the present study locates itself, although, as has been discussed in the following sections, its emphasis is not on educational outcome but on a cultural understanding of social classes.

2.2 The Cultural Approach to Class and the Adult Gaze

The understanding of social inequalities, particularly class, from a cultural perspective has usually meant a shift from a stricter definition of class according to relationship to the means of production or occupational position. The focus on cultural aspects of class – of practices and values made alive by individual examples draws from a rich and diverse tradition, particularly in the British social sciences, ranging from the historian Thompson's study of the English working

class, to the influence of Bourdieu and Boltanski on the culturally specific context of social inequalities. It has also meant a shift in perspective within the theoretical traditions in which the discussion of class was resurrected almost two decades ago. Whereas questions of class consciousness and its implications for the fate of a social class were some of the more important questions in the structural understanding of class, in the contemporary approach which acknowledges the legacy of Bourdieu's writings on social inequalities as a principal source of influence, the possibility of class struggles upturning the status quo is eclipsed by the processes in which some social groups ensure their cultural reproduction through the dissemination of cultural, economic and social resources, as a subject of investigation.

The relationship between the 'standard' modern childhood and the middle classes have already been discussed in the previous sections. In the contemporary discussion which situates classes culturally, the relationship is redefined as a problem of cultural reproduction in a social context in which the middle classes are portrayed as adhering to specific practices of cultural socialization, in reaction to their 'fear of falling'. (Ehrenreich 1997) It is primarily at this point that sociologists of class, or education, explore the intersection of social position and children's position, uncovering the processes by which the middle classes, in times of uncertainty about status and social position reinforce their children's chances of upward mobility through engaging them in a variety of cultural activities and by making choices about institutions their children are to attend (Ball &Vincent 1998, Reay & Lucey 2000). A variety of practices have been highlighted by this research. A central concept in such studies is that of 'cultural capital' which refers to cultural resources of education and familiarity with works of culture, the possession of which gives some groups advantage over others. This conceptualization of culture as capital has not only allowed for more nuanced understanding of distinctions between and within classes, but has provided, figuratively speaking a conceptual banquet for cultural theorists of class incorporating aspects such as informal social networks of parents (Ball & Vincent 1998),gender, emotional capital of middle class parents (Reay 2008) in their studies of how the middle class culturally reproduces itself.

An aspect that has been highlighted particularly in the British social science research is the greater involvement of families – middle class and working class – having greater cultural capital, in the education and cultural socialization of their children (Ball,Vincent, Kemp, Pietikainen 2004; Reay 2007; Vincent & Ball 2007;Walkerdine 2001). The extracurricular classes deployed to ensure the familiarity of children with culture – such as playing the violin or ballet – referred to as 'enrichment activities', the increased familiarity with other cultures – 'cultural omnivorousness' or 'multicultural capital'(Vincent & Ball 2007, p.1068) are some of the aspects of the middle class culture that have been identified as

strategies of cultural reproduction. Some studies argue that there is no clear distinction between how the professional middle class and the managerial middle class use cultural capital, thereby challenging some of the basic assumptions of the cultural class approach (Wong 2004). However, notwithstanding the greater alignment with either Goldthorpe's approach (also Prandy 2002) to class or Savage's, the different studies focusing on the middle class and education in the contemporary social sciences emphasize the existence of 'middle classes' than a unified middle class (Burzan 2010;Wong 2004).

The adultist overtones in the theories of cultural socialization cannot be denied. In most of the studies about the middle class sustaining itself or ensuring upward mobility through the use of strategies like the 'grapevine'[16] or 'enrichment activities', the respondents in the empirical studies were almost always parents from middle class and working class families. Children's accounts about themselves, or the perspective that the process of cultural transmission might not altogether be a one-sided process has not been the subject of this kind of research. On the other hand, studies from this tradition are significant in their very approach to social inequality – that of culture. The emphasis on the use of cultural capital, despite the ambiguity about the extent to which the concept can be applied – allows for an alternative definition of class, in times when in many developing and developed societies, income, occupation and relation to the means of production are not sufficient to understand social classes.

The cultural approach to class, draws attention to another aspect that has emerged against conventional structural understandings of class – the emotional dimension, which focuses on individual experiences. This aspect, much like Ariès' exploration of the history of sentiments from medieval Europe to the eighteenth century draw a connection between two domains – the broader public domain of social structure, the changes of which are visible to some extent in the shrinking of architectural space, the rise of some institutions and the decay of others – and the private domain of sentiments and values, hidden to the public view, that can be ascertained, like the proverbial elephant, after it is gone. In this understanding of class, the middle class is not the only context of parental anxieties and engagement. Especially in the context of some developed countries, against backgrounds such as a post Thatcherist Britain, the role of the welfare State, the working class has also entered the discussion about 'enrichment activities' and 'cultural capital' as opposed to or sometimes, in a similar way as the middle class. In a powerful discussion about the experience of girls and women from working class families, which after economic and political changes in Britain, sought to 'remake' themselves as middle class, Walkerdine evokes a felt,

16 The 'grapevine' is a term used by Vincent and Ball to refer to informal social networks of middle class parents to exchange 'hot knowledge' – or information about schools, which is significant in the decision making of middle class families about the choice of schools (Vincent & Ball 1998).

embodied image of class, that is also echoed in Bourdieu's writings, as 'something which refuses to go away' (Walkerdine 2001).

In a related context, the different practices that have emerged in the empirical research following the cultural approach to class, that are said to 'make up' the middle class, are a dominant feature of middle class childhoods in many cultural contexts in the last few decades – western and non-western. In the transnational processes of cultural and economic change, researchers speak of comparable practices in middle classes or classes with high cultural capital in contexts as different as China, to migrants of South Asian origin in the United States to West Germany (Naftali 2010; Zinnecker 2000). The cultural enrichment of childhoods from specific social backgrounds stands the chance of becoming as self evident a connection in this perspective of a 'transnational middle class' as the image of the domestic, scholarized childhood of the upper middle classes in the nineteenth century. The complete absence of children's agency in most of these studies of middle class parenting is however, a drawback from the point of the new Sociology of Childhood. But to reject the cultural approach to class because of its adultism in a study that situates itself within the new sociological perspective of childhood equals, almost literally, to throwing the baby out of the bathwater. The cultural perspective of class has to a great extent, with the exception of some like Walkerdine, been used to argue for the transmission of culture from families to children. The dualism of socializer and socialized notwithstanding, some of the arguments made by researchers from this tradition can be used to understand class as a felt experience. The question of sentiments is also a significant one. What has been identified as 'middle class anxiety' might well be understood as an ethos of a specific social section, within which children live. If a perspective intent on seeing how social classes reproduce themselves focus on parents and data on educational success as its source, then a perspective that questions the adultism can clear out its own space in the study of middle class childhood by shifting its focus. The methodological shifts are implied in this shift of focus. Based on these theoretical premises – the sentiments of childhood, childhood as a segment of the social structure, and social class as one of the contexts in which childhoods are experienced – I propose to explore how childhoods are possible in given cultural historical contexts, and how, childhoods are lived. These aspects are brought into connection in the concept of the *Bildungsmoratorium* in the following sections.

2.3 Childhood and Moratorium

Bildungsmoratorium or childhood as a cultural moratorium are concepts which help one understand the nature of change in childhoods in industrialized societies from the 1980s. The term 'moratorium' was used significantly in Erikson's work (Erikson 1973) to refer to a psychosocial stage of youth. In Erikson's work, the concept of psychosocial moratorium was not used for childhood, but for a distinct phase of self-exploration and suspension of adult responsibilities and duties among adolescents. In *Identität und Lebenszyklus* (Identity and Life Cycle), Erikson uses the term '*Karenzzeit*' which comes closest in meaning to a 'stay' or period of leave or abstinence. He says that in certain cultures such a suspension or period of leave between childhood and adulthood is recognized and allowed by society and needed by individuals. In this psychosexual moratorium the 'inner identity' of the individuals are be mapped out[17]. The concept in this sense built on earlier psychoanalytical theory which, Erikson says, recognized a 'latency period' before puberty. For adolescents, this period implies a suspension or delay '*Aufschub'* in entering sexual relationship, parenthood and instead extends their stay in school or a place of vocational or technical training (Ibid). The moratorium was perhaps significant particularly because it allowed a suspension even when individuals were sexually mature.

The idea of youth as a cultural moratorium was developed by the German educationist Jürgen Zinnecker in the 1980s where the phase of self-exploration and 'time-out' from the adult world of paid work was connected to the development of a service sector in post-industrial societies and the values and practices related to higher education for youth that emerged as a result. Realizing the significance of educational achievement and its implication for an extended trial period where adult duties continued to be suspended, Zinnecker coined the term *Bildungsmoratorium*, thus showing from the start that the phase was not a passive period of suspension of adult responsibilities, but was an active one characterized by rigor in educational and cultural achievements (Zinnecker 1991).

Bildungsmoratorium (*Bildung*= Education[18] in German, and *mora* = suspension in Latin) is used to describe the nature of youth and childhood that emerged in most western industrialized societies in the twentieth century, that was characterized by intensive pedagogization, greater emphasis on protection, learning,

17 The German quotation reads: "Die Aufgabe, die der junge Mensch und seine Gesellschaft hier zu leisten hat, ist oft schwierig; notwendigerweise ergeben sich für den einzelnen und die verschiedenen Gesellschaften große Unterschiede in Bezug auf Dauer, Intensität und Ritualisierung der Adoleszenz. Die einzelnen Kulturen gestatten und die einzelnen jungen Menschen brauchen eine mehr oder weniger anerkannte Karenzzeit zwischen Kindheit und Erwachsenenleben, institutionalisierte psychosoziale Moratorien, während welcher ein nunmehr endgültiger Rahmen für die "innere Identität" vorgezeichnet wird" (Erikson 1973, p.137).

18 The German word *Bildung,* can be at best translated into English as 'education', though its connotation is not captured in entirety. In this sense it is comparable to although not equivalent to the Bengali word *shiksha*.

and freeing from adult responsibilities, that became a standard format of the lives of youth and middle class children, from the second half of the twentieth century.The concept of the moratorium was extended to childhood later, in the 1990s. It is not clear when it was developed in connection to childhood, but in the 1990s Zinnecker speaks about it in the context of cultural modernization of childhood in west European societies (Zinnecker 1995), and uses the term cultural moratorium more than *Bildungsmoratorium*, a term which he emphasizes for youth. The conditions under which moratorium is experienced by children and youth are the same – -the development of industrialized society, the expansion of a service sector and the expansion of the market to the degree that young people and children have increasingly come to be perceived as consumers with specific cultures of tastes and preferences. The nature and the cultures of the moratoria however, differ for children and youth, based on their different social location. One of the most significant implications of childhood as a cultural moratorium is that it creates a standard ideal of childhood and makes practices related to this standard accessible to the middle class and not just the luxury of an upper class. Zinnecker calls this ideal the ideology of 'bourgeois childhood', which from the middle of the twentieth century no longer reserved for the *Bildungsbürgertum* or the educated upper middle class, but became a standard that was imitated by the middle class as well. (Ibid, p.85-86). When speaking of youth as a moratorium, this spread and the class question is not directly brought up by Zinnecker because though the contexts of the two are similar and to some degree common, their implications and consequently some of the questions that emerge from the discussion of the two moratoria, are different.

Writing about the structural change in the phase of youth in west Europe, the connection between the *Bildungsmoratorium* and the industrial development of society is emphasized. Comparing youth in west Europe and east Europe, a connection is identified between the expansion of the service sector in west European societies which were more prosperous and the emergence of an extended *Bildungsmoratorium* in this region. In an industrially developed society characterized by salaried professions, social status cannot be transmitted automatically from one generation to another but have to be maintained or earned through educational achievement. In this context, education, and the various institutions connected to education become important, and youth becomes a significant phase in terms of social reproduction. Zinnecker says that a partial moratorium such as the adolescent's exploration of his civil status as buyer, consumer and political participant requires a certain infrastructure, developed institutions and a corresponding development of the industrial productive forces[19](Zinnecker 1991, p.17).

19 Translated from original:„Ein Teilmoratorium wie die adoleszente Erprobung des Bürgerstatus als Käufer, Konsument und politisch Partizipierender setzt eine bestimmte Infrastruktur,

The special status of youth in this moratorium is a counterpart of a consumption intensive service sector society. In case of youth the moratorium is in many ways a period of investment for later years, or rather, the special status of youth that emerged was made possible because of these implications of an industrially advanced society. In the case of childhood, the moratorium takes a different turn. Children are one step further removed from considerations of paid work in a service sector society, than youth. Education is however as significant for childhood as a moratorium as for the youth moratorium, but of equal significance are culture and the development of leisure activities and leisure careers. Thus, the moratorium of childhood entails the building up of a parallel culture in some ways, characterized not just by the importance of school, but by the pursuit of extra- curricular activities like learning an instrument, or competitive sports. This parallel culture was without doubt, possible because of structural social changes like industrialization and the development of a service sector and a consumer culture, but it differs from the youth moratorium in the intensity of culture careers. This has a lot to do with the specific social position of children in modern industrialized societies, because of their age and relatively less autonomy as compared to adolescents. For Zinnecker, the concept of childhood as a cultural moratorium is closely connected to his view of children as similar to a 'cultural fraction' (Zinnecker 1995, p.90) or an 'age-specific habitus' (Ibid, p.92).

A clearer picture of what Zinnecker means by childhood as a moratorium emerges in 2000, in an article in the *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* in which he for the first time, specifies the origin of the term moratorium and his adaptation of the connotation of the Latin term mora, meaning 'delay' or 'postponement' to refer to the pedagogized childhoods in modern western industrial societies. He says that the term 'moratorium', roughly speaking, implies a specific biographical 'time-out' for the young, which is made visible at designated times, spaces and discourses – comprising of a withdrawal from certain obligations of civil society[20].

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gewachsene Institutionen und einen entsprechenden Entwicklungsstand der industriellen Produktivkräfte voraus. Das institutionelle Pendant zum Sonderstatus der Jüngeren als Käufer und Konsumenten ist eine konsumintensive Dienstleistungsgesellschaft. Im Wechselspiel und in Auseinandersetzung mit Markt und Dienstleistungen, die sich auf die Nachfrage der Jüngeren einspielen, entwickelt sich die relative Autonomie dieses Teilmoratoriums und bilden sich spezifische Weisen der gesellschaftlichen Kontrolle von Jüngeren heraus" (Zinnecker 1991, p.17).

20 Translated from original: "Mit dem Begriff des Moratoriums ist, grob gesagt, eine spezifische lebensgeschichtliche „Auszeit" für die Jüngeren angesprochen, sichtbar gemacht in ausgewiesenen Zeiten, Räumen, Statuspositionen und Diskursen, die einen Rückzug auf Zeit aus bestimmten Verpflichtungen und Teilhaben der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft beinhaltet. Es ist nicht unwichtig, vorab klarzustellen, daß das pädagogische nur eine von vielen möglichen Ausprägungen eines gesellschaftlichen Moratoriums darstellt. Gesellschaften verpflichten ihre einzelnen Mitglieder nicht nur, sie entpflichten sie auch immer wieder, wobei mögliche Anlässe

This is the first text in which Zinnecker actually clarifies what he means by moratorium. He refers to the Latin origin of the term and says it signifies a postponement, a 'time out' from certain responsibilities in civil society. The pedagogic moratorium is however, only one of the many possible manifestations of societal moratoria, though this is the moratorium that he discusses the most. The basic aspects of the moratorium of childhood are also outlined here. The freeing of children and young people from social responsibilities, such as organized work as well as the responsibility of having children as well the responsibility of parenthood characterize the moratorium of childhood in contemporary industrialized societies. The resulting energy and time in this phase are channelled into learning activities. The moratorium is made possible by some core institutions like the school, the kindergarten, the teachers' workshops, and for this reason he says, that there is a pedagogical province for every moratorium, within which the generational relations unfold (Zinnecker 2000).

Despite differences in the moratorium of youth and that of childhood, they are closely linked and certain aspects of the moratoria are in some ways inseparable from each other. In its most simplified form, the moratoria can be seen as operating within a triad – the school or scholarized moratorium, the familial moratorium and the social-pedagogic moratorium. This is true of youth and childhood moratoria. Another aspect that is common to both moratoria is the extended period spent in school during childhood and youth, which marks the scholarization of the two life phases in the twentieth century (Zinnecker 2001, p.45,p.48).The concept of childhood as a moratorium, especially *Bildungsmoratorium,* relates not just to childhood and its structural transformation, but it is, in its very formulation, connected to aspects of social-economic changes and relates significantly to the aspects of class and gender. From the start there is much emphasis on how the model of childhood that was the privilege of an educated affluent upper class, became, by the second half of the century, a basic format which people from different socio-economic groups began to follow and had access to. Zinnecker's views on this particular point are not very clear, but perhaps a filtering down of the standard ideal of childhood suggests a weaker connection between class and the childhood moratorium as it is not limited to a privileged class.

Another way of looking at it, however, would be to see the childhood moratorium as connected to the expansion of an established middle class. This

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und Formen mehr oder weniger institutionalisiert werden. Das sollte als Universalie menschlicher Vergesellschaftung anzusehen sein. Mittlerweile ist der Begriff Moratorium-nach lateinisch mora: Aufschub, Verzögerung, Rast- in den öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch übernommen worden, wobei es sich im eigentlichen Sinn um einen juristischen Term handelt, der den vertraglich geregelten Aufschub fälliger privater oder staatlicher Verpflichtungen bezeichnet' (Zinnecker 2001, p.37).

connection can be articulated in two ways. First, only with the emergence of a middle class, who are more affluent than the lower working classes and more educated, but at the same time lack the affluence of the small elite class, could such a standard of childhood be adopted and be afforded. Freeing children from the responsibility of paid work and emphasizing the importance of learning and cultural activities requires a certain amount of economic and cultural capital that the working class, at least in the early twentieth century in general could not afford. Secondly, an important aspect of childhood as a cultural moratorium emerges as a consequence of anxieties about social and cultural reproduction in which a growing section of service sector professionals cannot assure the automatic transmission of social position to the next generation. Which is why the extended phases of childhood and youth are intended to serve the purpose of this social reproduction, by becoming scholarized, a phase in which the kind of educational and cultural capital needed for a certain social status are invested in.

Gender plays a more complex role in the formulation of the concept of the *Bildungsmoratorium*. The moratorium in its initial form, was that meant for boys. Later, against the background of female education and women's movements in the twentieth century, a separate moratorium emerged for girls that Zinnecker says was subordinate to that of the boys. Speaking of the context of a youth moratorium, he speaks of the possibility of decreased gender polarization in which girls and young women are 'rather special representatives' of childhood and youth 'culturalism' (Zinnecker 1990, p.32). Although there is a utopian undertone in the prediction that the *Bildungsmoratorium* will create young women as bulwarks and pioneers of progressive-liberal perspectives, the influence of such a moratorium on traditional gender roles is a significant argument, whose implications can even be explored in a context such as that of Bengal, where the pedagogization of childhood made its way to the lives of girls from the twentieth century despite the prevalence of traditional values and practices.

A typology of childhood models are developed by Zinnecker, where he conceptualizes four types of childhood moratoria and identifies corresponding social scientific approaches which study them: Postmodern childhood which is typical of a consumer society and where childhood is directed by corporate commercial interest; modern childhood, where children spend their time acquiring cultural capital and even experience 'leisure stress' (Zinnecker and Silbereisen 1996); traditional childhood, where children live in closed institutions such as the family, school and church; and fundamentalist childhood, where children live with adults in adults in separate cultures, retreating from modernity (Zinnecker 2001 for detailed typology).

The corresponding theoretical approaches are found within the 'new' Childhood Research for postmodern childhood, socialization research for advanced modern childhood, pedagogical-psychological research for traditional modern-

ized childhood and research on political and religious movements for fundamentalized childhood. It is not explained in great detail if these different models of childhood or childhood moratoria can simultaneously exist in society. One assumes they can, especially as he mentions the childhood of the Amish community in the United States of America as an example of fundamentalist childhood, and the significance of the Church in the lives of children in contemporary Germany as an example of traditional childhood. Though the present study has not used the typology to identify the exact character of the *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood according to one of the given models, the distinction between the several models of childhood moratoria are significant to some extent. While discussing the postmodern moratorium of childhood, Zinnecker talks about children's role as autonomous consumers, and their reintegration into the eonomy as consumers, even in their moratorium from paid work. The conceptualization of different possibilities of a 'time out' are significant, so as not to equate a *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood with an image of 'innocent' childhood, untouched by the profaning market or the media.

2.3.1 Childhood as Bildungsmoratorium

The concept of the moratorium provides foremost an effective way of seeing the direction and nature of the structural transformation of childhood in the twentieth century. By focusing on pedagogization of childhood in the broadest sense, not just limited to the influences of the school, it makes it applicable to contemporary cultures of childhood not just in the west but in other contexts like India where childhood has become increasingly pedagogized from the beginning of the twentieth century.

Second, by focusing on contemporary cultures of childhood as protected and freed from adult life and responsibilities, it enables a comparison with cultures of childhood at different periods and in different contexts within the last century, where in the most extreme case, the lack of any sentiment about childhood as a ‘protected’ phase and ‘different’ from adulthood signifies to a certain degree, the lack of the very sentiment of childhood itself, that is considered to be associated with modernity. The concept of childhood as moratorium, or as cultural moratorium subsumes two aspects. One is that of the moratorium as an expression for the protection and to some degree freeing of children from societal, albeit adult responsibilities, which results in the emergence of childhood as a protective space or ‘*Schutzraum*’ as Zinnecker calls it (Ibid). This protection is not just from work or paid work to be more specific, but also from sexual experience among

other things. The other concept which is integral to childhood as a moratorium and stems from the first concept is that of a specific culture of childhood with elaborate practices and values that conform to the moratorium. For example, the freeing of childhood from responsibilities of work and sexual reproduction, contribute to values of asexuality, 'innocence', and indulgence which come to be associated with childhood. The idea of a 'happy childhood' regardless of debates about its possibly mythical status is a powerful reflection of these sentiments of the moratorium of childhood. The investment of this period in cultural and educational pursuits in a consumer oriented, service sector society where the media plays a dominant role, further contributes to the creation of a culture of childhood. These two aspects of the moratorium provide a suitable lens to understand structural transformation of childhoods in other societies as well as changes in the lives of children.

2.3.2 The Bildungsmoratorium in the Context of Bengal

The concept of childhood as a moratorium, and that of the *Bildungsmoratorium* were developed in a context that is largely western, referring to the industrialized societies from the 1950s. Despite the social historical background of its usage, the concept can be applied to other social contexts outside the industrialized west, in order to understand the nature in which childhood undergoes transformation in other countries, particularly in Asian societies which different histories than western Europe, and which are also different in their response in terms of economy, politics and culture to global, liberalize, consumerist forces.

The basic arguments about the protection of childhood and the creation of a culturally and educationally rigorous phase of life enable the wider application of this concept. The idea of childhood that has been hailed as 'modern', namely, a phase that is characterized by protection, play, indulgence, learning and innocence, is pervasive and has been, for at least a century in some other non-European societies as well. India is a significant example where this sentiment about childhood was reflected not just in the policies and public debates about traditional practices like child marriage, but also in an established culture of children's literature, pedagogic practices, domestic practices, which existed from at least the early nineteenth century.

There is a general tendency in social science research to represent different cultures of childhood in a non-uniform way. While these might not be direct or intended comparative works, they have the effect of producing comparative images of childhood in different cultures when the principle of comparison is dif-

ferent in each case. Social science research on childhood research in western cultures looks at a range of aspects, from children's relationship to the media to changing roles and positions of children within the family, or self-perceptions of school going children etc. While this is true of much of west European, particularly German or Norwegian research, in the United Kingdom, considerable emphasis is given to these aspects as well as to the sharp distinction between working class childhoods and middle class childhoods. Childhood is experienced differently not simply across time and countries, but also in terms of social position. Class background is a crucial aspect through which childhood is experienced and can vary sharply between children of different social-economic backgrounds within the same society at any given point of time. In the case of the developing countries or the Third World countries, the social science research related to children tends to a considerable degree to concentrate on those aspects which relate to human rights issues and are significant for immediate policy making, such as child labour, educational reforms, and child trafficking. Though in each case the issues taken up by childhood or child-related research reflect perhaps some of the most pressing questions that each of the given societies are facing, on a broader level, especially in comparisons between the more industrialized western countries and the industrializing developing countries, these research aspects become welded with images of childhood in these societies. Childhood and children's lives are naturally heterogeneous, varying across time and space, but a broad overview overlooks, other factors that cut through these aspects and within the same society, as a result of which childhood is experienced differently by groups of children within the same society, based on their social location, or is similarly experienced by groups of children across different cultures. Class is one such factor, gender another. In a context like South Asia, caste is another factor, its significance depending upon the region and upon gender and class.

The unevenness in the terrain of childhood studies create starkly diverse images of childhood and cultures of childhood, with starkly different problems or issues, like the death of childhood as a result of television consumption in the United States and the deprivation of childhood in the silk weaving factories in India. Just as in the social science research on childhood in the west, feels the need to specify, that a lot of research is focused on urban middle class children, and the lower middle class or working class contexts of childhood should be studied, in the case of countries like India, there should be an acknowledgement that the childhoods or children talked about are mostly from a different class context, and that the lives of middle class children are hardly researched or talked about.

In this context the concept of childhood as a moratorium is significant. It is from the outset linked to the aspect of class. The ideal of childhood that was previously unattainable by all, was the privilege of an educated affluent upper class.

In Zinnecker's formulation, childhood as a cultural moratorium meant that this formerly ideal childhood later became the blueprint of the lives of middle class children from the second half of the twentieth century (Zinnecker 1995). The way in which the spread of this standard became possible is indirectly linked to the development of a middle class in a society. The importance of the service sector and the implications it has for the salaried professionals in terms of cultural reproduction, is one of the most significant factors which creates the *Bildungsmoratorium*. The freeing of children from responsibilities of work and the creation a of a culture where this phase is devoted to educational and cultural pursuits, requires a certain amount of cultural and economic capital which the middle class can afford.

Therefore, in a study of the middle class culture of childhood in a society, the concept of a moratorium is a suitable one to guide research in the direction of uncovering the aspects where children are considered to require protection from certain aspects of adult life, as well the aspects which make up the culture of childhood, like leisure careers etc. The relational categories of 'adult' and 'child' are significant in this context. To talk about the aspects in which a 'time out' from adult-responsibilities are allowed to children, the culturally specific expectations of what it means to be an adult and how being a child is distinct from being an adult, must be known. The different theoretical approaches from which the theoretical outline of the current study is drawn have emerged in the western context, and it is therefore essential to situate them within the specific historical cultural context of Bengal.

3. Sentiment, Middle Classes and a Culture of Childhood in Bengal

3.1 A Question of Sentiment

In the years following the publication of Ariès' book, one of the strongest criticisms which was also a significant impetus for other works in the history of childhood, was of the historian's purported claim that the 'idea' of childhood did not exist in medieval Europe. A slew of counterarguments from historians was provoked by this statement, whereby childhood was rescued and resurrected from non-existence to undeniable presence in the Medieval ages. The assertion about this existence was however made by some historians like de Mause through accounts of mistreatment of children in the Medieval Ages, thereby emphasizing the adult child distinction in a direction that was opposite to Ariès' (de Mause 1974). Defenders of Ariès have often pointed out that the criticism arises from a partial quotation referring to the 'idea' of childhood. A satisfactory explanation is that of incorrect translation from the French word 'sentiment' to the English 'idea' (Cunningham 1998). In a curious turn, the very line that existed between Ariès' work and that of some of his critics disappeared afterwards owing to this emphasis on sentiments that led the studies of Ariès, de Mause, the historian Lawrence Stone and some others to be considered by some to be similar – studies in the history of sentiments.

The question of sentiment is crucial to the study of childhood – from the genesis of a particular concept of childhood, to issues of representation of children within and outside social science research. Neither Social History nor Sociology are alien to assertions made about the relationship between changes in sentiments and structural changes. The study of societal transformations acknowledges the role played by shifts in the realm of mentality as causes, effects, or shifts accom-

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panying structural changes, be it in the private domain in the emergence of new forms of family life accompanied by emerging values of conjugal love and privacy as demonstrated by Shorter (Shorter 1976) or the non-economic impulses to economic activities with far reaching consequences, Weber's celebrated thesis about the rise of capitalism being a case in point.

In the study of childhoods this aspect of mentality is doubly significant – not in the sense of an inner world of private feelings and beliefs of individuals, but as collective sentiment which manifests itself spatially (as reflected in shrinking size of homes among the middle classes in seventeenth century England from 'public houses', or the notions of the home and school instead of the street as appropriate spaces for children) and institutionally (the emergence of schools as well as institutes concerned with child welfare). Children are not only imbued with sentimental values and regarded special, lovable and in need of protection, but notions of protected childhoods or of childhoods as distinct from adulthoods have also been made possible by shifts in the realm of sentiments (Ariés 1982) that are also related to broader societal changes.

Social historians and sociologists trace the route of structural changes leading to the sentimentalization of the child through a study of several areas – demographic changes, changing stances of the Church, changes in the family, economic institutions like insurance companies (Zelizer 1994) over different spans of time, from the medieval ages to the twentieth century. However, a Social History of childhood is conspicuously absent in the Indian context or in the context of Bengal. What is however significant, is a rich documentation by historians in the twentieth century of one of the most singular influences in the history of nineteenth century India on the realm of the mental – the production of knowledge, the structural changes and the emergence of new sentiments, that Childhood Research so far has been silent about – colonialism.

The historical literature on colonialism enriches the understanding of the cultural context of what is now a 'developing society' dispelling any simplistic image of 'western' culture being imposed on natives in dark musty tropical lands that the word 'colonialism' might evoke. The historical and sociological research on colonial India is a vast area mapping the emergence of institutions, social sections, identities, meanings and constructs that to a great extent account for some aspects of family structures, education systems and construction of childhoods in parts of contemporary India. But neither social structure, nor the realm of sentiments remain unchanged, as placid bearers of its colonial past. In the years before Independence and in the post colonial era thenceforth, socio-economic processes wrought significant changes on India's social landscape, which were heightened after India's economic liberalization in the 1990s. In fact many of the markers of this contemporary India duly reflected in the burgeoning service sector, an increased consumption, as well as the emergence of a transnational 'new

middle class' – drew it into the same ilk as that of other contemporary South Asian countries as well as comparable – in terms of lifestyles – to some developed countries. A significant consequence of these different socio-cultural influences that is of interest to this study of childhood among a particular social section is a rupture in the realm of meanings.

In the past few years social science research like the media has sometimes shown a readiness to be thrilled by studies of this 'new' India, where tradition is married to 'modernity', images of pious IT professionals and rickshaw pullers wearing fake Lacoste T shirts have been a picturesque shorthand for globalization in the Third World. This is not to undermine the importance of the cultural changes in India in the past few decades, – particularly the sweeping entry of different foreign cultures – both western and non-western, as well as the spread of different cultures within India across geographical boundaries. However, in this study neither colonialism nor the transnational changes in India are of interest as contexts producing an overlapping of tradition and modernity – rather the meanings surrounding 'tradition' and 'modern' and their effects on shaping the identity of a particular social section to some extent are part of the subject of this research. It focuses on the region of Bengal – West Bengal after 1947 – on the emergence of a particular culture associated with a social section in Bengal, that by the time India was Independent, had spread to other social sections and came to be seen as the Bengali middle class culture. In locating childhoods – or a culture of childhood in this context in the contemporary generation of 10-12 year old children as well as the childhood of those of the same age group in the 1950s and 1980s, the context of colonialism and that of contemporary India are significant to the present study.

The study limits itself geographically to a certain part of India, as well as to a specific social section – those influenced by the culture of the 'respectable people' that emerged in the nineteenth century – the contemporary urban middle classes in West Bengal. This chapter is in part an attempt to bridge, in the course of reflexive theory construction the two areas of the Sociology of Childhood, and the sociological and historical research on the Bengali *bhadralok* and the contemporary Indian middle classes, that have, barring some exceptions, had little to do with each other.

3.2 The Making of a Middle Class Culture

The middle class has always been a source of theoretical vexation in the Sociology of Class. Apart from its intermediate position between the upper classes

and the working classes, little has been agreed on about the characteristics of the middle class in the different theoretical approaches to it. In the sociological debate, the 'middle class' occupies a much disputed position with different views about its formation, basis, constitution and boundaries (Lamont & Mólnar 2002) as well as of its existence as a class being proffered by proponents and critics of the traditional Marxian and Weberian perspectives of class. As a theoretical concept it has always eluded satisfactory nailing down, not least because of the 'fuzziness' of its boundaries (Wacquant 1991). In this study there remains some ambiguity about exactly who the middle classes are in Bengal. But enumerating the different groups which form the middle class has not been of interest. Rather, the focus is to some extent on the culture associated with a social section, which from the nineteenth century described itself as Bengal's middle class. However, socio-economic profiles of social sections as well as cultural artefacts, practices and their meaning for different groups change, giving social classes a processual character rather than a permanent one. The groups that might be more or less safely said to belong to the urban Bengali middle class in West Bengal – professional managerial groups – by far the most dominant group of this section – are different from the preceding generations of the Bengali middle class (sometimes within the same family) not just in salaries, lifestyles, specializations but also in their relationships to other social sections in Bengal. However, some of the basic aspects and 'traditions' of this class can be traced back to the social section that emerged in the context of colonial Bengal.

3.2.1 The Bhadralok in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Bengal

Historians of colonial Bengal have often turned to the emergence of a particular social section – sometimes referred to as the 'colonial elite' as one of the most significant curiosities of colonial rule, that literally changed the history of Bengal, even in the post colonial period. This section was the colonial *bhadralok*, or the 'respectable people'– which was as much a product of its times, as well as one of the driving forces in the nationalist movement against the colonial administration.

The academic debate about the Bengali middle class, drawing on its heritage of the social science perspectives on the middle class, shows similar tendencies in the more general debate on class of using Marxist or Weberian perspectives to define the *bhadralok*. The middle class in Bengal, in the sense it is understood

today, was created in the nineteenth century, under the rule of the East India Company and the British Raj. The need for a 'new' class of Indians, who would help the administrators and who would be "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect"(Macaulay quoted in Barry 1966) was one of the major contexts in which this section was formed. The term *Bhadralok* has been referred to by some scholars as a status group in the Weberian sense[21] (Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase 2009; Gupta 2009) and though it includes the middle classes, it also includes the rich, or the poor in some circumstances.

Another reason for the emergence of this social stratum was the gradual impossibility of large entrepreneurial ventures under colonial rule, which made salaried jobs, largely as clerks and translators, coveted among the educated Bengalis. The Bengali *bhadralok* is said to have been largely Hindu and characterized by the dominance of some of the upper castes, a dislike for manual labour, and the salaried profession. A prominent section of the intelligentsia in Bengal came from this class, although they have been sometimes ambiguously described as the 'elites'. In the early half of the twentieth century, the social reform movement of the *Brahmo Samaj*, that directed itself against the orthodox Hindu system and later, the nationalist movement, wrought further changes in the social-cultural landscape of Bengal. A significant aspect of the nationalist discourse was the differentiation between public and private life that scholars like Chatterjee refer to as the distinction between 'the home and the world' that emerged in response to the colonial situation and which typified the culture of a section of Bengal's educated middle class (Chatterjee 1989, Dirks 1993b). In this remaking of the domestic structure among the middle Bengali classes, the role of the *bhadramahila*[22] or the female counterpart to the respectable Bengali man was that of a companion, educated, and subjugated to a new patriarchy.

> "The colonial situation, and the ideological response of nationalism to the critique of Indian tradition, introduced an entirely new substance to these terms and effected their transformation. The material/spiritual dichotomy, to which the terms world and home corresponded, had acquired, as we have noted before, a very special significance in the nationalist mind. The world was where the European power had challenged the non-European peoples and, by virtue of its superior material culture, had subjugated them. But,the nationalists asserted, it had failed to colonize the inner, essential, identity of the East which lay in its distinctive, and superior, spiritual culture. That is where the East was undominated, sovereign, master of its own fate. For a colonized people, the world was a distressing constraint, forced upon it by the fact of its material weakness. It was a place of oppression and daily humiliation, a place where the norms of the colonizer had perforce to be accepted. It was also the place, as nationalists were soon to argue, where the battle would be waged for national independence" (Chatterjee 1989, pp.624).

The distinction between 'the home and the world' and the social reform movements directed at Hindu Bengali society in this context was significant in two

21 For a Gramscian perspective of the 'intellectuals' in colonial India, not just in Bengal, see Torri 1990.

22 Literally translated as the respectable woman or 'lady'.

ways. The redefinition of the woman's position in the Bengali middle class family was one aspect of it, which in keeping with the *bhadralok* culture emphasized its indigenous identity, and its class character at the same time, making it clear that the lower classes in Bengal were not part of this culture.

> „The new patriarchy was also sharply distinguished from the immediate social and cultural condition in which the majority of the people lived, for the "new" woman was quite the reverse of the"common"woman, who was coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subjected to brutal physical oppression by males. Alongside the parody of the Westernized woman, this other construct is repeatedly emphasized in the literature of the 19th century through a host of lower class female characters who make their appearance in the social milieu of the new middle class maidservants, washing women,barbers, peddlers, procuresses, prostitutes. It was precisely this degenerate condition of women which nationalism claimed it would reform, and it was through these contrasts that the new woman of nationalist ideology was accorded a status of cultural superiority to the Westernized women of the wealthy parvenu families spawned by the colonial connection as well as the common women of the lower classes. Attainment by her own efforts of a superior national culture was the mark of woman's newly acquired freedom. This was the central ideological strength of the nationalist resolution of the women's question" (Chatterjee 1989,pp.627).

The educated Bengali middle class, became almost a tangible entity, reacting to the social currents, political changes by means of their social position. The Bengali term for the middle class is *Madhyabitta*, meaning middle income – a term which might appear self-evident, but which has significance for those who identify with it, excluding the lower status and extreme poverty manual labour is associated with, and the affluence of the entrepreneurial rich, a section which, in the case of Bengal has long been dominated by non-Bengali communities like the *Marwaris* originally from Rajasthan.

In the 1990s the changes brought about by the economic liberalization of India form the context in which the middle class of Bengal is talked about with renewed interest. West Bengal, reacting a little late to the new economic policy, swung into action in the mid '90s, and the boom in the IT sector, the construction sector, and later the growth of the call centres sculpted the economic landscape of urban Bengal further. The growth in the service sector and the expansion of salaried professionals gave further impetus to a debate about the 'new' middle class in India in general. One of the things that becomes clear from the literature on the middle class in Bengal and its relationship to culture, is that the fine lines between class and status group become hazy from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. It doesn't of course imply that the middle class in Bengal was undifferentiated, rather the diversity in the composition of the *Madhyabitta* has been always emphasized. Neither does it escape notice though, that while contemporary scholars take great care to separate the Bengali middle class from the colonial status group of the *Bhadralok*, reference to one category invariably evokes reference to the other, and the two are sometimes used interchangeably.

Historians have pointed out that the need for an impeccable administrative system under colonial rule and the emergence of a print culture or what has been called 'print capitalism` by some (Bhattacharya 2005) were some of the most significant conditions behind the emergence of a widespread culture of education in urban Bengal. The most noticeable development at this point was the emergence of what historians like Bhattacharya have called, the Bhadralok ideology. In this background, education and knowledge came to be seen as virtues. The Bhadralok sentiment that placed great value on education, sharply criticized the opulence of the rich in Bengal, the *Babu* culture. In the nineteenth century, the criticism of the moral decadence of Bengali society – specifically the rich of Bengal being overcome by alcoholism, going to prostitutes, the grandeur of public ceremonies to show wealth— became a common format in which the shift to culture and education was highlighted. Interesting here, is that the context in which the term Bhadralok is used, is related to this specific culture. To the extent perhaps, that even with debates about the disappearance of the Bhadralok in contemporary West Bengal, there is little doubt that the Bhadralok culture in some aspects, is dominant. A national weekly in 2000 discussed the state of things in contemporary West Bengal and accused the 'insular legacy of its gentility' for the state's decadence.

> "In the midst of such anarchy, the Bengali has become disturbingly insular. A smug middle class tom-toms past glories at every available opportunity. "Bengalis often think," says novelist Buddhadev Guha, "that Bengal is the only place in the world. Nothing exists outside Bengal." When Amartya Sen won the Nobel Prize two years ago, a Calcutta-based newspaper began its report describing the economist as a "Bengali, and an Indian". Iconising, producing apocrypha and myth-making have been perfected into fine arts– the myth of a cinema maestro producing classics out of crummy studios, the myth of a Thespian who goes into recluse, the myth of a rooted Nobel Laureate returning home to ride his favourite old bicycle, the myth of a once-wronged, now successful cricket star as a maharajah" (Biswas 2000).

The criticism of decadence that the *bhadralok* once directed against the *Babu* culture of Bengal, is now directed towards those who are a part of the *bhadralok* culture, more than a century later. The Achilles' heel or the insular nature says something about the middle class culture itself. Mythmaking and iconization are common to all cultures. It is the subjects of these myths that are specific to Bengal. Intellectuality – the cinema maestro, the Nobel Laureate, the Thespian, and the shirking of opulence almost to the point of a withdrawn asceticism in the myths – 'crummy' studios, the recluse, the old bicycle – have been the dominant aspects of the discourse by and about the *bhadralok* discourse.

This discourse about decadence, this dissatisfaction with the phlegmatic stagnating nature of things in West Bengal, is reflected in the general public discourse of the region. The criticism is directed against a group that is the 'other' even if it is from Bengal. In the nineteenth century the pigeon flying, brothel going, babus were the 'they' from the perspective of the educated, comparatively

austere *bhadralok* critic for whom knowledge was the highest asset. In the present discourse about the decadence in Bengal, it is not about the decadence of the culture, rather the culture itself is at the root of the decadence. This criticism of Bengali culture or of Bengal in general from within, though perhaps always present, reached a peak especially in the aftermath of the Partition in 1947, as has been discussed later.

3.2.2 The Middle Class and the New Economic Policy: Before Economic Liberalization and After

> „In no other class is the opposition between the young and the old, the challengers and the possessors - and also the opposition between the senior members of the class and the newcomers, which cannot always be superimposed upon it (since, in some sectors at least, the most senior are also the most precocious) - more determinant than in the dominant class, which can ensure its own perpetuation only if it is capable of overcoming the crises that are liable to arise from the competition between the fractions to impose the dominant principle of domination and from the succession of struggles within each fraction. The differences between the generations (and the potential for generation conflicts) increase with the magnitude of the changes that have occurred in the definitions of occupational positions or in the institutionalized means of access to them, i.e., the modes of generation of the individuals appointed to them'"
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> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinctions:A social critique of the judgement of taste*, 1996

> "This class is headed in columns for various glittering malls. One doesn't need the excuse of the Pujas to go there. All one needs, is a more or less comfortable income, a healthy wife (who doesn't stop to sit down everywhere because of aching feet), and if possible, a trouble free credit card (it is very humiliating if the shopkeeper returns the card). If one visits these huge markets on any evening, it becomes clear that the desire to buy of these millions of women and men who are walking about inside the building, some looking for *Bakorkhani* rice, some buying a passable i-pod, is alive the year round, and does not surge up around *Mohaloya*. This new section of the middle class is not the Kafka or Camus-spouting *Rabindrasangeet* loving intellectual of our adolescence, who our contemporary politicians emulate like idiots".
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> Sumit Mitra, *Pujobajare Paribartan. Bachhorbhar kinei cholechhe sadyabyasta alpoboyeshi madhyabitta Samaj*, 2010 (author's translation)

The neoliberal economic policies and structural adjustment programmes, arms of the economic liberalization adopted by India in the 1990s, are said to have sculpted the Indian middle classes in their present form. In the urban sector in West Bengal, the impact of the indirect consequences of the economic liberalization, and that of the broader current of globalization together gave momentum to the changes that are manifested in different areas,– from the architecture of Kolkata, to the aspirations of young people about to leave school, to leisure activities of

people. In the years after Independence, particularly the sixties, the industrial sector suffered in Kolkata.The tide of decay was slow though not imperceptible.

The biggest assault to Bengal, and to the Bengali middle class was the Partition of Bengal to carve out two states, West Bengal in India, and East Pakistan which was to become Bangladesh in the 1970s. The years after Partition saw a massive influx of refugees from East Pakistan across the borders (Chatterji 2007, Gupta 2009). The resulting economic and political turbulence, especially communal outbreaks, affected the intelligentsia and the lower middle classes of Bengal in many ways. Gupta (2009) describes the period between the late '40s, early '50s thus:

> "In Calcutta alone over 30,000 young men and women (between 18 and 22 years, and ranging from matriculates to graduates) were jobless as per the official figure of registration for the month of July 1950. The worst sufferers, of course, were the upper caste nimna madhyabitta (lower middle class) – a sizeable number of whom had been reduced to a state of semi-starvation and abject penury. They were sometimes hawking small items on the city streets, or stealthily begging passers-by for money and food. Not so miserable as the refugees among them, the lower – or perhaps a little higher – middle class bhadralok's depressed conditions in West Bengal was no better in 1950-51 than it had been before the coming of independence. Struggling within the rapidly shrinking space of clerkdom (and low level school teaching and private coaching), and not being mentally prepared to do manual work of any kind, their condition had been worsening very fast in the post-independence West Bengal. There were scornful outbursts all-around the way middle-class bhadralok – the "backbone" of Bengali society – the torch-bearers of "Bengali culture, civilization and enlightenment" – and the upholders of "religion, education and creativity" were dying, and collapsing with them the greatness of Bengali intellectual tradition" (Gupta 2009, p.296-297).

The fragmentation within the educated Bengali middle class continued even in the following decades. In the '70s, the industrial sector was gradually withering, particularly in the context of trade unionism. By the late 1980s West Bengal was a wasteland for industrialists, with companies pulling out of the state. At this point, the economic liberalization and the general winds of change gave the industrial sector a new lease of life. The IT sector was the direct and most visible example of this change. Other new sectors were media and telecommunications, apparel and accessory designing and construction among others.

The term middle class is almost synonymous with white collar work in the imagination of this class, especially in a context like Kolkata. There are lawyers, teachers, and doctors among others who belonged to this section even in the middle and later years of the Raj. In the years following liberalization, one of the most significant changes within this middle class is the different sections of people who have joined its ranks, and *how* this has happened. New groups, have naturally been added – the IT engineer who takes the office shuttle from South Kolkata to Salt Lake in the week and drives only in the weekends; or the content writer who studied English from Jadavpur University are not people who existed in the 1980s or even in the 1990s.

But the direct impact of the economic liberalization is neither the single nor the most powerful source of the changes faced by the middle class of Kolkata. Those who do not work in the new occupations created by the economic liberalization are nevertheless affected by the changes. A study done in the suburbs of Kolkata in the last ten years, shows how a section of the lower middle class, mostly white collar professionals in government and private sectors faced overwhelming changes in their lifestyles, some as a result of retrenchment and forcible voluntary retirement, and everyone as a result of high prices and new consumption desires (Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase 2009).

The desire for white goods – electronic goods like household appliances and computers and their prioritization among household expenses have been documented by the study (*Ibid*). The shifts are on two levels. At one level, they show how despite raised salaries, the lower middle class are confronted with a disproportionate increase in expenses, in keeping with the need for electronic appliances. At another level, they show, how in a market flooded with white goods, the lower middle class tries to refurbish its symbolic boundaries and status through a choice of brands and products and adjusts their budget by cutting down on other expenses which are perhaps considered less visible markers of status, like food for some. The study by Ganguly and Scrase documents the less rosy side of the effects of liberalization in contrast to the image that is usually touted – more jobs, higher income, westernization.

Definitions of class solely in terms of income can be misleading as well as give an incomplete picture. However, the amount specified by the report and the increase in ten years is of interest. Though the figures are for India in general, they can be considered in the context of West Bengal. As mentioned before, the change is not simply in the creation of new jobs, but as much in their nature, positions and the people who hold them.

There was a common understanding of the position and pay of a job based on the educational and family background, gender and age of the person having the job till the ‘90s. Always seen as a salaried-profession and education oriented community, the middle class in Kolkata reinforced its popular image, stressing the indispensability of a college education if one had to get a good job. Science, had always been appreciated, in an economic, employment related sense than in an enlightenment sense by the middle class. Engineering or medicine were and continue to be perceived as higher level professions, bearing the markers of both education and economic assurance. Science outside of this, as taught in the Universities and clubbed with the Arts and the Humanities, belonged to the ‘General line’, the colloquial term for subjects taught in the college, and enjoyed perhaps a slightly higher position than the Arts. Commerce was yet another option, and assured one a job as a salaried professional. For all those who worked and lived in Kolkata the tie wearing, moderately affluent middle aged manger of a company

and the literature loving, politically opinionated, cloth bag carrying professor of English at Kolkata University were two sides of the image of the educated middle class in Kolkata till the '90s. Despite differences in income, the two were not on opposite ends of the cultural spectrum of the urban Bengali middle class. Both might have possibly have studied in the same college – Presidency or Ashutosh college, the manager possibly having studied Economics and the professor English or History, both might have been to some degree active in left oriented student politics, or the Naxalite politics that swept over the student community in the 1960s; they would also share the love of Shakespeare and Shelley and have acted in college plays together some time, as well as sharing a love for *Rabindrasangeet*. They not only epitomized the *bhadralok* ethos in its stereotypical imagination of the Bengali middle class's relation to culture, but, their cultural universe was also laden with similar forms of symbolic capital, especially when the two had an intermediate position on a scale of economic capital. This was to change completely.

In the early years of the IT boom, not only did the creation of new jobs change the profile of one section of the population in Kolkata, but the sudden increase in the number of private engineering colleges in the city and surrounding towns in West Bengal changed the middle class in a fundamental way. The access to a very limited number of engineering colleges through the state regulated Joint Entrance examination for engineering and medicine previously, meant that engineers in the city formed a reasonably small privileged community. Fewer institutions and the restrictions of educational achievement also regulated this community, though anyone could take the examination and qualify. The increase of colleges from the late '90s threw open the privilege to thousands of students, from varying backgrounds, who could now, perhaps with higher fees, have the envied job of an engineer. The devaluation to some degree of engineering as a profession was not the only consequence of this. The employment system in the service sector and as a result the educational system was shaken up. The privatization of education and the creation of new forms of employment meant that there were several ways of attaining particular forms of employment, and there was a less straightforward correlation between what one studied and what one did for a living. What one did in one's thirties, was also no assurance that one would continue doing it in their forties.

The changes felt by the middle class could be articulated separately in terms of gender and age. Till the '90s, there were fewer women in the service sector. In areas of education this was previously heavily reflected. While the 'professional lines', engineering, medicine, law, business management were dominated and perceived as male, the 'general line' of arts and sciences were something that was associated with something a greater number of women opted for. In a social context where the middle class culture was primarily education and culture ori-

ented, the discrepancy among the middle and upper sections of the middle class was not so much about education and the lack of education between men and women; the discrepancy was rather, in terms of the nature of education, especially post school education and what one intended to do with it.

The relation between traditional elements and gender and its connection to women in some occupations and areas of education are established, in most societies. West Bengal is no exception. But the opening up of new jobs and thousands of seats in engineering colleges and other educational institutes and their affordability in comparison to what was promised by the resulting employment, or the belief of it, beckoned to more women and to more students in general, not just from Kolkata but from the surrounding small towns and suburbs. The 'general line' as the Humanities and Natural Sciences are known, and by logic, teaching, seemed to be the most chosen option for women in Kolkata, though there were women in other sectors. Though a minimum of a Bachelors degree is almost a norm among men women alike in the educated Bengali middle class, a significant number of women would be married after the completion of their bachelors or masters degree.

The proliferation of business schools and other institutions or subjects like journalism, mass communication and the increase in the number of institutions which taught these, meant one could change to another profession. An engineer could study business management and get a higher paid job in a multinational corporation, a student of History, who would have previously prepared to get married after her Masters and taught part time in a school or college after marriage – having limited professional options, could now be a journalist working for a media house and earn double the amount. The professional and the general lines were twisted and their destination changed, though they continued to be separate lines.

Age is also a significant factor of social space, as Bourdieu (1977) points out. When talking about the middle class of any social context, several generations are simultaneously acting at a given point of time, and despite belonging to the same class, and apart from differences of income and background, a generation's middle classness maybe structured around a different set of symbolic capital than the others. The article quoted from an intellectual Bengali literary magazine, *Desh*, captures the point that the increased consumerism among the Bengali middle class is not as noteworthy – for it is only logical that the market expands and new material and cultural goods compete with previous goods to attract consumers– as are the tendencies of consumption and the age of a section of the middle class. Reflecting on the consumption behaviour of a section of Bengalis during the traditional festival of Durga Puja, it muses over the decrease of the usual shopping rush before the ten day long festivity. Spatial changes are also connected to issues of class and consumption. While the malls are the established

spaces of consumption of the middle and upper sections of the middle class now, the traditional shopping arcades where the Bengali middle class shopped, the footpaths which is another selling-area, are thronged with the lower sections of the middle class, or the lower classes. What one generation of educated, qualified professionals earned at the peak of their careers, is what the next generations from families having less cultural capital sometimes earn in their thirties. The generations together form the middle class, but their very attitudes and beliefs, and their relationship to established forms of cultural and symbolic capital are different.

The urban middle class in West Bengal is not the same as it was since the nineteenth century, when the *bhadralok* emerged in a specific historical context. But the changes affecting this section have also accelerated in the last three decades, and the simultaneous existence of the different generations, each to some extent the product of the Bengali middle class of its time, is a living example of these continuing changes. Bourdieu, talking about the emergence of the new petite bourgeoisie says:

> "[..] age differences – increasingly so as one moves towards the cultural pole – mark differences in the scholastic mode of generation and therefore differences between generations defined in and by their relationship to the educational system. The best qualified of the younger generation of junior executives or clerical workers (mainly originating from the working and middle classes) share with the members of the new occupations – and especially with those of them who do not originate from the bourgeoisie – a relation to culture and, partially at least, to the social world which stems from an interrupted trajectory and the effort to extend or re-establish it. Thus, the new occupations are the natural refuge of all those who have not obtained from the educational system the qualifications that would have enabled them to claim the established positions their original social position promised them; and also of those who have not obtained from their qualifications all they felt entitled to expect by reference to an earlier state of the relationship between qualifications and jobs"(Bourdieu 1996, pp.354, 358).

Similarly, the 'new' professions in contemporary urban Bengal might be seen as a 'refuge' of different groups within the contemporary middle class that sometimes provide a common space for those from different 'scholastic mod'.The most significant change perhaps in the middle class in Kolkata till the ‘90s and now, is the difference in the world of culture and economy. While it was possible till the early years of liberalization for a company manager and a professor in a college to inhabit cultural worlds that were overlapping to some degree, the forces of economic cultural and social change have swept over jobs, education, mindsets and preferences. The symbolic goods and their homology to economic capital, were lifted out of their very universe, modified and embedded in different contexts, giving old markers of class and social space a different meaning. The dominant character of the Bengali middle class retains its strong association with education and culture (Donner 2008), even if the association is qualitatively different from the small section of upper caste English speaking, clerical or upper middle class *bhadralok* of the early twentieth century. These changes of the

Bengali middle class are of interest to the present study to the extent that the lives of the children who experience a scholarized, domestic, protected childhood, are inscribed within this social landscape where a middle class culture is far from homogeneous, and where distinctions in practice between the different groups, form part of the context within which childhoods are lived and also 'done'.

3.3 Adults, Children, and the Bengali Middle Classes

Shifts in sentiments are part and parcel of structural changes, and studying childhood as a 'permanent segment' of the social structure (Qvortrup 2007,2009, Hardman 2001) among the contemporary urban middle classes of West Bengal cannot focus on colonial and contemporary social structures in Bengal influencing childhood, leaving out the realm of sentiments. The works of those like Ariès (1973) and Zelizer (1994) show that the sentiments that account for the construction of certain standards of childhood, as well as the ways in which children are sentimentalized, are closely related to distinctions of social class. It is with this focus on childhood and the sentiments surrounding it, that an argument for a culture of childhood has been made, in the context of urban West Bengal that was greatly influenced by the *bhadralok* culture.

Bengal in the nineteenth century was deeply affected by two interrelated processes: the colonial administration and the colonial discourse about Bengalis, that manifested itself in the education system, in pedagogic practices, in the economic structure of Bengal and the nationalist movement spearheaded by the *bhadralok*, that produced a nationalist discourse as against the colonialist one. The question of children, even if not directly that of childhood, was raised in this context of wider questions raised in the *Bramho* movement which in in its attempt at social reform, criticized and challenged many aspects of the orthodox Hindu tradition in Bengal. Bose (1995) describes how the pedagogical discourse about childhood was part of the normative discourse about the new family against the background of nationalism in nineteenth century Bengal. His views on the portrayal of the child and the interests behind the portrayal are strikingly similar to Tremp's (2005) discussion of childhood as a Chiffre in Rousseau's portrayal of *Èmile.* Tremp says:

> "The social-pedagogical utopia is based on the idea that the child is a blank character. If this empty slate is written on correctly, it can be designed to generate a better future. The education here is a tool of enforcement of social order and ideas at the service of a social, that is revolutionary progress. In contrast, the development of educational utopia emerges mostly from a so-

cial and cultural criticism of the times, and sees in the child a basis for the promise of better times,if society rigorously applies itself to the cause of (educating) children. The unspoilt nature of the child guides the path to education. The child becomes a utopia, because it shows quite a bit of heaven on earth" (Tremp 2005, p.71)[23].

Rousseau's *Èmile* who is portrayed as 'homme noveau' is in this sense not different from the 'son of the nation' Bose talks about in nineteenth century advice literature, where the right education would ensure stronger Bengalis, or stronger Indians with the promise of political freedom.

A paradoxical relationship characterizes the focus of much historiography in the context of colonial India, and the significance it has for understanding childhoods and children's lives in this context. On the one hand, the very tradition of history writing in India is such that almost everything becomes cast into a 'nationalism-imperialism' framework (Anagol 2008). Such a perspective swamps other themes, children's 'voices' (Ellis 2009) as also that of adults are silenced in such a construction of history. However, the historiography of this period also points to the fact that colonialism and nationalism were significant contexts within which concepts, projects, Chiffres of childhood, tropes and the very experience of childhood itself were inscribed.

The colonial administration had, especially after the mutiny of 1857 introduced a new system of education, at first in urban regions, which replaced the traditional medium of instruction among the Bengali Hindus – the *pathshalas* (Roy 1995). Apart from introducing English as a medium of instruction, the system of schooling changed in itself, with more than one teacher, with an emphasis on examinations, and with a discipline that was qualitatively different from the traditional *pathshala* where usually a single teacher, the *pundit* was in charge of the education of boys of different age groups.

A discourse about children – which was to all purposes confined to boys, emerged within the nationalist discourse, where children, not unsurprisingly were seen as the future of a nation that dreamt of freedom from colonial rule. Children, as future citizens who would bring India freedom became a significant theme in much of the pedagogic discussion and the advice literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Socialization of the child into an educated nationalist was the main theme in this debate. It is difficult to tell apart the child

23 The original quote in German is :"Die sozialisationspädagogische Utopie geht von der Vorstellung aus, dass das Kind ein leeres Wesen ist. Wird diese unbeschriebene Wachstafel richtig beschriftet, so lässt sich mit der neuen Generation eine bessere Zukunft gestalten. Die Erziehung wird hier zu einem Instrument der Durchsetzung sozialer Ordnungsvorstellungen und steht im Dienste eines gesellschaftlichen, also revolutionären Fortschritts. Demgegenüber geht die entwicklungspädagogische Utopie meist von gesellschafts- und kulturkritischen Zeitdiagnosen aus und sieht im Kind eine Basis, die bessere Zeiten verspricht, wenn sich die Gesellschaft rigoros an diesem Kindlichen orientiert. Die noch unverdorbene Natur des Kindes soll den Weg der Erziehung vorgeben. Das Kind wird zur Utopie, weil es geradezu ein Stück Himmel auf Erden zeigt"(Tremp 2005, p.71).

as a metaphor in the public discourse about it from the real child, but the discussion points to a significant shift within the family structure of the Bengali middle class.

The discussion about childhood in the public sphere in early twentieth century Bengal also addressed the theme of pedagogization of childhood to some extent and the significance of some pedagogic practices over others, although there is very little reference to this in social science research. In a collection of articles in different Bengali periodicals in the early twentieth century, Bose (2009) has brought together articles on different aspects such as children's education, health, upbringing in the sense closest to the German understanding of *Erziehung* that concerned the educated Bengali middle class. An article in the periodical *Bharati* in 1915, discusses the 'new pedagogic methods' *Shishu Shikshai Nabapaddhati* of America. Though the article is entirely about practices in the western context, it raises questions about whether the new pedagogic methods rob children of their childhoods or make them precocious (Bose 2009, p.778) and shows an engagement with issues related to pedagogy in the western context.

The woman's question changed the situation of girls in a section of middle class Bengali families. While the orthodox Hindu tradition was hostile to the education of girls, particularly among the upper castes, the nationalist ideology which in Chatterjee's words, 'selectively' borrowed from the Western tradition saw education as the means of its implementation. This implied the 'freeing' of girls to a degree from the traditional confinements, almost in keeping with the Western ideals of women's emancipation, but the 'westernization' of the Bengali woman was not desirable either. The primary objective of the education for girls was their successful socialization into bourgeois Bengali women who would do symbolic justice to the men leading the nationalist movement. Schools set up for the education of girls were a direct consequence of this endeavor, and it marked the history of the entry of girl children into institutionalized education.

> „A new patriarchy had emerged, laying down the code which would delineate the desired 'spiritual femininity' of Indian women. In order to attain this goal Bengali girls had to be 'saved' first of all from so-called denationalization; e.g. they should not be exposed to the 'secular' West. In the transitional phase in which Calcutta found itself, both the old model of girlhood (of uneducated females living in *purdah* being married at an early age) as well as the new imported model of girlhood (of 'half-educated' or 'westernized' girls) were condemned“ (Kerkhoff 1995, p.41).

Within wider Bengali society the social reform challenged many traditional orthodox Hindu practices such as child marriage and the ill treatment of child widows. The Age of Consent Bill that created a furore in Bengal in the nineteenth century, was jointly possible by the colonial administration fuelled by the western perception of such practices as symbolic of the barbarousness of the natives (Sinha 1995), as well as that of the social reformers like Vidyasagar, who

aimed at reform from within. The practice of cohabitation at the age of 10 or 12 for girls, or that of marriage before a certain age continued despite the official declaration of them as illegal. But the passing of the act and the emphasis on the heinousness of the Hindu tradition towards women and girls by some sections within the Bengali middle class and the colonial administrators, particularly illustrated by the death of *Phulmoni* marked the beginning of a public discourse in Bengal where the protection of girls from traditional atrocities was emphasized.

The colonial project of education to aid its administrative interests, the nationalist ideology that shaped the image of the bourgeois Bengali woman, and the social reform movement influenced by the Bengali reformers as well as supporters from the colonial administration – sculpted the private and public domain of the Bengali middle class which had a lasting impact on this social section even after Independence and the Partition of Bengal. The role of the *bhadramahila* changed the nature of the family to a more domestic, emotional unit. The shifts at the realm of sentiment that according to Ariès (1973) occurred in eighteenth century Europe and England, by raising a wall between the wider society and the family is to some extent paralleled by the emerging sentiments of domestic life from the home and the world distinction in nineteenth century Bengal. Children or childhood have not been directly mentioned in the historiography on the *bhadralok*, except in reference to nationalism in children's literature or the changing family structures as reflected in the advice literature of this time. But the history of the *bhadralok* contains the history of the idea of childhood that became a predominant aspect of Bengali culture in the later decades.

The significance of education for a social section, and the emergence of a certain system of schooling became the markers of a particular social section, as has been discussed in the later chapters. Though girls and boys of the same age were far differently treated by the family and the wider society, the establishment of girls' schools and the official restriction of the practice of child marriage, diminished in theory, the gap between girls and boys. The political aspects of identity formation is of greatest interest to historians – the curious positioning of the Bengali middle class between indigenous culture and western culture, or the symbolic importance of women in colonial Bengal. The question of children or childhood is not of interest in themselves – *Phulmoni* is an event that brought the debate of colonial masculinities to the fore, the Age of Consent act stood for the colonial-nationalist discourse and the position of Bengali Hindu girls as a site for symbolic struggle. But these are as much contexts in which a discourse about the protection of some children from aspects like sexuality, from traditional roles as wives and mothers began to unfold. Kerkhoff in her study on girls' schools during the colonial administration argues „that age-grading was actually a major force in bringing about: a new kind of pre-adult youth status; increased cohort segregation; and a longer period of dependency of the middle class female on her

parents (or other family members) instead of on her husband or in-laws“ (Kerkhoff 1995, p.44) The introduction of girls' access to education, the establishment of schools for girls, and the gradual increase in the age of marriage and the age of cohabitation for married girls were not unrelated. Neither are they of interest just because of the common political ideologies that led to its emergence. The emphasis on education and the protection from sexuality – until a certain age, strike a resonance with the contemporary principal of childhoods being distinct from adulthoods.

Moreover, the construction of new identities of the Bengali *bhadralok* and the *bhadramahila* created new ideals of adulthood in Bengali society – ideals from which in its distinction, contours of Bengali childhood were formed. Equally significant is, these ideals of adulthood, and in the later generations, of childhood were even in the twentieth century, restricted to certain social sections of Bengal retaining a distinct class character, which has far from dissolved and whose historical past and the struggles of its emergence are seared onto its present in contemporary West Bengal.

3.4 A Middle Class Culture of Childhood?

The themes of class, generation and culture in childhood research have differently engaged with the socialization paradigm and the 'new' paradigm that criticized it. In this study, I have drawn from the theoretical premises of the 'new' Sociology of Childhood and its engagement with other positions from Childhood Research in the Anglo-Saxon and German debates on the themes of middle class, generation and culture and reviewing them in the context of historical research on the *bhadralok* culture in West Bengal, I have argued for a *Bildungsmoratorium* that can be understood in the Bengali context.

The relationship of the middle class to childhood has most often been the subject of research in the context of cultural transmission or cultural transfer (Reay, Crozier, James, Hollingworth, Williams, Jamieson & Beedell 2008, Scherger & Savage 2010;Vincent & Ball 2007). The cultural and economic capital of middle class parents enable middle class parents through parenting strategies, choice of schools and 'enrichment activities' (Vincent & Ball 2007) to ensure their cultural reproduction. Another aspect, that has been highlighted in many studies on children from middle class families is the anxiety experienced by the middle class in uncertain times of educated unemployment – the 'fear of falling' thesis emphasized by Ehrenreich (1997). Studies that are interested in

middle class children, also focus on the fragmented nature of the middle class, with different groups making different educational choices about their children (Reay, Crozier, James, Hollingworth, Williams, Jamieson & Beedell 2008): While these studies, from the point of view of the 'new' Sociology of Childhood are undeniably adultist, they do point to a pattern across middle classes within and outside the western developed societies, where developing the 'cultural repertoire' (Lareau 2003) defines the lives of an increasing number of children. As the discussion in the previous chapter shows, the flaws of the earlier socialization paradigm can be corrected to some extent by emphasizing the significance of children's agency and by including the child's perspective – an approach that has been pointed out by some scholars to be full of methodological presuppositions in itself (Honig 1999b).

The theme of culture, in contrast has been a prime example of how the agency of children was highlighted. Borrowed from anthropology, the term has been used for a long time to speak of a world of the child, a special world, where adults have no entry (Becchi 1999). Critics from the 'new' paradigm have commonly drawn from the Vygotskian perspective to argue for a middle ground, where the thesis of the exclusive culture of children was rejected, emphasizing on structure and agency. The concept of children's culture is now being questioned, especially in the choice of spaces in the studies which make this assertion. James, Jenks and Prout point out that by studying children in specific spaces such as the playground, or among their peers, where they are in a context separated from most adults – such theories produce the concept of a separate culture of children than arising from one (James, Jenks & Prout 1998). While this criticism is against the theory of a separate culture of children, a theory about a culture of childhood has also been made following a similar perspective (Goodman 1973). The emphasis in this approach used by Goodman (1973) was on everything a child produces, how it assesses its possibilities expressed from the child's own perspective. Goodman's main argument was against a universalized image of childhood, dominated by the American middle class standards. Premised on the argument that the children's perspective of their world differs from the perspective of the studies on child development and counts as a significant subject of study, Goodman's work might be seen as one of the few arguments in the English speaking academic tradition of childhood research that in the 1970s took a stance different from the socialization paradigm.

> "The literature on child development, including a scholarly journal published under that name, is enormous. So is the literature on child rearing – on socialization. These and other studies report what adults see when they observe children, and what adults do for and to children. Culture of childhood studies, in contrast, report on what children see as they observe the world in which they find themselves. Because culture of childhood studies are few I have found it necessary to supplement them to some extent by drawing inferences about the "child's-eye view" from child development or from socialization studies"(Goodman 1973, p.2).

At the same time, the 'child's eye view' was discussed more by reference to other anthropological and psychological studies on children than by inference from children's views. The study offers rich data in its cross cultural references and emphasiszes one of the author's main arguments, that there is no universal model of childhood, an argument that was also made by Mead from the anthropological tradition, in her study of adolescents of Samoa. The 'child's eye view' has not been extensively followed in the study, owing to the kind of data Goodman based her arguments on. This approach has been criticized particularly on methodological grounds (Becchi 1999, Hardman 2001) for resorting to statistical analysis rather than actually exploring children's perspectives.

The critique as well as the response to the the adultist theoretical approach are directed against its 'child' 'adult', 'asocial' 'social', 'developing' 'developed' dualism. However, within the contemporary Sociology of Childhood the attempt to purge itself of an unpleasant, unequal socialization paradigm does not essentially resolve the problem of dualism, nor does it in itself chart out a space for reflexive theory construction. Basing itself to a great extent on the dualism implicit in a *construction* it attempts to rectify the adult gaze of socialization theory by an alternative representation of children. While this no doubt makes considerable difference to the direction and tone of research, as Honig points out, this sometimes leads to a moralization of the problem of representing the child, and it is not always clear if the critique of the adult-child dualism is a criticism of the construction or an assertion about the ontological nature of the child (Honig 2009b).

Outside the domain of theory, in the everyday lives of people in many societies, the differentiation between 'child' and 'adult' plays a crucial role in the existence of a wider normative framework, and social sentiments regarding the relation and the boundaries governing the two categories. This differentiation as well as its normative image is also significant in the lived experiences of those belonging to the two categories. 'Adults' and 'Children' here are relational categories, and although in many contexts, such as social perceptions or in the interaction of adults with children, this dichotomous understanding of the two categories are stronger than in others, the differentiation in itself merits theoretical attention. One of the implicit arguments in the social science research, and one that is highlighted by historical research on childhood is that childhood is not a taken for granted biological category, but rather is a social historical construct, whose cultural definition varies. In this sense the categories can only be understood in relation to one another – childhood cannot be conceived of without a conceptualization of its 'other' – adulthood (Cook 2011). As it has been important to be conscious of the dualism in theoretical perspectives in the new Sociology of Childhood, so it is also crucial to turn to the differentiation in the lived worlds of people, without which the concept of childhood as distinct from other biograph-

ical phases would not be understood. It is perhaps as useful to keep in mind that this distinction might translate into dualisms – in constructs of these distinctions or in interactions of people, but again, it might not. It would be hardly surprising to those in the social sciences that in the lived worlds of 'adults' and 'children' as a domain of struggle, negotiation and interaction everyday – binaries such as 'adult' 'child', or 'powerful' 'powerless' that cause theoretical sparring rarely lead a placid existence as dominant frameworks of being. This view, developed most significantly in the work of Honig represents a different position within childhood research than those who are essentially opposed to an adult-centric approach and uphold the 'agency' of children. Honig (2009 b) says, childhood research does not concern itself with the knowledge of what a child really is, nor does it plead for a specific image of the child, rather, it asks how childhood is possible. In this sense it is not about children, but rather practices of differentiation between children and adults and their objectification.

From this discussion of the dualism implicit in the theorization about children in the socialization paradigm, and the subsequent guard taken by the new Sociology of Childhood I would like to chart out my theoretical space. Just as the understanding of the differentiation that makes childhood possible is imperative, so is it also necessary to explore the possibility of using other theoretical positions to understand childhood in combination with the anti-adultist perspective. Socialization theories can serve as a caveat to researchers on childhood exploring new theoretical and empirical areas, rather than as a ghoul in the attic of the new Sociology of Childhood.

The concept of childhood as *Bildungsmoratorium* is crucial in this context. The development of a 'cultural repertoire', the involvement in 'enrichment activities', the significance of 'ethnic surplus value'[24] (Hage 1998) characterize the strategies of certain social section. This section has been loosely referred to as a middle class whose heterogeneity has been emphasized more through these studies on parenting and educational strategies than a collective identity of class. It is true that the perspective in most of these studies is not so much concerned on the children. Children here, serve as a suitable entry point for something else – diversity within class, boundaries within and across social section, processes of cultural reproduction, the power of habitus, the inequality in education systems being some of them. But it is also true that the lives of many children are also lived within such practices. Going to school, and attending extra classes are certainly one aspect of the everyday lives of children, but they are, for some social sections in different social contexts also an increasingly dominant aspect in terms of the time invested in them and in their relation to leisure activities. Significantly, the historical and social processes which pedagogized middle class childhoods, also implied the distinction between childhood and adulthood in other

24 The value placed by the white middle classes on ethnic diversity to enrich themselves.

areas – such as in paid work or sexual activity. This is the *Bildungsmoratorium* in a nutshell, and in its increasing currency among different social strata, it provides the context of a way of being children for some social sections. The argument in this study is that an entire culture is built up around such a 'time out' which not only signifies a separation from adulthood and an increased pedagogization of childhood, but where the practices and values of childhood derive meaning from the relational other – that of adulthood from the present and the previous generations.

Based on these aspects, I have raised the following questions which have been explored in this study.: Given the shifts in economic and education systems in contemporary India as well as West Bengal's specific historical development, is it possible to outline a childhood as *Bildungsmoratorium* among the middle class in Bengal based on the accounts of children about their everyday lives, and that of two older cohorts about their childhoods? Is it possible to speak of a middle class culture of childhood in urban West Bengal, from the nature of this *Bildungsmoratorium*? If such a culture exists, is it homogeneous or does it reflect the different groups within the urban Bengali middle class?

The argument for a culture of childhood in this context, is not similar to that of Goodman's[25], but has been used in the same sense as that of James, Jenks and Prout (1998). Where Goodman's conception of the culture of childhood is based on a separate perspective of the children about their world (even if this was not as much emphasized in the book as the psychological quantitative data), the culture of childhood the present study argues for is not exclusive to children, not does it claim to take on an 'authentic' 'child's-eye view'. The study focuses on the accounts of children between the ages of 10-12 and based on these as well as on accounts about childhood experiences of two older cohorts, it argues for a distinct culture that includes children and adults, perceptions of childhood, practices of childhood creating a distinct motif of childhood with its markers, typical leisure pursuits, forbidden activities and unintended consequences. The culture of childhood that is of interest to this study, is therefore more of a genre, specific to a particular geographical and cultural context, as well as a social section within which childhood is conceptualized and lived.

Emerging from a historical context where education and culture have been the defining features of the dominant social section, the colonial elite, who from

25 Goodman's book *The Culture of Childhood: Child's-Eye Views of Society and Culture* (1973) argues for a perspective of the children's perception about the world around them, or the 'child's-eye view'. Some of her arguments, based on cross-cultural research, particularly about children's early awareness of race in African societies, or religion, or caste in India are compelling. However, her arguments for a culture of childhood is based greatly on psychological quantitative data to argue that there is no universal model of childhood, by which she is presumably, criticizing the tendency of scholars in the United States to use a particular model of American childhood as a yardstick.

the twentieth century came to be identified as the Bengali middle class, the *bhadralok* culture is a significant influence on the contemporary middle classes in West Bengal. However, the focus of the study is not to see how Bengali children grow up to be *Bhadralok* through cultural socialization, nor is it about a culture of childhood to which only children from certain social sections in West Bengal have access, which, like the lores of schoolchildren documented by the Opies, thrives unseen, of which the adults have no knowledge. The interest in this study has been on a world that is hardly secret in the sense of the 'children's world', rather, is peopled with adults, children, institutions, home, books, conflicts and boundaries. The socioeconomic transitions in West Bengal which create stark contrasts between the post colonial *bhadralok* culture and the different groups who are inheritors of– or reject aspects of – this culture, add new meanings and perceptions to the boundaries of childhood and adulthood, changing the nature of 'protected childhoods'. Childhood researchers have long thirsted for the 'emic' view, an effort whose unavoidable difficulties have also been the subject of much debate (Honig 1999b, Ecarius 1999). The significance of children's experience in this study arises not from a 'commandment to listen to the voices of children' (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin 2007, p.243) but because there are two ways of continuing the debate. The one is to speculate on the effects of childhood as a *Bildungsmoratorium*, and patterns it might produce in children's lives. The other is to try to see – even if the perspective remains an adult one – how it is lived, and was lived in the two older generations, producing a pool of patterns, practices and sentiments which give childhood a particular form, worked on by the generational experiences of children in a particular social context.

4. Talking to Children, and Talking about Childhoods

The reference to culture in studies of childhood and children's lives is a significant one, implying in the very context of culture, who one means by children, how childhood is problematized and so on. The study of childhood as an extended *Bildungsmoratorium* is essentially a study of protected childhoods, where temporally and spatially children's lives are bounded off from some aspects of adult life. Childhood researchers from different disciplines acknowledge that a scholarized, domesticated childhood, which fits in the groove of Zinnecker's imagination of the *Bildungsmoratorium* though not the only model of childhood, has become something of a global icon which has led other forms of childhoods to lose their dignity (Niewenhuys 2009, Balagopalan 2011 Zinnecker 1995). In this sense this model of childhood has been usually held up as an essentially typical form in western industrialized societies, and 'other' childhoods from this understanding that sees the protected childhood model as Eurocentric, or limited to some western societies – are very often those of children in the 'wrong place', assaulting a more conservative western middle class notion of childhood.

In this context childhoods studied in South Asia are sometimes all the more conspicuous and exemplary of 'otherness' by virtue of their situation in spaces like the street or the factory. And in this emphasis on cultural diversity, the study of childhoods in non-western societies have a long history with the anthropological tradition and the ethnographic approach.

Studying the *Bildungsmoratorium* in the context of middle class children in urban West Bengal is in some ways studying an other – in its very cultural and historical context, though in some ways the image of protected education centric childhoods is a well-known one, especially in the context of western societies and is seen increasingly as a typical middle class phenomenon. The question of cultural context is of supreme importance to the study of the *Bildungsmoratorium* in two areas: The very emergence of the *Bildungsmoratorium* was conceptualized by Zinnecker in the context of certain social sections in West Germany and some other West European societies in the 1980s. The historical and social

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context specific to these societies accounted for the absence of similar patterns of extended moratorium of childhood in places like East Germany. In Zinnecker's words:

> „A necessary, but not sufficient precondition was (and remains) the immense prosperity consequent upon economic growth after World War II in societies without war in Western Europe. In this respect, the social processes connected with the onset of transition to service economies and the social changes resulting from this have been, it seems, the main forces at play. A concentration and centralization of markets, trade and traffic and a wide variety of services has taken place in the large conurbations. 'Salary men' and their families increasingly live and work here, too. In this economic, social and cultural 'greenhouse' atmosphere, the model of childhood as a cultural moratorium has flourished“ (Zinnecker 1995, p.86).

This development of the service sector and the emergence of a class of professional service sector workers, 'salary men' have occurred in different parts of India, and in the context of this study, in Bengal – under very different historical and economic circumstances. The liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s has been without doubt one of the key changes that have given the service sector in different parts of India a new impetus, but the 'salary men' – who make up a section of the middle class have been around in West Bengal and in other parts of urban India for a long time, bearing the legacy of their predecessors of the colonial times who worked at different levels of the administration and to whom education and salaried jobs were central aspects of their existence.

Secondly, a more implicit concept in the *Bildungsmoratorium* is the separation or distinction between adulthood and childhood. The very concept of 'time out' from adult responsibilities and practices – work, sexual behaviour, reproduction – is developed around a fulcrum comprising a set of notions about what it means to be an adult, and by implication what the child 'must not' rather than 'cannot' be or do for a period of time. The concept of adulthood needs to be denaturalized as much as that of childhood. Bearing children, working for a living, going out of the sheltered house into the outside world unprotected are not essential functions of biological age. Particularly in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century Bengal, it was not uncommon for girls of 13 or 14 to bear children, although in the following decades the age at which this was considered appropriate kept increasing, accompanied by a shift in sentiments which extended the mantle of childhood to girls of a much higher age, thus showing changing boundaries of adulthood and childhood.

Both these aspects show the need to situate the *Bildungsmoratorium* in the cultural and historical context in Bengal, as it has been done for West Germany. In this study of a culture of childhood of the urban middle classes in West Bengal, that conforms to the concept of *Bildungsmoratorium* as formulated by Zinnecker, historical background of Bengal's middle class culture, societal changes, as well as the perspectives of the people who are part of this middle class culture of childhood themselves have been some of the main aspects. In

keeping with Zinnecker's formulation of childhood as the *Bildungsmoratorium* three principal areas had been marked out for the study. One was the 'freeing' (Zinnecker 2000) of children from social obligations that serve the collective reproduction. The separation of children from practices such as marriage, paid work form one aspect. The utilization of the time and energy of the children, in learning activities is another aspect. The learning activities include education, play and cultural activities and are disseminated primarily from some 'core pedagogical institutions' (Zinnecker 2000) and are manifested in some special spaces – the playground, the child's room, the school etc. The generational relation whereby a distinct 'adult' status emerges and where adults represent the pedagogues who help the children 'prepare' is the third aspect. To bring all these aspects together to understand the culture of middle class childhoods, a combination of methods have been used, drawing from the ethnographic approach, as well as from existing historical research on the Bengali middle class. The primary source of data in this study has been narrative interviews conducted with children and adults conducted for over six months across two years about their everyday lives, or about their childhoods.

The choice of narrative interviews or of children's own perspectives is not new to the 'new' Childhood Research with its focus on children as actors, sometimes even as researchers of their own lives (Zinnecker 1999, James 2007). However, the methodological approach of 'listening to children's own voice', has a set of underlying political assumptions. After the initial celebratory spirit of 'seeing things from children's perspective' was somewhat subdued in the last decade, some researcher within Childhood Research grew more sceptical about this practice. Zinnecker himself, tracing the methods of research with children from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century, argued that Childhood Research had gone back to where it had started from as the 'new' methods of including children in research had a more hidden, but nevertheless present educational-component – where children were considered as 'knowing' in a handful of contexts, and where differences of generational order were far from removed (Zinnecker 1999). The concern with the political implications of 'giving voice' to children is reflected in the German language Childhood Research in the 1990s itself, as reflected by a volume of essays edited by Honig, Lange and Leu (1999) titled *Aus der Perspektive von Kindern?*(From the Perspective of Children?), complete with a question mark. In the English speaking academia, a similar concern is voiced by some of the proponents of the 'new paradigm' of childhood. James (2007) cautions against any naive celebration of the true perspective of children.

> "Within the cultural scripts of Western societies, it is as if in the words that children speak lie encapsulated the innocence and authenticity of the human condition, fast being lost to the adult world.." (James 2007,p.261).

What makes the question difficult to resolve is that children's own perspective does enrich research about children's lives greatly, although the way such data are framed and with what principal are not easily resolvable issues.

From a different disciplinary background, Grosvenor (2007) talks about the necessity to make children's voice be heard overcoming the silence of the field and method. In his article *'Seen but not Heard'*, Grosvenor attempts to trace the lives of two children, in a school and an asylum, through official records, and his arguments are convincing enough to tempt the reader to see the utility of 'life stories' in an area where children's experiences are mired in representations, numbers, and adultist observations.

The focus on narrative interviews in the present study arises not so much from an ideological perspective as from a methodological interest in how children live their everyday lives in the contemporary generation and among two older cohorts. The first lot of interviews was conducted for four months from November 2009 to March 2010, in Kolkata, and the second phase from December 2010 till February 2011 was conducted in Kolkata and in Bandel, a town in the Kolkata Metropolitan District. In both the phases the first few weeks were spent in making contacts, spreading the word and in reformulating how a mix of respondents could be achieved. As the study was based on the premises of a protected, middle class childhood, as outlined in Zinnecker's writings on the *Bildungsmoratorium*, a number of spatial aspects were taken into consideration while selecting a sample. The study involved no doubt school-going children from a certain social section – the middle class. Apart from the school, and home, dominant spaces of such a middle class childhood as discussed in studies about middle class children (Zinnecker 2000) also included classes where the 'leisure careers' or 'enrichment activities' (Vincent & Ball 1998, 2007) took place. While these were some of the primary criteria marking the section of children selected to be interviewed, these were also directions as to where to look for child respondents.

When I started out to explore the everyday lives of middle class children in urban West Bengal, the heterogeneity of the middle class in West Bengal was presumed and the diversity within this middle class as reflected in children's accounts was also a significant point of interest. In cities like Kolkata, there is a perceived hierarchy and distinction between different schools that has currency among several networks, largely informal – in media reports, among parents, teachers, and to some extent among older children of about 14 years onwards. This hierarchy is not clearly defined and is based on several criteria – such as knowledge about the school's performance in the State conducted Board Examinations of classes 10 and 12, knowledge about teaching qualities, about the fee structures, about benefits associated with attending particular schools, and about the kind of people associated with the schools – teachers, founders and the back-

grounds of the children attending them. This kind of knowledge and perception of hierarchy in its turns produces a general association of particular schools with particular sections of people. The distinction between schools also derive from previous education policies of the State Government. In the 1980s the removal of English in primary schools among schools of the West Bengal Government was a policy implemented by the Left Front Government at that time which created a deep divide between the class character of schooling in West Bengal. The policy was lifted in 1999 but already the association between schooling in the English medium and upper and middle sections of the middle class who could afford and who preferred private schooling had become well established. The difference within Bengali and English medium schools were also several. Moreover, schools with a mix of children from Bengali and non-Bengali backgrounds are often though not always private English medium schools where parents prefer the cultural mix, indicating a specific section of the educated Bengali middle class. In selecting the sample of children to be interviewed, I drew to some extent on this 'grapevine' about schools in Kolkata and Bandel – a term that has been used in the context of middle classes choices of schools in the United Kingdom (Ball & Vincent 1998). A list of kinds of schools – convent girls schools, missionary boys' schools, Bengali medium Government schools, Central Government School, private English medium coeducational schools – as well as different kinds of English medium private schools etc. and a list of possible schools was drawn up which covered a fair mix of some of the different kinds of schools attended by middle class children in Kolkata.

A mixed purposive sample was drawn to select children mostly between the age of 10-12 years for the study. The age group of 10-12 was decided upon based on previous studies in which children of this age group were considered to have sufficient mastery over language for narrative interviews (Ecarius 1999; Behnken, Leppin, Lutz, Manuela; Pasquale; Zinnecker 1991). A method of quota sampling was followed in which children from the different schools of Government/ private, Bengali medium/English medium; girls'/boys'/coeducational, missionary/non-missionary private were selected.

In the second round of the interviews conducted between December 2010-February 2011, parents and grandparents of some of the children interviewed were contacted for interviews about their childhoods. The respective age-cohorts were those born between 1964-1974 (although two respondents, both male, were born in 1958) and those born between 1938-1946[26]. The unevenness in the age limits arise mostly from the practice of the women being usually five years

26 The increasing age at the time of birth, among men and women, as well as the increasing age of marriage among women from the 1950s, accounts for the gap between the parental and grand parental cohort. Though not all the adult respondents were necessarily parents or grandparents of children interviewed – the age limits were decided upon based on the ages of the parents and grandparents of children who were interviewed.

younger to their husbands. Therefore in the cohorts of the parental and grandparental generation, the women were always considerably younger to their partners. For purposes of convenience the parental cohort is referred to as the '80s cohort and the grandparental cohort as the '50s cohort, as most of the respondents belonging to them were about 10-12 years old in the 1980s or 1950s, the age of the contemporary generation of children interviewed.

The children were contacted through three main sources – one was through teachers and tuition teachers in Bandel and Kolkata; one was a girls' school in Kolkata which gave me the permission to speak to some of its students during the school hour, and the third was a swimming club in South Kolkata, where children from different schools came to practice swimming and other sports.

A method of snowball was followed, not only for respondents of the age of 10-12, but especially for the cohort of the grandparents. Although parents of children were often available for interview, grandparents were not always accessible. Different reasons were stated for this: parents, often mothers of children were uncomfortable at the idea of their in laws being interviewed and said it was not a good idea – hearing ability, age and residence outside Kolkata or Bandel were also stated as some of the reasons why interviewing grandparents of children. In order to have a sufficient number of respondents from this cohort, therefore respondents were contacted through snowball sampling. A total of 33 children were interviewed – 18 girls and 15 boys. Among the parental cohort 19 respondents – 11 mothers and 8 fathers, and from the grandparental cohort 11 respondents – 5 women and 6 men were interviewed. One respondent, an 84 year old woman, the great grandmother of a respondent was also interviewed.

The sample of the children and the two older cohorts is by no means expected to be representative of all the different groups among the Bengali middle class – even if such groups or fractions cannot be enumerated. But the mix of choosing children by the different schools, ensured a variety of different family backgrounds in the three generations in terms of cultural and economic capital.

The narrative interviews were recorded and transcribed in the form of childhood stories of the older cohorts, and of accounts about everyday lives of the child respondents. While interpreting the interviews as a source of data, particular importance was given to narrative structures and the patterns of response in the interviews.

4.1 The Concept of Cultural Capital

A key concept in the study of childhood as *Bildungsmoratorium* is that of cultural capital as developed by Bourdieu and Passeron and extensively used by Bourdieu. In *The Forms of Capital* Bourdieu says that culture is one of the guises in which capital presents itself (Bourdieu 1986, p.243) and says that cultural capital can exist in three forms, the embodied state, the objectified state in cultural goods and in the institutionalized states. He bases his thesis of social inequality and education on this concept of cultural capital.

> "The notion of cultural capital initially presented itself to me, in the course of research, as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success, i.e. the specific profits which children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions" (Bourdieu 1986, p.243).

The concept, often seen as Bourdieu's 'signature concept' (Lareau & Weininger 2003,p.567) relation has, thereafter become a key concept in relating social inequalities with the use of culture as a resource, and has been emphasized and argued for in different ways by scholars, particularly in the area of social pedagogy and education, either agreeing with (Lamont & Lareau 1988; Lareau & Weininger 2003) or by posing a nuanced criticism[27] of Bourdieu's arguments about cultural capital (Kingston 2001).

In the discussion about 'modern' childhoods, especially among the middle classes in industrialized societies, whether in the context of *Bildungsmoratorium* or in studies of educational strategies of families from a Bourdieusian perspective, cultural transfer has been the principal concept in relation to children. In Zinnecker's formulation of childhood as a *Bildungsmoratorium,* the concept of cultural capital as developed by Bourdieu is of primary significance – especially in a social context where the acquisition of educational capital or degrees – '*Bildungstiteln*' – are essential to the maintenance of status (Bourdieu & Köhler

27 Kingston (2001) in *The Unfulfilled Promise of Cultural Capital Theory* reflects on the usage of cultural capital in theory, particularly in the works of Lamont & Lareau and challenges the notion that possession of cultural capital is essentially privileging. Although his critique is directed more against contemporary interpretations of Bourdieu in American Sociology than against Bourdieu, one of the arguments he makes is that familiarity with some aspects of 'highbrow' culture, such as knowing different kinds of wine, or knowing certain musicians might be skills or marks of greater familiarity with some aspects of culture, but cannot be seen as 'resources' which necessarily lead to success or upward mobility. Though the present study is not as such concerned with the privileging 'results' of cultural capital, Kingston' discussion is significant and of interest as it is one of the fewer studies of cultural capital and cultural practices which do not make a direct connection with educational achievements.

1981), which is possible when families use their cultural capital to ensure the process of cultural transfer.

In this study, the concept of cultural capital has been borrowed from the Bourdieusian perspective and is significant in two broad contexts. The emergence of a culture in colonial Bengal, that was centred to a great extent on education and education-related jobs made the possession of education and cultural resources of a specific kind the distinguishing feature of a social section. The possession of cultural capital was essential to the cultural ethos of this social section, that in colonial Bengal as well as in contemporary West Bengal, continues to identify itself as the educated middle classes.

The second context in which the concept of cultural capital is of significance to this study is in the distinctions within the narratives about middle class childhoods. The different patterns in the accounts of children and the adult respondents – though all scholarized and domesticated childhoods – reflect distinctions within the common practices, such as the kind of emphasis on education, the kind of leisure activities, the way in which the adult child distinctions were articulated. These differences, can be greatly attributed to the differences in families, whose perspectives and sentiments about education and other aspects translate into practices and values that shape the lived experiences of childhood within it. In the last one and a half decades, such intra-class differences, particularly within the middle class have been the subject of social science research which have focused on the differences of cultural capital among other factors.

Bourdieu's use of 'cultural capital' as well the extended application of this concept by researchers, particularly by the English speaking sections to suit the American context have led to several meanings and connotations of the concept. As Lamont and Lareau (1988) have pointed out, the concept has several roles in Bourdieu's own work, from being a power resource, and a resource that ensures cultural and social reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) to being an indicator and a basis of class position (Bourdieu 1986, 1996; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). The repertoire of meanings of cultural capital attributed by Bourdieu as well as his followers is vast, ranging from academic standards to dominant or high culture (Lareau & Weininger 2003). These in turn have been operationalized differently, sometimes quantitatively, using statistics about parental education, reading habits etc. or qualitatively (Vyronides 2007).

In this study, the cultural capital that has been mentioned to signify the family backgrounds of the respondents is significant as an indicator of social position. Cultural capital was operationalized qualitatively as a combination of parental education, pedagogic practices in the family – such as reading some kinds of books, familiarity with Bengali and English and to some extent parental occupation. However, the study itself is premised on the idea of a middle class culture which values education and culture. Cultural capital is in this context not syn-

onymous to 'high culture', rather different kinds of cultural capital, as well as different levels of cultural capital have been conceptualized for the distinctions within the urban Bengali middle class.

To determine the family backgrounds, the children's parents in the first field phase were given a form asking for the parents' occupations, academic qualifications, the newspapers subscribed to by the family among other things. To some degree it provided an overview of family backgrounds and of cultural capital, where even now, the employment of women in service sector is closely associated to high cultural capital – not simply as an indicator of educational qualifications, but also in its deviance from the traditional role of women in Bengal. However, the parents of children were not always available for answering the questions, and the children were asked about their parent's occupations.

A clearer picture of the cultural capital of the families of the older generations emerged in the narrative interviews. As discussed in the following chapter, respondents often talked about family practices or family stories – a father who was a strict English teacher, a grandfather who came first in school, parents' insistence on learning classical dance – which indicated the social position of the family. The education of women in the family – mothers and aunts – has been a key indicator of cultural capital among the adult respondents. The historical background of women in the Bengali middle class is such that the formal education of Bengali women until the 1950s, beyond school or high school signified liberal attitudes of the family and a high value placed on education, which was not limited to men. In this context when respondents born in the 1970s or 1940s talked about their mothers studying till high school or a Bachelor's or Master's degree – the practice of women in formal education itself – for mothers of respondents of the '40s generation – as well as the level of educational qualifications were indications of high cultural capital. The educational qualifications of parents, specially mothers, the occupation of parents and pedagogic practices at home have been perceived as indicators of higher cultural capital.

Bourdieu's concept, as well as its application in other studies have hardly been used to study childhoods. The principal areas of its application have been in studies on social inequalities and distinctions (Savage & Bennett 2005, Bennett 2005, Lamont 2002) and in studies on educational practices and achievements based on family backgrounds. In the second context, children are of some interest but only in so far as choices about their schools or their school performances are concerned, which are interpreted as functions of cultural capital. The focus of this study being, not on educational performances but on experiences of childhood – calculation of cultural capital was to some extent not possible – as the study involved interviews with 10-12 year olds, nor could it be operationalzsed as in a more teleological interpretation which correlates factors with educational achievement. The concept of cultural capital is significant in simplifying to

some extent the distinctions in the patterns of childhood experiences. While information about the family – where possible – have helped in associating some practices with some groups, as indicators – the accounts of the three generations can also be 'read off' to some extent as showing how cultural capital forms the basis of class position. The different associations of cultural capital to practices affecting childhood, have been discussed in the empirical section of the study, rather than confining it to something that can be methodologically clarified.

4.2 Stepping In

The 'field' as an ethnographer would use the word, was not a single, unbroken expanse in the course of this study. In a sense it was Kolkata and its metropolitan district, Bandel in general – with constant talks in the buses and metros about children and their hectic schedules or preparations for examinations, with the sight of school children from different age groups on the streets, waiting in clusters for buses, meeting parents after singing classes or mathematics tuition or thronging outside stationary shops in the mornings, to buy refills for their pen and greeting cards for Christmas. The field in another sense, was wherever the interviews were conducted – in the 'study' rooms or drawing rooms of families where children, and adults were interviewed, in the school where I was given a practice room to conduct my interviews with five girls – where trophies and certificates of inter school competitions hung on the wall alongside framed 'did you know that?' charts of famous personalities and paintings done by students, and lastly – in a place where my sense of field came closest to its ethnographic application, at the swimming club in South Kolkata.

As I moved in and out of apartments, houses, neighborhoods talking to respondents from the ages of 10 to 70, the interviews – in the themes that recurred, in the words used, in the inevitable way some questions produced a smile, a longer pause or a quick dismissal – seemed to run into each other and be held together like threads of a web across 60 years and the 35 Kilometres that separate Bandel from Kolkata – leaving a sense of the field.
The interviews with the children and the adults incorporated some of the basic methods and objectives in the project designs *Projekt: Kindheit im Siegerland* (Behnken, Leppin, Lutz, Pasquale & Zinnecker 1991; Wojtkowiak & Zinnecker 1994) and *Projekt: Bildungsmoratorium* (Georg, Hasenberg,Marx, Stecher, Strzoda, & Zinnecker 1994). The main objectives in the study were to have a historical perspective of children's lives in three generations with a view to patterns

that might point to the distinction of children's lives from aspects of adulthood, as well as to see if a culture of childhood emerged from the narratives. Though specific questions about everyday life in school were not usually asked, the focal points of the study were spatial aspects[28], pedagogization and individual biographies. The children were interviewed about their everyday lives, especially what they did in their time out of school, leisure activities and tastes. A comparative perspective of children's everyday lives across three generations was sought in the interviews with adults. However, what children could talk about in the immediacy of their everyday lives, adults from the two older cohorts had to rely on reminiscence. The method of data collection was primarily narrative interviews. However the interviews with the children and adults were conducted along different guidelines owing to their differences in context with relation to their childhoods. A combination of a narrative interview method and the use of guidelines (*Leitfaden*) to ask the respondents about areas which did not come up in the narrative interviews, was used. The children were usually asked to begin by talking about themselves, their families and then to describe how their day was spent. The guideline was used asking specific questions if the children found it difficult tpo talk at a stretch, as they sometimes did. Some of the main points of interest were: how and where their time was spent during the day, the kind of enrichment activities they engaged in and their perspectives about them, the kind of leisure activities they preferred. Other questions in the guideline were 'follow up' questions where these were not talked about in the more unstructured part of the interview. Questions about preferences – the kind of television shows, books or other forms of leisure children preferred or did not prefer; questions about clothing preferences and autonomy in choosing clothes or other things; as well as questions about particular incidents that was mentioned were also asked.

With the adult respondents, the narrative interview method was used with the guidelines. Respondents were asked to describe their childhoods, their families, and following the guidelines questions were asked to enable a comparative perspective, about the way the time out of school was spent, 'enrichment' and other leisure activities, clothing, preferences, incidents of conflicts with parents. Ques-

28 In *Projekt: Kindheit Im Siegerland* (1991) the word *Verhäuslichung* has been used which literally translated, means domestication. One of the central themes in the studies of modernization of childhood in the German context was that of the domesticization of childhood. Though the word conveys little to the reader in the English language, it refers to a shift from children spending time outdoors, especially on the streets, to a childhood, noticeably in the bigger cities where the home or school or closed spaces were increasingly the locus of childhood. In the context of West Bengal, the distinction between street-childhoods and non-street childhoods have a strong connotation of social and economic inequalities. In the absence of any detailed historical research on a 'non-domestic' childhood existing among the middle classes in Bengal, the implications of the word used by Behnken *et al*. Have been incorporated to understand protected spatial aspects of childhood.

tions were also asked about consciousness about gender – either at home or school or in the neighborhood as children; the respondents' perspectives of when they saw their childhood as having ended; perspectives of difference between their childhoods and that of contemporary children, particularly where younger cohorts from the same family were interviewed.

The method of narrative interviews in *Projekt Bildungsmoratorium* was developed according to the guidelines of Fritz Schütze. In the present study, the interviews, even before transcription were conceptually divided into sections. Two of the broad divisions were the structuring of time and the pursuits in the leisure time. The more structured part of the interview following the guidelines, was divided into subsections such as the kind of games played, the kind of books read, the kind of programmes watched, gender-specific experiences, household chores assigned, and conflict with family. For the older cohorts two more questions were added, that about the perceived end of their own childhood, as well as their comparison of their own childhoods with contemporary childhood.

These 'topical structures' (Bohnsack 2007; Nohl 2010) were applied even after transcribing the interviews to comparatively look at other interviews based on specific sections. Another point of interest was, the recurrence of certain patterns, or a set motif of situations or experiences that came up in the interviews. A third point of focus during analysis was the topics that that the respondents talked about in great detail. Nohl (2010) refers to Bohnsack's works and calls these 'focusing metaphors'. However, rather than metaphors, in analyzing the interviews, certain narrative styles were of greater interest. Riessman says:

> "Narrativization tells not only about past actions but how individuals understand those actions, that is, meaning. Plots vary in type: tragedy, comedy, romance, and satire. Tellers pour their ordinary lives into these archetypal forms"(Riessman 1993,p.19).

These archetypal forms were one of the main aspects in the analysis, although they were more significant for the interviews with the older cohorts. This is not to say that children as narrators of their everyday lives are not capable of applying satirization or any other archetypal forms to give form to their everyday lives. Rather, as has been mentioned in one of the following sections, children often use humour or satire when talking about conflict with parents. However, the kind of 'archetypal forms' Riessman talks about, or 'focusing metaphors' mentioned by Nohl (2010) have greater meaning when there is some distance between the narrator's present and the past that is being narrated. For children, the description of their everyday life was not only too near, but they were living it as they spoke, which made casting narratives into such forms less probable. Nevertheless, some recurrent forms employed by the children are seen, giving an impression of the pace of the week, for example through a particular narrative style.

4.2.1 On Taking Children Seriously and Being Taken Seriously: Interviews with 10-12 Year Olds

The practice of exploring childhood from the perspective of children, through interviews or through observation still has something of its novelty as well as disputed status in childhood research in the social sciences, well over a decade and a half after the assertion was made about children as actors, and the importance of seeing things from children's perspective, assertions which emerged as a criticism of the one-sidedness of the development paradigm. The practice of 'giving children a voice' has not been embraced without a measure of justified skepticism. In the last two decades, the assertion of children as actors in their own right has been echoed in empirical research in 'making children be heard', a stance which raises questions about the politics of representation (Honig, Lange & Leu 1999). The emphasis on taking children seriously is a reflection of this stance sometimes, where the image of the child is that of a citizen (Ecarius 1999). The power differential behind such a stance of 'giving' children a voice is unmistakable, and strikes a chord with some of the questions raised in subaltern studies,sometimes ironically enough in the very context of Bengal. As Honig pertinently raises the question, „Who is speaking here?“ in talking about giving children a voice (Honig 1999b, p.34). These differences cannot be altogether bridged as the difference essentially remains that of a child who is heard and observed, and that of the researcher, who listens and watches, and who in 'giving' a voice to children through her work, mixes some of her perspectives and represents the 'voice' of the children as per her focus. The difference can however be reduced. The shadow that creeps into the appeals to take children seriously also reflect a similar awareness of the power differential, a discomfiture with the researcher's own position, of a well meaning Gulliver among the Lilliputs. The clarification of why children's perspectives are significant to a study and an overview about the possible shortcomings or difficulties based on the researcher's impression are useful. The perspective is still an adult one, but not adultist, or less adultist.

Children were chosen as the principal respondents in this study to explore the nature of middle class childhood. In asking children about what they do after school, what they like spending their time doing, where they spend time most, discovering a secret, inner world of children was not the point of interest. Rather, the focus was on seeing if the contours of the *Bildungsmoratorium* could be drawn from the children's accounts about their everyday lives. The leisure careers, the 'enrichment activities', the games, the books, the shielding of children from sexual activity and work that 'make up' the middle class, are also lived by children in their everyday lives – or even flouted, contrary to standards of middle

class childhood. The story of the *Bildungsmoratorium* in West Bengal, of how children are expected to have a distinct biographical phase from adulthood, is also a story of the everyday lives of the children. Who best than children themselves to talk about it?[29]

In most of the visits to the children, especially at the swimming club, and in one of the neighborhoods in Bandel, I was struck with how the small digital recorder with which the interviews were recorded, served as an ice-breaker. On most occasions I entered a room to find the children had already been told that I was coming to talk to them. Though I will never exactly know what the children thought of it, sometimes I had the impression that on my entry, children were quiet, expecting something of a test where general knowledge would be tested. When I introduced myself and said what I was there for, they usually nodded, some of them saying they already knew, it was for an 'interview'. Before starting to record, the children were usually told that the recorder would be used and my anxieties that it might not be clear because of the background noise were sometimes voiced, especially at the swimming club, where the sounds of children playing and swimming and the traffic outside were strong. At this specific point, children often volunteered to see if the recorder picked their voice clearly, saying when they found it satisfactory, and the conversation usually took a turn of ease. Without exoticizing the uniqueness of children, it was also noticeable how serious the children were about some things. Sometimes, when we were walking around the swimming club, talking, or when we moved during the interview, the children remembered the recorder before I did, and sometimes lifted it right onto their laps while they were talking. Even when the wording of my questions seemed inapplicable, some children emphatically rephrased what I said – a practice that was revelatory of the culture of childhood in its rhetorical nuances. For example, I asked one 11 year old girl Dipanwita, using the Bengali form of expression if she went out to play. She hesitated, then clearly and with emphasis replied: „No I don't. That is I play, but I don't go *out*“.

At the swimming club when I finished interviewing a 12 year old boy, I came upon a group of women, mothers, who said some of the children had been waiting for when 'Didi'[30] would 'interview' them. The word 'interview' which was used freely by the adult contacts, possibly to impress the significance of what I was doing on parents and children seemed to be something of a novelty among some children as well as something looked on with a sort of misgiving. At one time, in Bandel, a 12 year old boy, Rohan who was one of the respondents, took me to the house of a schoolmate of his, another boy who lived in the same neigh-

29 The interviews for the most part, both with children and the two older cohorts were in Bengali, although the respondents freely mixed words in English during the interviews, as is common in colloquial Bengali. The translations are the author's own. It has been specified where the interviews are in English

30 The Bengali word for 'elder sister'.

bourhood. When I was being introduced to the parents of Shubham, and talking to the others, Rohan, to allay his friend's apprehension about the difficulty of the questions asked, generously said, „She asks really easy questions. I was almost laughing out loud they were that easy!“. Confronted with the possibility that I might not have been taken seriously, I had my first taste of the other side of research with children. While fearing that the children's views might not be taken seriously enough might predominate in formulating a study with children, in the field, there is no reason to believe that an adult-child differential always tilts the balance in favour of the powerful adult, who has at her disposal decisions of taking children seriously or not.

The difference could however, be far from ignored. Some of the interviews were carried out in the homes of the children, and parents – sometimes from lack of sufficient space, and partly from a culture where adults are involved in most things to do with the children – were within earshot, and sometimes piped in – when the children were talking. This was one aspect of the interview where the children's position as children and my position as an adult got in the way. Although the problem of parental interference was something I had pondered over, it was not something that could be successfully resolved. Asking to be alone with a child was sometimes an option, but not always. Space, as I realized, was not always a question of availability, it was also a part of culture, imprinted in one's sensibility. The concept of space does not exist in many contexts in the Bengali middle class culture, not just for children but for adults.

My position as an adult, as well as being introduced by school teachers sometimes put me, in the first meeting on something as the same footing as a teacher. I noticed this when some of the children asked me if they should talk to me in English or in Bengali. I was interviewing an 11 year old girl, Titiksha when I noticed that she kept up a flow of talk in English even when I was talking in Bengali. Though she spoke to the other children in the building in Bengali, she spoke in English with her neighbour the teacher from her school who introduced me to her. English was a language for school, for teachers – especially in some missionary schools which forbade the use of Bengali during the school hours, apart from lunch breaks. And as an outsider who 'needed' to talk to children, I was an equivalent to the speakers of the English tongue – teachers.

In another family an 11 year old girl was sometimes annoyed when her mother broke in, when she hesitated to reply – and sometimes agreed with her mother. Despite having asked her mother to let her speak, it was not resolved – the apartment having a drawing room and two bedrooms, which were occupied by other members of the family – her father and grandfather, to let us have the drawing room. When Rwiti's mother was interviewed in her turn, Rwiti, did not go into the bedrooms. Instead, she chose a spot beside her mother on the sofa and settled down. When her mother asked her what she was doing, couldn't she see I was in-

terviewing her, Rwiti said „When I was talking you were there“. The remainder of the interview continued uninterrupted.

4.2.2 Talking About Childhoods

The different concepts suggested by the term 'childhood' translates into methodological minutiae at all points of empirical research. Comparative studies of childhoods suggest certain kinds of diversity – of the cultural anthropological kind, as in Mead's study in Samoa or of the historical kind as in Ariés' thesis about sentiments of childhood unfolding even if not lineally, but somewhat chronologically in parts of western Europe. However, comparing childhoods within a cultural context across generations, poses differences of another order. The principal difference in interviewing 70 or 40 year olds and 10-12 year olds is in their relation to the biographical phase of childhood. The children through their accounts of their everyday lives, make visible patterns of practices, institutions, and sentiments that enable researchers to talk about certain kinds of childhood, or of transformations of childhood in a collective sense. The here and now of the children's everyday life in this context form one aspect of the subject matter of contemporary childhoods, or childhoods that are being lived and 'done' now. But with adult respondents their distance from the biographical phase they understand by 'childhood', enables a 'looking back' and an overview of a childhood that has been already lived.

Narrative interviews about childhoods raise several issues of methodological significance. One does not naturally take out a recorder and ask 12 year olds to talk about their 'childhoods'. But in the context of adult respondents, the meanings evoked by 'childhood' or 'child', produce significant patterns in the narratives – stretching across the individual's life course beyond specific age-groups, across personal experiences as a child in recounting 'how things were in those times', and even in reaction to the standard contemporary conception about childhood.

The narrative interviews of adult respondents showed a characteristic blurring between individual biographies and narrations about 'the times' in general. The guidelines or the *Leitfaden* was developed and sharpened through the fieldwork phase to distinguish between the two where it was significant to the research focus. Questions such as „But what did you read as a child?“, were asked to specify a response that in the respondent's childhood detective books were popular among children. At the same time, the apparent blurring between what

was believed to be the general practice and the respondent's personal experience was often a rhetorical style – of establishing one's own experiences of growing up as a trope, a style that was not confined to only a few respondents. This was especially noticeable when the interview at any part involves questions about gender roles. Respondents, when asked if they helped at home in housework, sometimes said that they did „Whatever the practice was in those days“ – referring to girl's helping with typical forms of housework, or boy's helping with errands or not having to help. Follow up questions about the exact nature of chores the respondent had to do and the division of chores among other children in the household were asked.

There is little achieved if this ambiguity is seen as a methodological problem to be 'resolved' by the follow up questions. The narratives as well as the responses to specific questions have been taken together to understand the culture of childhood through this seeming ambiguity of some of the interviews. Perceiving them as narrative styles has also enabled a richer understanding of the cultural context, which in their continuity and divergence across and within generations reflect the intersection of history and biography. The relatively unstructured part of the interview and the *Leitfaden* based interview complement each other in a significant way when talking about childhoods. By being able to distinguish between what was believed to be generally done 'in those days' and the respondent's individual biography –whether affirming or in defiance of tradition – the social location of the respondent's background as well as the specificity of individual biographies came to the fore.

The manner in which contemporary childhoods could be explored through the accounts of 10-12 year olds about their everyday lives could not be replicated with the older cohorts. One could ask adult respondents to talk about their childhoods, but the concept of 'childhood' being a subjective one, could not be tacked down to a specific age-group. Respondents, sometimes talked about their experiences at the ages of 15 or 16 and sometimes even 20 – age groups which are broadly seen as corresponding to adolescence or youth – and referred to all of these as their „childhood“. Such narratives cannot be uncritically compared to the accounts of the 10-12 year olds without some clarification of how old the respondents were at the time of some practices. But if 'snapshots' of childhood cannot be obtained in the narrative interviews, the education system in West Bengal and the strong correspondence between chronological age and different 'classes' in school provide one one of the keys to determining the age of the respondents in the context of some practices and experiences. With respondents, whose children or grandchildren were also interviewed, specific questions were posed, where they were asked if they remembered aspects of their childhood when they were of the same age as their children or grandchildren. Questions such as, „Do you remember what you read when you were as old as 'S'?“ or „Do you remem-

ber how old you were when you read it?“ are some examples. Sometimes, the respondents themselves specified at which point of their biography a certain practice or event occurred. Responses like, „I didn't have any after-school lessons when I was my grandson's age. But in class nine I had a tutor in Mathematics“ or, as in the case of some female respondents who grew up in the 1950s, „I started wearing a sari in class six – I must have been 12 or 13 then“, are themselves specifiers which allow a comparative perspective of the lives of children over three generations to some extent.

The system of schooling, its association with chronological age of children, especially in established age-limits for significant examinations – the Intermediate in the 1950s, the School Leaving or board examinations in class 10 and class 12 for the cohort who grew up in the 1970s and the '80s itself forms a framework in which many respondents from middle class backgrounds situate their childhoods. In narrative interviews about childhood, experiences at home and school and the neighbourhood, get structure and sequence from age divisions in schooling practices. These have been utilized to an extent to minimize the ambiguities in the interviews, but 'resolving' the apparent blurring in the interviews of the adult respondents have not been the primary focus in this study. The concept of childhood is not alien to reconstruction, be it in Rousseauesque treatises, social science theorizing or in subjective representation of personal biographies. This subjective aspect of narrative interviews is not a drawback but the very strength of the method of narrative interview. This subjectivity itself has been incorporated as one of the aspects of the study of childhood as a *Bildungsmoratorium*. Respondents from the older cohorts were asked two questions in the more structured part of the interviews. One was if the respondents perceived any difference between their childhoods and contemporary childhoods – or that of their child or grandchild. The other was when the respondents perceived their own childhood as having ended and why. The two questions make the subjective meanings about childhood clearer, and at the same time show the transformations in the culture of childhood and in the boundaries of the cultural moratorium of childhood across the three generations.

The questions in the interviews were developed to understand the lived experiences of children of the two generations. Remembered childhoods have a dubious status with regard to their 'authenticity'. But seeing them as data which must be 'cleaned' might well pose a methodological quandary. While the guidelines were used in order to specify aspects of the narrative interviews, attempting to 'resolve' the problems in subjective narratives can hinder understanding of the lived experiences of children – however unspecific and ambiguous – through whittling away of what might be perceived as 'methodological flaws'.

4.2.3 Subjective Location of the Researcher

The question of subjective positioning of the researcher is often raised in empirical research with children – not least because of the researchers' own experiences of childhood, as well as her or his status as an adult in interaction with children. The question is perhaps most raised in studies using ethnographic methods of studying children – by observing them, talking to them, sometimes even participating in their games or conversations. Thus an insight into the world of children is gained, but similar to some cultural anthropologists, the childhood researcher's entry into the playground or the classroom is conspicuous owing to a difference – the adult status of the researcher. The examples of the perceived 'adult status' of the childhood researcher in the 'field' that are most often cited, are in situations of conflicts between children, of children turning to the researcher, expecting her or him to step in during a conflict (Thorne 1999; Eßer 2009). Identifying the researcher with a person of authority – a teacher or a 'pedagogic personnel' (Eßer 2009,p. 45) is unavoidable in contexts where adult child roles are not only distinct, but where childhoods are pedagogized so that children are mostly used to interacting with adults who are either parents or teachers, which determines the children's perceptions of adults and expectations from them. It is perhaps impossible for the childhood researcher to 'go' wholly 'native', but researchers in the past have come up with means of minimizing the gap between researcher and respondents, by declining to interfere in the children's matters showing authority, or by assuming what is known as the 'least adult role' developed by Nancy Mandell with the children (Warming 2011).

The significance of the researcher's identity and that of her subjectivity are greatest in the context of the 'field', in studies following the methods of observation or participant observation. But the questions are nonetheless significant even for the narrative interviews with the children and the adult respondents, in the perceived status of the researcher as an adult, or as someone curious about childhoods and children of other generations.

My cultural identity as Bengali as well as that of a 'student' had considerable bearing on my entry into the 'field' in many senses. The introduction with most of the children were primarily through adults, therefore my perceived identity depended to some extent on what the adults chose to say about me. Where adults – parents, or teachers– introduced me, I was the girl doing a 'study'– a term that many of the adults used in introducing me, especially at the swimming club– an introduction that I realized at several points of my research as having the stamp of approval, because of its association with education. Among the children themselves, the interaction, as well as my perceived status was different according to the context. With the exception of the swimming club, where I made several vis-

its, the visits to most of the children– either at home or school or at a tuition – were one time, when the children were interviewed. Compared to a field in the more ethnographic sense of long-term observation of children, in an interview situation the events pointing to the adultness of the researcher occur within a compressed frame of time and space. The act of the interview in itself, however less structured – where the child has to answer questions posed by someone who is adult, emphasizes the distinction between the children and the researcher, especially as 'question-answer' contexts are associated with the school.

Unlike a field study in which continuous visits are made to a place where the children and the researcher grow familiar with each other, in the context of interviews the children and the researcher have several hours. However, the context of my access to children as well as that of the interviews had significance for how my 'adult' status could be negotiated. Where I had been introduced by teachers, either at school or from the neighbourhood where the children lived, the formality at the start was sometimes apparent, especially when the children asked which language they should talk to me in – English being for most, the choice for conversation with teachers.

Many children said they had no disagreements with their parents and those who did, often cited 'not studying' as a main cause. For example, Rwiti an 11 year old girl paused for a while and then said that she had conflicts with her parents. When asked about what, she smiled and at first hesitantly said it was about studies. Smiling broadly she explains, „That is when I don't study, then Ma asks me to study and I keep saying after a while after a while, and then no studying is done“ (Interview with Rwiti, January 2011). In a context where adults at home and school place a high value on 'studying', narrating stories about 'not studying' to an adult is possibly not done without some judiciousness. The smiling, or the humorous description of conflict with parents that children sometimes employed appeared to be a pattern children chose when recounting conflicts, or being slapped by parents – to lighten the effect. Sitting on one of the benches at the swimming club, away from the groups of mothers and children, Ishan a 12 year old boy grinned and said he was often in trouble at home for 'playing too much'.

Sometimes, when children were interviewed in groups of three or more, there was less hesitation in answering some questions – particularly related to studies and conflicts with parents. When something was found funny by one child in the group, the others joined in and the conversation took a humorous turn with children hesitating less. Some of the themes that were talked about a little in contrast to not being mentioned much in the individual interviews, were about things watched on television that parents did not approve of, or even romantic interests. Taniya, her cousin Abhishekh and her friend Priyanka were interviewed in Isha's room. Her parents and her aunt and Priyanka's mother were in the drawing room. The children on being asked if they watched something that their parents disap-

proved of, mentioned Hindi soap operas and Abhishekh said Mr. Bean. At the mention of Mr. Bean a twitter went around. When I asked more about Mr. Bean, the two girls started giggling and one of them offered to explain:

T: They show rubbish. That is why they don't like it.

H.S: So you watch it or turn it off?

T: No we watch it.

H.S: What do you mean by rubbish?

T: He walks about naked..but they let us watch the cartoon, the human (non animated) one they don't (Interview with Taniya, December 2009).

At the school where I was given the permission to interview some class five students in a practice room, there was similarly a lot of laughing when one of the girls said she watched a show called the Jonas Brothers on television. The girls mentioned other shows and when another girl said she watched the Jonas Brothers as well, there was another round of laughing. One of them, Tiya, asked me if I knew them.

T: Do you know Jonas Brothers?

H.S: What?

T: Jonas Brothers.

H.S:Nope.

S: I'm really glad..

T: Shut up. Shut Up!!

S: They are three brothers.

H.S: They sing?

S: Yeah, they sing. There's one girl called Hannah Montana.

T: I watch Jonas Brothers and Taylor Swift. I *love* (intones) listening to songs (Interview with Tiya, Shaswati, February 2010, in English).

Noticing the amount of giggling and Shaswati.'s sarcasm – „I'm really glad" – at my ignorance of the Jonas Brothers, I asked Tiya if the group was nice looking or good singers. She grinned and emphatically said, „Singers *and* they look nice". This was the closest to which any comment was made by the children about finding someone nice looking or even about romantic interests – a theme which most of the children appeared to be aware of, in their responses of 'just good friends', when referring to friends of the other gender.

The familiarity with media was one of the themes in which my status as a 'grown up' was softened. The children on discovering that I was unfamiliar with the animès or most of the television shows that they watched, set out to explain with great enthusiasm the storylines, the characters, sometimes telling me when

these were aired on which channels. My ignorance of these shows, appeared to provide a space for the children to tell me a thing or two outside the responses about how their day was spent. Unfamiliarity with the popular media culture could also be related to otherness. In another context, while asking Mithoo, an 11 year old girl what kind of music she liked, she said,“If I tell you the names, will you know them?“ The songs she mentioned were mostly by playback singers from Hindi films. The reasons for her scepticism however, remained unclear, of whether it was on account of my not being a child, or from being away from Kolkata for long.

Adult-child interactions are hardly tipped in favour of a one-sided power relation with children being learners and adults always imparting useful knowledge, and neither are adult-child positions binarily coded. At different points of the interviews my perception of my own position changed – where the smallest confidences felt like a triumph, that changed at the slightest hesitance of a child to reply to a question. Given the code of conduct in middle class Bengali society, where adults value education and culture and do not approve of subjects like popular Hindi cinema or romance to be discussed with children, it was sometimes difficult to negotiate between the role of the researcher and as someone perceived as part of the culture. The solution was found by the children and some of their parents unintentionally, in designating me as '*Didi*', the Bengali word for elder sister. Children, and even most adults in West Bengal, use terms of fictive kinship in informal situations, and the form of address is in some way matched to the perceived age and status of the person and the character of the relationship. Most of the adults were addressed by the children as forms of uncle or aunty, either in English or using the Bengali equivalents for mother/father's older/younger sister or brother. The form of address for elder sister was however more ambiguous than 'aunty' or 'uncle', being used for adolescents, or even for older children. My image – based to some extent on my physical appearance and my 'student' identity – among parents and children was somewhere between adult and child. By addressing me as sister, the children suitably captured my ambiguous position, as non-children who are also not adult authority figures such as teachers or parents often display the familiarity with both sides, as well as being strangers to both, owing to their age as well as to a youth culture that is closer to the media-culture of children. Though the objective of this study has not been to represent things 'from the children's own perspective', there was nevertheless satisfaction in the thought that my position had at least been bargained to that of a sort of an adult but not an authority figure.

While interviewing adult respondents, my identity similarly determined my access to a section of the respondents. Initially, I was concerned about how being from the same cultural background could influence my research. When at the start of the interviews, I asked respondents what professions their parents had be-

longed to, my status as an 'insider' loomed up as some respondents – specially from the '50s cohort murmured that their mothers were of course housewives – a fact that was so well-known that it was surprising that I should press to ask about their mothers. But in most other aspects, in the narrative interviews, the respondents explained and described many aspects of their childhoods – from school, to leisure to the cultural situation in their childhoods. I assume there are two main reasons. One is, that I did not belong to either of the two cohorts from which adults were interviewed. As such I was not an insider to the culture of childhood and youth of these times – the clothes that were forbidden in one generation were most commonly found among children from later generations; the television programmes that were a novelty for one generation were forgotten by the following generations. The second reason is related. Owing to the intensity of social transformations in India, and especially in Bengal – from a post-Partition State in a fledgling nation to one affected by post-liberal economy and the emergence of a new culture – over 60 years, one doesn't inhabit the same West Bengal by simply growing up in it. The past, like another culture, perhaps has no complete 'insiders'.

The researcher's own biographical experience of childhood is often considered to be a source of the subjective perceptions about children. When the study is in the same cultural context as the researcher's own, a distance could perhaps not be easy to achieve. But history, at the social level and at the biographical level forges its own distance. Childhood is a world that grows further away as one grows older. The cultural contexts of childhoods – as in geographical, societal regions are also always changing. Childhoods, in this sense as a subject of research, are like another land – to which one can return to in the past or present – with empathy but to which, despite claims of personal experience or cultural belonging, the research is never quite an insider, speaking from the own perspectives of the respondents.

5. 'Being Good at Studies': The Bhadralok Culture and the Ethos of Education in Bengal

In the first phase of fieldwork for the research, in December 2009, I sought interviews with children in Kolkata between the ages of 10 to 12. The focus being on a specific social background, all the children interviewed were school-goers. In the middle of December when more children were contacted through tuitions, schools and other contacts, it was difficult to talk to a child for more than some minutes, than it was even two weeks ago, in November. Sometimes, the parents would be anxious about the time spent, but usually, the children themselves were hardly available, rushing from one tuition to another tuition. It was the month before the final exams in some schools in Kolkata, particularly those under the West Bengal Board of Education. Weekend lessons of dancing, drawing and singing were suspended for many children I interviewed until the final exams were over. The swimming club, where I interviewed some children, was almost deserted, some weeks before the exams, with only younger children or a few from schools who had already had their exams visiting regularly to practice sports. Though it was the final exam for classes five and six, routines of the children were rearranged at least a month before the exam, parents met and talked about exam questions set in schools where the final exams were conducted earlier than in the others, and there was a constant talk among children and parents, that there was not enough time to 'study'. It was to some extent this experience of the fieldwork itself that emphasized the significance of a specific ethos of education in a research about children's everyday lives.

For the last one and a half decades, it is not uncommon for education, childhood and class to be interwoven as themes of research in the social sciences. This interweaving, especially in the last few years, has been emphasizing different aspects of contemporary forces of globalization, economic changes etc. irrespective of cultural contexts. In research on South Asia, both education and the middle class are significant in order to emphasize the intense transformations in

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culture, economy and politics of this region and both have become symbols of 'modernity' which makes comparisons with the western context a little easier than before. Childhood or children's lives, however, are less present in this interweaving, and when they are, the focus is largely on issues of policy and state measures. In research in the Western context, particularly in the United Kingdom and parts of Western Europe, the intersection of the three significantly takes the form of analyses of class differentiation in educational performance or parenting strategies usually, though not always comparing children from the working class with children from the middle classes (Vincent & Ball 2007; Vincent; Braun; Ball 2008). With the increasing inclination of a section of researchers towards a subtle dynamic of social inequalities, especially in the tradition of Bourdieu, – class, especially the middle class, childhood and education have become almost imperative counterparts in this braided research.

In the Indian context the emphasis on childhood has been much less compared to contemporary research in western contexts, but middle class and education have been often used to emphasize a new cultural and economic landscape – an image of flamboyance as well as of industrial development – as against the previous images of the colonized East, or the spiritual non-materialistic 'other'. In the wider public discourse, childhood and children from certain social backgrounds in India, especially from the middle class, are perceived as part of what has become a transnational phenomenon because of global economic and cultural forces. Research in other cultural contexts as different as China (Naftali 2010) and the United Kingdom also point to this phenomenon where the lives of children from middle class backgrounds have, owing to the increasing significance of certain educational practices, and the demands of an economy, become part of a universal experience of a biographical phase. The overall importance of schooling and the pressure of school and school related activities dominate the everyday lives of children from middle class backgrounds in many cultures. This has been explained in some part as consequences of a rapidly changing job market and the uncertainties of middle class existence. The heightened fear of falling accounts for this dominant role of education in children's lives where it is sought to be assuaged by investing in schooling and extra-curricular lessons for children.

In this study I have chosen the other perspective, of focusing on a specific history and a specific culture of a middle class and drawing on accounts about childhood from three generations, I have tried to show how the contemporary practices and values children from middle class backgrounds are confronted with, bear a relation to a historical background. I have sought to show how the history of the *bhadralok's* relationship to education in Bengal points to an entire world of values and sentiments surrounding education that contribute to the understanding about some aspects of childhood among the middle classes in Bengal. Interpreting the accounts of children's everyday lives in Kolkata, as a

function of transnational economic forces, and of additional 'modernizing' processes (the usage of which is almost unavoidable in the case of India), leaves half of the story unsaid.

A staple viewpoint that is often cited and that guides discussions about past and contemporary educational regimes in India, especially in Bengal, is that from Macaulay's minute[31]. The colonial rule, in its policies and perspectives had a far reaching impact on the field of education. It also sculpted in part, aspects of the landscape of education in India that educationists and policy makers even in the post Independence era constantly refer to. However, centring a discussion on Macaulay and his likes to gauge the nature and history of education in Bengal deflects attention from how indigenous groups reacted to and perceived the education system in colonial India, and how in this context certain values and practices emerged that in later generations became a significant aspect of the identity of certain sections of Indians. Education, in Bengal, especially that imparted in English has been a political battleground as well as an instrument used by the *bhadralok* from at least the early nineteenth century to rally themselves against the lower classes from the time of the Raj.

A phrase that is often heard in the middle class rhetoric on childhood in West Bengal is that of *porashunoi bhalo* or 'being good at studies', which in itself is perhaps a peculiarity of Indian English. The term and the concept have currency among children and parents in contemporary Kolkata, and have been resounding for at least three generations among certain social sections – at home, in school, among friends, in popular literature for children, and significantly, in adults' and children's evaluation of themselves and of other children – . The opposite, *porashunoi kharap* or 'being bad at studies' also exists, implying a child whose scholastic performances are poor. There is a whole rhetoric found among the Bengali middle class that is spun around the concept of *porashuno* or schoolwork. The interviews with the children and the older generations, as well as the rich body of children's literature in Bengali since the nineteenth century, attest to this.

The centrality of *porashuno* in the children's lives, have been affirmed by children themselves and by adults in narratives about their childhood. The concept, it must be emphasized, goes beyond the structure of what the term 'schoolwork' might convey. It has a range of implications and usages in Bengali, signifying at times all that is good and proper for children, sometimes something

31 Thomas Babington Macaulay, who was the Secretary to the Board of Control for the British Raj, had, in his minute in 1835 put forth the agenda of the new educational system in India under colonial administration, 'We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the million whom we govern-a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' (Barry 1966,p.49). The phrase 'Macaulay's children' was later used on occasions to refer to sections of Indians who were Western in their institutional upbringing and lifestyles.

that limits children, implying a personal trait-as when someone is good or bad at it, and often, but not always, standing as the binary opposite of play and leisure in general that is pursued by children.

It is my argument in this section, that this significance of education among certain sections in West Bengal, is not completely mercenary in the sense that it reflects the proverbial ambitions the middle class harbours for its children. Rather, there is something of a sentiment where education is concerned, connected to but not limited to school and schoolwork. To understand this a history of the *bhadralok* culture which emerged in the nineteenth century and its relation to education must be looked at. The discussion of the historical background helps in two ways. First it shows how a value system developed in Bengal that is education centric in its basic sentiment. Secondly, the past contains the vocabulary that helps articulate some aspects of the present even if they did not exist before, at least not on the same scale.

The following sections will look at the historical emergence of a section in undivided Bengal for whom education was a principal source of sustenance as well as a significant aspect of their identity *Porashuna* or education has several traits that are implicit in it. The sentiment about education was often tied up with a distaste for opulence of a certain kind, signifying the educated middle class's attempt to distinguish themselves from the entrepreneurial classes just as it did from the uneducated manual labourers. Some amount of nonchalance with regard to traditional religious practices, was another trait, though the nonchalance was a practised one at least for some generations of the Bengali middle class (the discussion on conservatism and accounts of religious practices in childhood). Historical studies on the period of the Bengal Renaissance bring out in a startling way how class interests were linked to education and education policies in the nineteenth century, and how the debates about education reflected the stances of certain sections of the middle class.

This does not, however, imply that the relationship of the *bhadralok* was a straightforward one. Especially English education was sometimes valued as enlightening and the medium of scientific knowledge and also an object of criticism in some spheres, where it was considered superficial or endowed the student with arrogance or a world view akin to that of the British, but that was more deplorable, as being a native Bengali, this arrogance made it absurd. As has been discussed in the following sections, the image of the enlightened educated liberal Bengali man was the hero in much of Bengali fiction in the nineteenth and early twentieth century although from the period the nationalist movement crested, the Bengali middle class man was often portrayed as a weak character, overburdened with knowledge of the classics but inhibited by his physical timidity and autonomous thinking. In this image, the prototype of the hero against whom the educated Bengali man was often depicted, was sometimes less educated or low

caste and by implication physically courageous, and usually a misfit in society[32]. The association of intellectuality with physical weakness was a significant aspect in the self fashioning of the *bhadralok* as well as a possible colonial construct[33]. Accordingly, the character of a culture of sport was perceived sometimes as characterizing the lower classes and castes[34]and was often understood as a binary of the *bhadralok* culture where intellectualism enjoyed pride of place. However, physical courage and agility was also perceived with some envy, as something the Bengali *bhadralok* male lacked. Children's literature in colonial and post-Independence years where protagonists were often 'first boys' or children who came out on the top of their classes, have been projected as good boys, primarily because of their school performance and conduct, but they have also been sometimes described as being 'all rounders' implying an engagement with sport. If these various aspects are seen as paradoxical, then they have coexisted from the nineteenth century, not being replaced by one another at different periods.

In the section based on the empirical research, the sentiments about education among the contemporary Bengali middle class and that of the two older generations become clearer through the interviews. The narrative styles of the respondents of the three generations as well as the vocabulary used, form core parts of the analysis and the discussion about the historical background of the *bhadralok* helps one understand the vocabulary used in connection to education.

Interviews with children always involved some mention of 'studies' or 'studying', understandably as they comprise a significant aspect of children's everyday lives. In this chapter, however, two main patterns have been focused on that emerge from the interviews. One is that of 'family stories' about hardships endured to get an education. Many of the respondents from the older generations, and a few of the children narrated stories about someone in the family who had to struggle but were ‘good at studies'. Though tempted to call them family myths, I use the phrase 'family stories', and it is not their verity, rather the ethos and sentiments surrounding education, that such stories imply – that is of interest. The second pattern is not strictly a part of school education, but relates to the leisure

32 The novel *Srikanta* by the novelist Saratchandra Chattopadhyay portrays the wayward Indranath, who is high caste but not caste conservative and of an intellectual disposition against the timid philosophical Srikanta. In the novel, when Srikanta grows up, he is pitted against several female characters, the courtesan Rajlakshmi, the fearless Abhaya, who lives in a socially unconventional relationship with a man, and Durgadidi, the woman who gave up a life of comfort and respectability to live with her husband who had converted to Islam. All these characters were projected in the narrative styled novel as courageous, if not physically, then in their rejection of social conventions and unlettered or semi lettered.

33 The historian Joya Chatterji in her book *Bengal Divided* explains this construction of the stereotype of the effeminacy of the Bengali man as part of the colonial scheme of dividing the labour force.

34 See John Rosselli on the physical culture in colonial Bengal in *The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in nineteenth century Bengal*.

activity of reading story books. The perception of such activities, and the objects – 'storybooks' as against textbooks, emphasizes another aspect of the middle class sentiments of education, prevalent since at least the 1950s.

The discussion about education and a tradition of education in the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century, followed by a discussion based on interviews with children, leaves in an apparent way significant gaps in historical periods. In India, changes have always been accelerated, especially from the time of the colonial rule. A gap of 20, years implies immense cultural political changes in the Indian context. One of the reasons for this is the nature and inclination of historical research in India. For several reasons, the periods of the nineteenth century, and the 1940s, up to Independence and some of the years after it, have special significance in historical research in India. Research done in these periods and others, have often tended to focus on aspects relating to the State, politics, and policies. It is difficult to derive a clear picture about the lives of some groups and certain social sections – children, the middle class – from these studies, apart from fiction, films and plays of and on these periods. I have tried to bridge this gap to some extent, through interviews with the older generations. However, the focus on the specific time periods – the late nineteenth-early twentieth century and the contemporary context, as well as the 1950s and 1970s – was to draw attention to the specific features of the ethos of education that is crucial to understanding the everyday lives of children from middle class families in Kolkata. The attempt has also not been one aimed at bridging history with the present for the sake of bridging. Rather, the argument has been that in the space of social relations, when practices and values in the culture of childhood distinguish groups of children, these practices and sentiments are not directly carried over from the past, rather their significance derives from how certain sections in different generations perceive the meanings of these practices and choose to distance or align themselves with certain aspects of these values.

5.1 The *Bhadralok* and Education in Colonial Bengal: Historical background

„Renaissance novels created an image of the ideal Bengali Hindu, who exemplified these generic Hindu qualities of gentleness, tolerance and spiritualism. In his ideal incarnation, he was portrayed as being particularly gifted with the Hindu quality of high intellect. Amarnath, hero of Bankimchandra's novel Rajani is, for instance, 'an accomplished conversationalist. His mind [is] cultivated, his education complete, and his thought far reaching'. He speaks fluently about Shakespeare's heroines, comparing them with those of the Indian epics, his conversation, ranging

from the classical histories of Thucidytes, Plutarch and Tacitus, the positivism of Comte and the philosophy of Mill, Huxley, Darwin and Schopenauer, reveals a lightly carried burden of erudition“

Chatterji, *Bengal divided*, 2002

"So although the redemption of educated Bengalis from the slur of effeteness meant the calling in as instructors of helpers and servers lathiyals, door-keepers, low-caste men and Muslims - these men were not acknowledged as full members of the Bengali society that was being redeemed. In the myth of physical downfall and resurgence the educated elite appeared as sole actors"

Rosselli, *The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in nineteenth century Bengal*, 1980

The portrayal of Amarnath by the nineteenth century celebrated Bengali novelist captures in essence the image of the educated Bengali. In many ways this image was not relegated to the domain of an ideal, quite a number of Bengali men fashioning themselves on this model. With variations in the philosophers and classics he is acquainted with, this model continued to exist even in post Independence West Bengal, and traces of it can still be found among the urban Bengali middle class culture.

The connotations of being *shikkhito* or educated in Bengal went beyond implying a school education. Some of these arose from the peculiarities of the colonial context and the social and religious reform movements that emerged in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century with the cresting of the nationalist movement, some new connotations were added and certain aspects that were celebrated in one generation sometimes came to be ridiculed and criticized in the following generations.

The rhetoric of the Bengali middle class in the nineteenth century showed a deep distaste for opulence, and education and culture were seen as separated from wealth. Historians in their research of public and private correspondences, media reports and official policies of this time, have shown how in practice, the educational practices, policies as well as sentiments among significant persons and educational institutions in Bengal, refute any idea of democratic citizenship and equal opportunity that such a stance towards material wealth might suggest. But as Tithi Bhattacharya points out, a significant implication of this attitude, is that of a social life, determined by market forces, no matter how weak, where authority appears divorced from wealth (Bhattacharya 2005,p.154).

This attitude was to influence and become a significant aspect of the *bhadralok* culture in Bengal, and was reflected specially in the bitter criticism and satirical barbs at the decadent *babu* culture of Bengal, of the affluent landowning or the clerical upper caste Bengali Hindus whose extravagance was legendary and whose alleged lack of cultural refinement and education were negatively associated with the opulence that came to be disliked in the *bhadralok* rhetoric.

This stance was present well into the twentieth century, with Bengali literature often casting the stereotype of the rich landlord against the poorer and humbler socially thinking man of erudition. Religious excesses were another aspect that this culture was critical of, possibly a consequence of the influence of the social-reformist *Bramho* movement.

The connection of education to religiosity was more complex. The relationship reflected the political backgrounds of the different phases in Bengal. In the nineteenth century, with the prominent rise of the social reform movements, particularly the *Bramho* movement, with the added influence of the colonizer's lens through which Hindu society was viewed, many traditional practices came to be seen as brutal and oppressive. Even when the controversies about the abolition of widow burning and child marriage by the administration continued, sections of the educated middle class, prominently young men who came from upper caste families, professed to be free from the shackles of superstition and blind faith of their earlier generations. The emphasis on the need for reforms for women formed part of this refutation of tradition. However, what was considered liberal, changed within some years. The relationship of the educated middle class with an enlightened, western, unorthodox spirit grew sour and depictions in literature in the early twentieth century reflect this. Chatterji discusses this through analyzing fiction of this period and emphasizes that the educated ideal of the *bhadralok* who went against religious conventions gave way to a prototype of a protagonist who was educated, but who nevertheless had a spiritual detached aspect to his character (Chatterji 2002).

While the analysis of Bengali fiction in the nineteenth and early twentieth century suggests a shift towards a more spiritual appreciation of religion rather than a strong adherence to rituals and idol worship, some historians point to the emergence of new religious cults in the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century which was a specific and a paradoxical feature of the *bhadralok* culture. Sumit Sarkar gives an elaborate account of the rise of the religious figure Ramakrishna Paramhansa, priest from Dakshineswar who dominated Bengal's religious landscape in the nineteenth century and who was the complete opposite of what the *bhadralok* culture in Kolkata had come to stand for, with its emphasis on rationality, science, religious reform, English education and an affinity for Western thought. Sarkar calls it 'a two-way crossing of social frontiers' where the rustic priest,contemptuous of bookish knowledge emerges as a guru figure of the city *bhadralok*, and where the urban educated Bengali middle class 'fall under the spell of an idiom, values and personality, different from their own' (Sarkar 1992, p.1543).

The entire subgenre of faith that was built up centring Ramakrishna and his teachings has been attributed to the disenchantment of the Bengali middle class with their times, the salaried job offering less incentive than it did some years be-

fore. A similar disenchantment can be identified in the shift in the discourse about culture and education. Though education continued to be regarded as a necessary virtue, there was a subtle change in which cultural stances were seen as worthier. While rational thinking and a familiarity with Western philosophy continued to be markers of 'education', over familiarity with English to the extent one had less knowledge about indigenous classics or worse, when one held traditional teachings in contempt – was considered superficial and was often greatly satirized. Paradoxically, the elements that were upheld as positive features of the *bhadralok*, were similar to those which came to be ridiculed in the shallow culture of the *babu*, a term with strong pejorative connotations.

> „Here the babu is the mirror image of the 'bhadralok' Amarnath, whose conversational brilliance becomes in the babu pompous verbosity, whose sure understanding of western classics in the babu is mere aping, his mastery of English in the babu is slavish mimicry:all in all, a sarcastic indictment of the schizophrenia of the intellectual in British Bengal. The Bengali Hindu persona that emerges out of Renaissance writing is thus full of contradictory essences: it is simultaneously courageous and timid, vigorous and passive, other-worldly and venal, spiritual and hypocritical, cultured and imitative“ (Chatterji 2002, pp.162-163).

Religion and a familiarity with the Western and indigenous intellectual traditions were woven into the middle class culture of education with the existence sometimes of contradictory values. The emphasis placed on education and culture among the *bhadralok* had significance for a perception towards a physical culture of sport, which in its turn had an impact on practices, contributing back to the constellation of symbols and practices imbued with different meanings in the middle class culture of Bengal that acquired new layers but never completely disappeared in the twenty first century. The image of the effeminate Bengali male has been discussed as one of many colonial constructs by scholars. The image of the bookish, gentle male, absorbed in his intellectual pursuits was the ideal and appeared to be incompatible with a physically courageous and agile version of masculinity. However, scholars like Rosselli, point to the existence of a physical culture of sport in the form of wrestling groups at *akhras*, of *lathiyals* or those training to fight with sticks and some engaged in circuses. Alongside this, Bengal's association with the British sport of cricket emerged in the nineteenth century, even if it does not undo in any way the image of the physically ungifted Bengali male. Cricket in Bengal, has been seen by some historians as a nationalist effort, where the *bhadralok '* through the medium of the sport sought to beat the British at their own game, or what has been called the 'subversion' of the 'games ethic' (Majumdar 2010,p.279) This interpretation of the zeal with which cricket was taken up and the prestige it continues to enjoy in Kolkata even now, contradicts the widely held understanding that the success of cricket in Kolkata and in India in general is an example of the colonial hangover. Whatever its reason, nevertheless physical sport was not a part of the mainstream middle class culture in Bengal either in practice, or in representation. Bengali fiction, re-

flecting the nationalist environment, occasionally modelled superhero like figures of fearless freedom fighters whose physical dexterity was of epic proportions[35] and in this rhetoric, physical timidity was a metaphor for national servitude. Rosselini believes that there is sufficient historical evidence pointing to engagement with different forms of physical culture in Bengal, however, the people engaged were mostly from the lower castes or classes of manual workers and migrants,– although *zamindars* or landlords were often patrons of such physical activities – and as such were not part of the *bhadralok* culture. In its representation of the self, the discourse of the effeminate Bengali man was faithful to its specific social section, the urban educated Bengali middle class.

This image was often used and continues to be used by the middle class against itself as a reminder of humiliation. The *bhadralok* culture was nothing if not self-critical. While there was no mainstream culture of sport among the middle class, apart from cricket which was confined to very few, this was also a source of concern within pedagogues as it was seen as an educational shortcoming. Bhattacharya cites several sources of advice literature where the need to develop physically as well as intellectually has been stressed. Whether it was because of the stereotypical image that was hard to shake off, or some other reason, there were attempts to introduce a physical culture among the middle class. Just as Sarkar explains the change in Bengal's religious culture in connection to the salaried job, Bhattacharya makes a similar remark about this rhetoric on sport. She says,

> „The rhetoric against the 'effeminate' Bengali babu, developed by the new Bengali middle class, from the middle of the century was thus not merely a response to cultural and personal humiliation. It was tied to the genuine material dissatisfaction of chakri and the decreased opportunities in the political economy. The discourse on the development of the body that filled the pages of contemporary tracts on education has to be seen as this need for a class to go beyond the social role that colonialism forced upon it"(Bhattacharya 2005,p.163).

The relationship of the Bengali middle class to sport, in a culture where education was prized above most things had an impact even on the post Independence culture in the region. The reason for which in a research on a contemporary culture of childhood, these seemingly unrelated aspects of religion, Western education, sports have been discussed is because all of them form the background of the contemporary middle class culture in urban Bengal, and have a bearing on children's lives in their engagement with school subjects, sports and religion in school and at home. As will be explored in the following sections, a perception which sees play as the binary opposite of 'studies' dominates in West Bengal among the middle class, and the lives of children in many sections have been accordingly impacted, in the proportion of and the nature of 'play' and 'studies' they

35 See Chatterji's (2002) discussion of the fictitious character Sabyasachi created by Saratchandra Chattopadhyay in his novel.

are encouraged or discouraged to engage in, and in the balance that they are sometimes expected to strike between the two.

5.1.1 Education, Class and the Self-Image of the Bhadralok

> „The unnatural idea of culture by birth presupposes and produces blindness to the functions of the educational institution which ensures the profitability of cultural capital and legitimates its transmission by dissimulating the fact that it performs this function".
>
> Pierre Bourdieu & Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction In Education, Society and Culture*,1977

> „But it was a stereotype that bhadralok Bengalis made their own, using it as the basis for their exhortations to action"
>
> Joya Chatterji, *Bengal divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition*, 2002

> „Towards the end of the novel, Sabyasachi asks the poet Sashi to forget the peasantry, to sing instead of the glorious rebellion (*biplab*) of the community of the educated and cultured ('*shikkhita bhadra jati*'). When challenged by Bharati, he replies that while he does not believe in *varna*, he 'cannot but observe the caste differences between the educated and the unlettered'. These, he argues are the 'true castes, fashioned by God'"
>
> Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's *Pather Dabi* cited in Joya Chatterji,
>
> *Bengal divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition*, 2002

Historians who specialize in nineteenth century Bengal refer to the system of English education, the growing importance of salaried jobs or *chakri* and the emergence of a print industry as the three principal aspects influencing Bengal's middle class culture[36]. The Permanent Settlement Act[37] and the policies adopted in the Bengal Presidency related to land holding, led to fragmented land holdings and dwindling incomes that were, especially for the small rentiers, 'inadequate for the demands of gentility' (Sarkar 1997, pp.169). The uncertainty in income and respectability formerly assured by land ownership was not accompanied by

36 See Sumit Sarkar, 'Writing Social History' and Tithi Bhattacharya 'The Sentinels of Culture: Class, education and the colonial intellectual in Bengal (1848-1885).

37 The Permanent Settlement Act was an agreement made between the East India Company and the landlords in Bengal in 1793, by which landlords were made the intermediaries between the tenants and peasants and the East India Company for tax collection. The system changed the political and economic landscape of rural Bengal.

an increase of opportunities in capitalistic ventures. The implications of the Permanent Settlement Act ' for property-ownership, landholding along with the lesser opportunities for capitalistic enterprises in Bengal, formed the background for emergence of a middle class that placed a considerable amount of hope on education, especially Western education that was the only means to the respectable professions. The emerging significance and values attached to 'formalized scholastic achievement' can be read against this background, making, as Bhattacharya says, career opportunities more predictable in a time of uncertainty in nineteenth century Bengal (Bhattacharya 2005).

While the importance of education for sustenance and upward mobility have been variously highlighted by several historians to show the material basis of an ideology, the relationship of the Bengali middle class to education goes beyond a straightforward one of need for material and economic stability and betterment. This is perhaps most obvious in the debate and outcry against the proposed policy of dissemination of education among the lower classes in nineteenth century Bengal.

There is a tendency to sometimes pit the struggle surrounding education in colonial India in terms of colonial and nationalist ideologies and agendas. More often than not the former has been seen as guided by political and administrative cunning and if the latter was not completely selfless, upholding education for education's sake, it was at least positive in comparison to the colonial agenda of education. The idea of a western-indigenous conflict is a recurrent theme in the field of education, even in post-Independence Bengal particularly in the context of and the debate surrounding the erstwhile Left Front Government's decision at one time to not teach English in government schools until after class seven. The discussion in this section is not to weigh and compare the agenda of the colonial administrators with that of the indigenous elites. Rather, to understand the place of education among certain sections in Bengal to understand the middle class culture in contemporary urban Bengal where education is a dominant aspect.

As mentioned before, the most dominant viewpoint with respect to the education system in the nineteenth century that is quoted is Macaulay's who declared that the idea behind implementing the new system was to create a class of Indians who would assist the colonial administrators in their work. Assistance in running the Raj was certainly a core aspect of some policies. But citing Macaulay to sum up the entire context, however many sinister turns the phrases 'Indian in blood and colour', and 'English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' are given to uncover the imperial cunning, results in a severely misleading picture of the context, and of the nature of different sections of Bengal's *bhadralok*. The role of the middle class, particularly the upper sections of it in the context of the emerging ideology of education at this period is significant.

Some scholars have pointed to the strong views of the Bengali middle class regarding education and have cited instances when sections of this class strongly voiced their positions, sometimes in reaction to certain policies adopted or suggested by the colonial administration. Bhattacharya through her extensive research of public documents as well as letters and fiction of the time shows how intense the subject of education was for the middle class. This is best brought out in her discussion of the case of the Hindu College. The Hindu College was a prestigous institution of higher education in Kolkata that was established in the nineteenth century, which was well-known for its illustrious teachers as well as students. Bhattacharya says that though there were no official policies that prevented some students from taking admission, the high fees ensured that the sons of certain prominent families could attend it[38] (Bhattacharya 2005,p.175). While the implementation of certain policies during the colonial period made certain discriminatory practices against lower castes and manual workers officially illegal, in practice such policies translated in a manner that was far from democratic.

In 1853-4 an incident involving admission being given to the son of a prostitute into Hindu College caused furore among the *bhadralok* community. This is mentioned by Bhattacharya as preceding the government's decision to alter the nature of the college. By the mid-nineteenth century this sentiment among the 'cultured' middle class in Bengal, which saw education as the sole preserve of this section became more marked in the context of certain proposed policy changes by the administration. In the mid-nineteenth century, the state decided to remove all official bars in education to the entry of all social sections. To balance funds for this purpose, it announced its decision to stop funds to the Hindu College giving grounds of fair and democratic admission policies. In an immediate aftermath a number of eminent Hindu Bengalis resigned from the management of the college. However the new Presidency College, as it was renamed, increased its fees considerably and granted scholarships to only chosen Hindu students. The balance and the filtering out of 'students from 'select' sections of Bengali society were therefore maintained.

The practice was not limited to just elite institutions like the Hindu College. It has been suggested by some scholars that attempts by the Government to reverse the education policy, reducing funds for English education that mainly the upper and middle classes benefited from, and investing in primary education in the vernacular for the lower classes and castes was met with vehement protest by eminent figures from the *bhadralok* (Acharya 1995). Both Acharya and Bhattacharya give examples of dialogues between British policy makers and officials in the realm of education and members of the Bengali intelligentsia to show how

38 Bhattacharya says, 'The Hindu College was formally declared open to non-Hindu students, when it was re-established as the Presidency College in 1855. The fee was raised from 5 to 10 rupees as the price of this open policy' (*Ibid*:175).

the proposed policy changes were opposed by the Bengali middle class and upper classes. The arguments were usually made in terms of whether the changes would accrue any benefits to students from different social and class backgrounds. Initially there was a belief that the education would filter down from the privileged sections of society to the lower sections. When this did not happen, despite making legal the entry of all to educational institutions, the proposal to encourage primary education among the masses and the decision to stop funds for subsidized English education to the privileged sections was made.

The principal defense against this proposal, coming from both sections of the Bengali middle class as well the British administration was that the lower classes would not benefit from education beyond rudimentary reading, writing and arithmetic. Among the Bengalis, Acharya and Bhattacharya mention the stance of Vidyasagar in particular, one of the key figures in Bengal's social reform movement, fighting against traditional Hindu practices of widow burning and child marriage, and who has sometimes been dubbed the father of Bengal's education. A statement by him shows the kind of reasoning used.

> „Vidyasagar felt that the condition of the labouring classes was so low that they could not afford to incur any charge on account of the education of their children, under such circumstances he emphasized that it was 'needless to attempt the education of the labouring classes'. The government should, he felt, confine itself to the education of the higher classes on a comprehensive scale, for 'by educating one boy in a proper style the government does more towards the real education of the people, than by teaching a hundred children mere reading, writing and a little of arithmetic“ (Bhattacharya 2005,p.182).

Among the other figures who were against such mass education, Pearychand Mitra and Prasanna Kumar Ghosh have been mentioned. The irony lying perhaps in that, these were figures who were notable adversaries of many unjust traditional practices that were believed to favour dominant groups. However much as caste is considered the primary issue in reactions of the colonial elite, the arguments were articulated in terms that come closer to class interests[39]. Though not everyone among the *bhadralok* were against the education of the lower classes, they were not against partial changes in the system, rather the opposition was more towards the entry of lower classes in the higher education schools.

The discontentment and attitudes of the *bhadralok* community towards educational policies took place in the background in the nineteenth century, becoming intensified in the period after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. While these characterized the decades following the implementation of educational policies by the

39 Vidyasagar in a letter to the Secretary to the Council of Education, F.J.Mouat, argued in favour of limiting admission of students from the lower castes using arguments upholding the need to ensure 'respectability'.„The reason, why I recommend the exclusion of the other orders of Shudras at present, is that they, as a body, are wanting in respectability and stand lower in the scale of social consideration. Their admission, therefore, would, I fear, prejudice the interests of the institution“. [Letter No.702, from Vidyasagar to F.J. Mouat cited in Bhattacharya 2005, p.179]

English administrators, the issues and the debates related to education in the twentieth century were different. The middle class's association with formal education had already become established, as its relationship to salaried work or *chakri.* By this time, the dissatisfaction of the *bhadralok*, with salaried jobs was gradually coming to the fore, the mood of the time being reflected in fiction and certain religious stances in the period[40] Accounts by historians, on this period do not mention groups warring over the right to education so much, as they do the impact of the nationalist movement on ideologies of education among the *bhadralok*. In this new sensibilty the anglicized Bengali *babu* was a figure which invited criticism and ridicule. The relationship with the middle class Bengali to education appears to be paradoxical from this period.

The *bhadralok* was far from a unified category and included people from different economic and social sections, barring the class of manual labourers and comprised mostly of those from the Bramhan, Vaidya and Kayastha caste groups. What they had in common was their affinity to education. Chatterji sums it up thus:

> „If there was a single unifying symbol of bhadralok identity in the first half of the twentieth century, it was arguably 'culture'. Since the late nineteenth century, the bhadralok had regarded themselves as a group that was 'cultured', by the early twentieth century, they saw themselves, more specifically as heirs to a particular cultural heritage, the 'Bengal Renaissance“ (Chatterji 2002, p.155).

The period in the nineteenth century that saw the emergence of social reform movements aimed against traditional Hindu practices, accompanied by an intellectual productivity and the formation of several religious, and social reform groups has been called the Bengal Renaissance, in accordance with the spirit of the age, where the earlier European Renaissance was an influence and also held up as an example among the educated middle classes in a nation that was in shackles of British rule.

Historians of precolonial India have sometimes emphasized that the relation between the region of Bengal and education go back even before the Raj., where a succession of foreign rulers created a section of men who specialized in foreign languages like Persian and Urdu, working as translators and who came mostly from the eastern region. However, the Bengal Renaissance marks the emergence of a middle class on such a scale who upheld education as a virtue, and as a marker of the identity of a community. But the idealization of education among the *bhadralok* was far from simple.

Despite this association with education, the *bhadralok* discourse at this time aimed nettling comments towards those who were arguably members of this very section itself, a figure that was called the *adhunik Bangali* or the 'modern

40 See Sumit Sarkar's account of the nature of the religious cult around Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Sarkar in *Writing Social History.*

Bengali'. Some of this criticism emerged as early as 1860s and 1870s in the works of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Pyarechand Mitra[41] The criticism was, possibly less aimed towards education or English education as such, as against what was considered the 'shallowness' of those who after reading two pages in English, looked down on their fellow countrymen and considered themselves to be liberated and enlightened. While the earlier phase had seen the attack of certain Hindu traditions, the twentieth century showed a more complex, relationship towards Hindu tradition and Western education. At the same time as it criticized certain religious social practices, as had the *bhadralok* of the earlier generations, it invoked certain characteristics like asceticism and detachment as honorable and grounded them in the ancient Hindu tradition. This tendency can be understood in the context of the upsurge of nationalism where the history of the nation was recast to attest to the existence of a past of glory. What is of interest to this study, is however not the debates or the causes per se behind the stances of the middle class towards education. Rather, the discussion in this section aims to establish certain aspects of the relationship of the *bhadralok* to education and culture ever since the existence of the category, in its own discourse.

The sociological and historical literature on the *bhadralok* has sometimes asserted that owing to its diversity, it is a status group in the Weberian sense than a class. Though in the twentieth century the term was more widely applied to refer to those who were 'respectable', the *bhadralok* comprised of predominantly the three upper castes of *Brahmans*, *Kayasthas* and *Vaidyas* in the nineteenth century understanding of the term. Other aspects of diversity within the category are pointed at by historians, such as the diversity of economic situations – from the poor clerk in an office to the son of a wealthy landowning family – anyone could be *bhadralok.* The discussion in this section, particularly the resistance of the indigenous elites against the official entry of the masses in higher education, points to a specific aspect of the *bhadralok*, which despite its diversities rallies forth when it perceives an injury to its identity. The category owed its exclusiveness to its relationship with higher education, and higher education of a specific kind. The opening up of higher education institutions, to all, including those from lower castes and manual labourers was akin to doing away with its very existence. It appears on occasions to be ironic, that figures who were the icons of what has been called the 'new Bengali middle class' in the nineteenth century, refuting many aspects of traditional practices, specially practices of caste inequalities, should themselves reinforce such obvious inequalities through their support for certain education policies.

The discourse of the *bhadralok* against policies by Hardinge and others points to a stance whereby utility of education to its specific class was essential-

41 See Joya Chatterji in *Bengal Divided: Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-1947* for a detailed discussion about the unfolding discourse on the 'modern Bengali' man.

ized, thereby justifying its stance. In this sense the *bhadralok* comes close to a class, especially in its fierce defense against the class of manual labourers. Bhattacharya says that after the policy of making higher education available to all, the institutions subverted using other means, such as raising fees and selecting students eligible for scholarships, to 'weed out' certain social sections. Much later, in the twentieth century, different policies and practices in West Bengal, especially the decision of the Communist Government in the 1980s to put a stop to the teaching of English in the government schools, kept inequalities alive through the education system. The relation between education and inequality, specifically inequalities of class is well established in sociological and pedagogical research, especially owing to the Bourdieusienne perspective. In the case of the *bhadralok* in Bengal, the inequalities were present at the onset of its emergence and despite blurring boundaries of economic situations and occupations, the exclusivity of the group and the 'weeding out' of undesirable sections occurred through the means of education. In subsequent years the inequalities changed qualitatively, but till well into the twentieth century it bore strong marks of its past.

5.2 Studying Hard Against All Odds: The Ethos of Education in Three Generations

The research concerns itself with a culture of childhood among the urban middle class in contemporary West Bengal. It is based on children's accounts of their everyday lives, with a focus on time spent outside the school, tastes in leisure culture, practices at home, compared with accounts on similar areas by older generations about their childhoods. The primary idea was to see if a specific culture of childhood among the middle class could be identified based on these accounts of childhood. An equally significant concern was if the accounts point to a dominant culture of childhood that is standard (Zinnecker 2000) or if patterns emerge suggesting variations across different groups circumscribed within what is largely understood as the middle class.

It is therefore not directly concerned with the intricacies of the education system and prevalent pedagogic practices as such, as school performance or school experience are not the focus of the study. However in childhoods in many contemporary industrialized or industrializing cultures, school is an inherent indispensable feature, to the degree that 'modern' childhoods, both in their image and in the lived experiences of real children are sculpted considerably by the school,

– in the sense of specific individual schools as well as in the demands of the broader school system. Therefore a study on a culture of childhood that does not take into account the education system and the culture of education would be inadequate.

The focus on the middle class brings to the fore aspects of class, values associated with some social sections and social inequalities – aspects which link up with education in several ways. Moreover, the specific historical context of Bengal – from at least the period of colonial rule emerged in such a direction that class identities and class inequalities and differences were intrinsically linked with one another, perhaps in a more pronounced way than in most parts of colonial India. The debates that contemporary researchers working on the middle class and educational practices in contemporary industrialized societies raise, link the importance of education with the middle classes as a specificity of transnational social economic changes in the last twenty years or so. This section does not examine aspects of the education system with a similar argument. Nor does it concentrate itself on challenging this particular connection, rather, it underlines the significance of understanding middle class, and along with it, middle class childhoods, not as universal categories, but rather in specific cultural contexts, which vary spatially and historically (Butler 2003).

The interviews with the children were mostly about children's descriptions of their everyday lives and the way their day and time were ordered. On the basis of these accounts further discussions and questions were raised which were more reflective, about their preferences, their accounts of what their parents approved or disapproved of and their feelings about some aspects of their everyday lives. The interviews were usually led with a question of how the day unfolded, from going to school (if the school was a morning school) till the child went to bed. Specific questions about the school were not usually asked unless it came up in the conversation where the child volunteered information about the school, or where the school came in as part of the conversation about the rest of the day, such as the mention of a friend who went to the same school etc. What stands out in each interview is the primacy of learning in children's everyday lives, outside school hours, on weekdays or even during vacations. In a diary that some of the children were asked to keep to record their week, one child, during the holidays after his final examinations writes: 'Today I woke up late as I had no pressure of exams and was partially relaxed“ (Ishan, January 2010)

This reference to 'studies' or school-subjects entered in different contexts in the interviews, from questions about main sources of conflict with parents, to accounts of dinner times and nap hours. A large number of the children interviewed, said that 'studying less' or watching TV instead of studying were the usual reasons for conflict with or 'being scolded' by parents. Some of the interviews had to be shortened and sometimes rescheduled or some children could not be in-

terviewed at all because of their 'studies', a class test, or a tuition lesson, or the reason being given that the child needed the time to study. The point is not to assert that Bengali middle class children spend a considerable part of their waking hours in schoolwork, and that activities outside of it are genuinely considered as secondary – such as when a child cannot be interviewed because parents feel she or he must 'study'. Rather, the emphasis is on a culture where schoolwork and education occupy such a position in the conceptual order of things and where a rhetoric complements and supports the significance of, not education in general, but '*studies*'– a specificized aspect of education located within institutions and associated with evaluation, performance and competition – to the degree that according other activities secondary value to studies, is considered legitimate in such a culture.

5.2.1 'My Father Was a First Boy': Family Stories of Merit and Hardship

The word '*pora*' or '*porashona kora*' which refers to the verb form of studying, is used by children and the adults to describe a person, specifically according to characteristic traits of someone's relationship with studies. For children, it was not typically used to describe themselves, rather others or parents when they were asked if they knew something about the childhoods of their parents. For the adults, in their narratives of their childhoods, some, though not all respondents used the relationship to studies as a means of portraying and conveying their childhood in the interviews. For example, Shubhash Kumar Mandal, is a 69 year old grandfather who grew up in a village in the 24 Parganas in a family that owned some land, where the parents had almost no education. He says :

> "I read books, but I didn't have much of a thing for studies, I studied less (emphasis). That is to say, I didn't have a thing for..eh..studying too much..Perhaps studying little sufficed for me..as in it was alright. Whatever I studied, it didn't take much time to memorize it" (Interview with Shubhash Kumar Mandal, December 2010, Translated from Bengali).

The comment brings out a significant aspect of the centrality of studies in Bengali childhoods. The discussion on studies is not always in connection with education in the sense of a degree. Rather, the extent to which one is educationally qualified is to a certain extent taken for granted as having at least a college education for males born in the 1940s and at least the completion of high school for Bengali women of the same generation. 'Studying' refers specifically to engagement with schoolwork as a child and adolescent and though the implications of the sincerity with which one studied as well as one's performance and bright-

ness – might have a bearing on getting a salaried job, it is seen as a characteristic that is valued in itself. Also noticeable, is that being 'good' or 'bad' at studies are not the only categories of description of childhood-personalities. Earnestness, the time spent in studying, successful school performance despite less than average industriousness nuance this understanding of childhood traits and family backgrounds instead of a straightforward polarization into 'good' and 'bad' students.

In some narratives studying appears as a normal aspect of childhood though not elaborated on. For example, a female respondent in her sixties, brought up in Kolkata in a family with considerable cultural capital, summarizes her childhood in general terms saying,

> "You do or don't do what you want..you have no worries about what will happen tomorrow, from where you will do what. Just studies, play and maybe music or something..whatever one does" (Interview with Nalini Haldar, December 2010)

Equally of significance is the relative aspect in the self-image of respondents where the relative studiousness of respondents as children are sometimes emphasized. This is specifically in the context of respondents who themselves came from lower middle class families, where parents had little education. For example, when asked if he read books outside his school subjects, Shubhash Kumar says:

> "No, story books at that time..in those days it was not so developed. No, then, that is, at the time I grew up, the fact that I passed the School Final, that was at that time probably equivalent to – they treated it like a Masters' degree. I mean the general, common people. When I did it without– taking any help at all, that is, I mean, the help of a tutor..I couldn't even have a tutor because of the fees. I went to a tutor when I was allowed to take the IS exams in Class ten, only *then* I had tutors, they were actually teachers from the school who gave me private lessons. They taught me till I appeared for the final exams"(Interview with Shubhash Kumar Mandal, December 2010).

Shubhash Kumar talks about studying without a tutor for most of his schooldays in reply to a question about books he read. Though it could be read as deviations in semi structured interviews, the connection is noticed between his saying that he did not read books outside school, – 'in those days it was not so developed' – and his effort to complete his school without a tutor's help. In comparison to his contemporaries who grew up in Kolkata among families where a salaried job and education played a greater role, Shubhash Kumar's description of his childhood point to a lower degree of cultural capital. This is sought to be balanced out by the reference to studying without tuition till the school finals, and is reasserted in the statement of how his school degree was perceived by people in his environment – 'they treated it like a Masters' degree'.

Education was perceived as a positive trait than an asset and the narratives of respondents from families with different degrees of cultural capital, reflect the ways in which this sentiment was articulated. Shubhash Kumar is an example of someone from a family that was mainly agriculture-centric, with economic hardships. Another example is Parimal Das, a respondent whose family was econom-

ically well to do and much more comfortably off than Shubhash Kumar's, but who, nevertheless, belonged to a family with a primarily business calling, and as such not specifically education centric. When asked to describe his family, Parimal chooses to start with the academically successful members of his joint family.

> "Ah..from my family, one of my uncles (father's brother) was..he was very good at studies, he was a gold medalist. In English. Then..my father as well, my father..mm..after his graduation he joined the army. After he came back from the army, he worked in *Statesman* [*The Statesman* is an English newspaper in Bengal, and West Bengal after Partition] in the post of a subeditor. Then he came over to business. And..on my mother's side of the family,..there was not much progress in studies. They were mainly busy with business. There were two or three people there who did well in studies" (Interview with Parimal Das, January 2011)

It is interesting to note that sometimes in general questions about the family, respondents emphasized stories about educational achievement or merit. In families with low cultural capital, or where agriculture or business was significant to the mainstay of the family than education, the job of a teacher or professor in the University or any other salaried job, respondents tended to mention an academic or meritorious uncle or grandfather in the joint family, or to their own educational performance. Most of the exemplars were male, particularly for the generation who grew up in the 1940s and 1950s, though one or two respondents mentioned a mother who was known for her academic achievements – though these were limited to families with high cultural capital, where a woman's academic merit was part of a family story.

This pattern, of talking about academically gifted or hardworking family members continued in the generation born in the 1960s and early 1970s as well. For example a 41 year old woman who grew up in Bandel, describes her family, emphasising her father's career as a professor of biology in a girls' college before he joined a pharmaceutical company as a chemist. When asked if her family was inclined towards education she says:

> "Yes. That is, my Grandfather, I have heard stories that he was born in a terribly poor family. That is why he had to struggle a lot to study. He struggled terribly (emphasis). When he was a student, then he would teach the children in a household in a rich *zamindar* family in Calcutta, it was during the British times, he taught children of a *zamindar* family. And because he taught the children, they gave him his meals. And Grandfather would sit and study there in that kitchen, by the fire of the coal stove. And that year *Dadu* (grandfather) passed his M.A.In Bengali with a first class first from Calcutta University. For that Sir Ashutosh summoned him. His clothes were in such a state that he couldn't go. He went till the door,near the house, but he turned away from the gate because he was ashamed to enter, he came back. I have heard this story many times from my grandmother. Every time *Thakuma* (grandmother) told this story, with tears in her eyes, she would say – 'If your *Dadu* went to him just once, then you would be brought up in very different environment. If your *Dadu* entered through the backdoor to go to Sir Ashutosh'. That is, he suffered very much to study. And he loved studies so much, that in all the schools he had a job as headmaster, in every school, he brought home the *first, second, third boys*[42] who were poor, he would bring them home and give

42 A collection of children's stories, from the nineteenth and twentieth century, published by the Bengali Children's Literature Society, the Shishu Shahitya Shangshad under the heading 'School

them a place to stay, he would give them food, provide the costs of their studies. And because my father was not not so good at studies, he would neglect them and concentrate on other children, he would thus highlight (italicized portions originally in English), those who were very good at studies" (Interview with Shubha Thakur, December 2010, Underlined sections in English).

This narrative is the classic trope in which one of the dominant middle class sensibilities about education and hardship were articulated in Bengal throughout the last century, till the immediate years in the post-Independence period. The stories recounted to children about the scholarly grandfather, and in turn recounted by the adult to the interviewer to give an impression of the family background, take their significance beyond the question of verification, and reflect a predominant value, asserting how crucial it was to the middle class that valued education – to not just *have* an education, but to *acquire* it in a certain way. This narrative has several points of interest. The narrator weaves in the anecdotes about academic industriousness and poverty, shame, and struggle as an interplay, retelling a story she has herself heard. Through the interplay, the effort and investment gone into achieving educational success is established – getting the first class first from Calcutta University the same year her grandfather studied by the kitchen stove of a family that offered a poor young boy his keep. Noticeable is also that the connection between poverty and meritoriousness is carried over in turn by her grandfather who helps 'first' 'second' and 'third' boys from poor families, neglecting his own son who was not so 'good at studies'. This epithet of being the 'first' or 'second' boy, that is according to school performance in the class also typifies the Bengali middle class sensibilities, where certain children, predominantly boys were upheld as model children based on school performance, with other attributes like gentleness, lack of mischievousness and poverty and humility adding to their exemplars.

An entire body of children's literature in Bengal, specifically from the 1930s till the years immediately after Independence make vivid this world of children, replete with conflicts of 'first boys' with other children, competition in school examinations and conspiracies to 'beat' a 'first boy' at his position in the class. In this subgenre of school stories much of the drama of childhood is focused on even if not confined to the school. This will be discussed in later sections.

The hardship suffered to get an education is not always seen as stemming from poverty[43]. Often an adverse atmosphere, such as unwilling parents, spe-

Stories' bears a strong resemblance to some of these narratives. The theme of denoting children by their class performance – the 'first', 'second' and 'third' boys, as also the storyline of poor but meritorious students helped by teachers are recurrent in the stories, most of them written by the 'classical' Bengali children's authors such as Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay and Sukumar Ray. One story, '*Shinghashanchyuta*', literally meaning 'dethroned', ba Mohanlal Gangopadhyay, written in 1941, is about the humiliation and psychological pressure felt by a schoolboy when someone else comes first in class, thus taking away his position of honour (Sen & Dasmunshi 2005).

43 It is not unusual that the most dominant images of the childhood of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar,

cially for women who grew up in the 1950s, and political situations also form part of the narrative in many interviews with the older generations. One respondent, who grew up in a family with high cultural capital, where her mother as well as her father had a Masters' degree in the 1930s, talks about how her parents had to struggle for their education. She was born in Dhaka in erstwhile East Bengal – the current Bangladesh, and her parents had done their Masters from Dhaka University. The nature and context of the adversities faced by her mother and father are different in her narrative. She says:

> "My mother was a well-known student of Dhaka University.. she stayed up in the nights to study". Her father was a freedom fighter who joined the armed nationalist movement and was imprisoned for seven years –"In his last two years in prison he ordered books and studied and studied for his Masters degree from prison"(Interview with Pranati Sengupta, February 2011).

For her mother, going to University in the 1930s when fewer women pursued higher education after school, was in itself indicative of fighting through obstacles. The adversity was in the situation of being a woman and having domestic obligations, as studying in the nights affirms – presumably after all domestic duties were done. For her father, his imprisonment as a political prisoner created the context of hardship. In each of the accounts, educational achievement is emphasized with stories showing it was not easily won.

For contemporary children, these stories sometimes appear as well, though with much less mention of 'first boys' or 'first girls'. The importance of being 'good at studies' is nonetheless recognized, but the effect of the trope where education was glorified by hardships is diluted compared to its preponderance in the two older generations. A 10 year old boy, studying in a private school in Kolkata, talks about his father who grew up in the rural Midnapore. When asked to talk about his family, he chooses the pattern used by some of the respondents from the older generations.

> R: So he (his father) would play football there. He grew up there. And my father was very good at studies.
>
> H.S: Okay.
>
> R: He would actually..every year..he would come first or second (in class). And..and my mother, even my mother was very good at studies.
>
> H.S: Does that put a little pressure on you?
>
> R: No, it does not put that much pressure, but my..father.
>
> H.S: Yes

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one of the most prominent educational reformers of the nineteenth century and the author of the children's alphabet book in Bengali – are those of the hardships he endured for academic success. One of the most widely circulated stories about Vidyasagar's diligence which captured the imagination of the educated Bengalis, and attained mythical status among them, is about how, when he moved to Calcutta as a boy, Vidyasagar would tie his cowlick to a lamppost in the street as he studied, so as not to fall asleep when he studied late at night by the light of the streetlamps.

R: He says that I should do my Maths very well and Maths is my favourite subject":

(Interview with Riju, January 2011)

The connection between play and studies is immediately recognized by Riju as soon as he speaks of his father playing football. By supplementing the statement with the information that his father was good at studies, he is following the norms of the rhetorics in a culture where play and education are seen as potentially contradictory categories, but where mutually exhaustive, is an exemplar of a child who is an 'all-rounder'.

Whether the existence of such 'role-models' in the family actually affects children's lives is beyond the scope of the study. However, the interviews show that the existence of such models of studiousness within the immediate family, specially parents, sometimes imply specific patterns of studying at home, as in this case where the father stresses the importance of practicing mathematics.

Comparison of children with older family members, might well occur where stories of a parent or a relative's studiousness are compared with the studiousness or the notoriousness of a mischievous child. Interviews with children and with the parents indicate this. As to how it affects children, if it does at all, can be partially surmised but was not followed up in the research. The comparison does not always occur in the context of educational performance. Rather, the increase of the 'pressure of studies' and sometimes the concomitant diminished free time of children in the current generation are also much mentioned themes in accounts of both the older generations, particularly those with a child or grandchild, as well as by children themselves. As 11 year old Paromita compares her daily schedules with swimming classes, tuitions, dancing and art classes to stories heard about her parents' childhood, she articulates the difference between the two thus:

"It's like, in those days neither did Baba Ma have much pressure of studies, on top of it they would get to play most of the time and we do not get to even play" (Interview with Paromita, December 2009)

It might well be that Paromita is repeating what she has heard said about the difference in her childhood with that of her parents'. The interviews from the different generations have not been discussed to establish what is said as the 'truth' about childhood experiences and variations across time and backgrounds. Such attempts are far from the objectives of this research. Rather, the perceptions of respondents about practices and their change has been looked at to understand possible patterns in the ethos of education in West Bengal and its shifts in different periods that are intricately connected to the lives of middle class children. Paromita's summary of how her parents' childhoods were different from her own is more indicative than anything of the middle class discourse in Bengal, which laments the pressure children are put under because of the rat race of contemporary times. Similar views are held by the older generations as well in comparing childhoods, as will be discussed in subsequent sections. The perceptions of

changes in children's lives and the family stories about 'good girls' and 'good boys' are a few of the significant aspects among many others which make up the fabric of the ethos of education in Bengal. Stories about how other children in the immediate or extended family grew up, how they studied and performed form part of a discourse that many Bengali middle class children grow up with. This does not necessarily imply that such patterns or emphasis on studying certain subjects in specific ways are found among children having 'good students' or 'first girls/boys' in the family, nor that the emphasis on studies is limited among such families. Rather, the very fact that the children choose to talk about their family using a vocabulary similar to the two older generations shows the significance of certain role models and traits in a culture that make sufficient sense to children, even sixty years apart, for them to borrow from it in their narrative styles.

For those from the generation who grew up in the post-Independence period, the changes are sometimes articulated in terms of sentiments which did not exist in their times[44]. This pertains to aspects such as greater autonomy of children, expression of clothing preferences, friendship or 'mixing' with children of the opposite sex – aspects which will be discussed in the following chapters. Here, however an excerpt from an interview is included which shows how this perception of changes in sentiments are extended to the area of 'studies'. The perception of the difference in the interview is formulated thus:

> "That mentality did not exist then..Again, in those days everyone was comfortably off..As it is, if one owned crops..those who had cultivable land, maybe they owned 10 bighas of land..they would think, '*Puh! What use will it be to get an education, there is so much land. If one raises crops, that will be sufficient for a living*'. In those days, they did not think about these things so much. But this mentality of the people..not everyone has the same mentality. This is where the transformation, this is how it occurred" (Interview with Shubhash Kumar Mandal, December 2010).

The respondent Shubhash Kumar Mandal, grew up in an agriculture-based family in rural Midnapore in the 1950s and despite the low cultural capital of his family, he worked and paid for his college education and worked as a writer of legal deeds in the court. Two generations after him, his 10 year old grandson is growing up in a household where education is of undisputed primacy for the children and where his parents (Shubhash Kumar's son and daughter-in-law) draw on their cultural capital, emphasising school work, after-school classes and other cultural-educational activities for him. Shubhash Kumar does not express this difference in terms of increased 'pressure' of studies or competition, unlike some of his contemporaries from families with higher cultural capital, or those

44 This is less common among the generation of parents where accounts involving a conflict with sentiments of the older generation regarding certain aspects are found (the sections on clothing and friendship). However the generation which grew up in the 1960s and 1970s perceive and articulate the changes in childhood in ways other than a shift in sentiments.

belonging to the parents' generation do. Presumably, this is because his family background and that of his son's and grandson's are so far apart that comparisons using 'more studies' or 'more tuitions' would not fit in, even though education played a significant role in all three generations. Noticeable also, is the context of his family background. This is one of the only two interviews where the respondent grew up in a non urban background. The views expressed and the values are markedly different from those of his contemporaries. This shows the different values as well as standpoints within Bengal in rural and urban contexts. The statement 'in those days everyone was comfortably off" must not be misunderstood as an idealized perception of general affluence in rural Bengal which is very likely far from accurate. Rather, 'comfortably off' possibly refers to the respite from the competition for salaried jobs in the rural areas, unlike in the cities and small towns where the anxiety and competition regarding subsistence, made the rural scenario idyllic in comparison. The next sentence about owning sufficient land affirms this, implying that education was not seen as a pressing need as long as there was enough to eat. A significant aspect in these accounts is that the different values and perspectives operate across the generations and family backgrounds *despite* and within a common background where education, at least in the biographies of the narrators, was a central feature in their childhoods.

5.2.2 Reading in 'Secret': Schoolwork and 'Outside' Books

Family stories were the most common contexts in which the theme of studies and values attached to education are prominently reflected in the interviews. Though these are not specific to one's childhood, forming a background of the respondents' biographical chronicles, direct references connecting childhood and studies are made in the form of everyday schedules for the contemporary children, and about schoolwork and parental practices concerning schoolwork for the older generations. As discussed in other sections, the primacy of schoolwork for children has been attested by many respondents from different family backgrounds. The significance of studies is also emphasized in other contexts, such as accounts of leisure practices in childhood.

The account of respondents like Parimal Das, who grew up in Central Kolkata in the 1940s reflect how leisure activities are defined by this primacy of 'studies' is. When asked what he did in his leisure hours, Parimal says it was spent playing alone on the terrace of his house in his early childhood and reading. He

mentions reading Bengali classics, naming authors like Bibhutibhushan[45], which he started reading at the age of eleven. When he talks about books he read, referring to fiction, a pattern emerges in which the primacy of 'studies' casts its shadow in other areas:

> P: I read some books secretly and Baba would also get me some.
>
> H.S: Why secretly?
>
> P: Secretly because, then studying was the main thing.
>
> H.S: Ok.
>
> P: Mm..Reading external to school studies was not..much in vogue then. But if I did not read..then I wouldn't know about many things.
>
> H.S: Hm.
>
> P: I used to read Rabindranath then. Especially books of poems. Rhymes..ah..or *Chhelebela*[46], I'd read these. And..I would read Jogindranath's[47] *Hashikhushi*, all of these. I read books even outside studies" (Interview with Parimal Das, January 2011).

The reference to books 'outside studies' is a strong indicator of the paradoxical relationship faced by children in the middle class ethos where education and culture are significant but sometimes perceived as competing. The appreciation of the Bengali middle class for 'culture' took the form of an interest in music, art, theatre, and literature. At the same time, for those of the school going age, this ideal of 'culture' was separate from the realm of education within the school, which was and continues to be examination centric. From this perspective, culture in any form, including books for children which were not within the school prescribed syllabus were seen to clash with the specific education of the child in the school.

The use of terms like 'outside studies' and 'books external to school studies' are indicative of this perception of school related books and other books as binar-

45 Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay is one of the authors of fiction who is regarded as one of the classics in twentieth century Bengali fiction. His works were not specifically for children, except for *Chander Pahar* (translated into 'Mountain of the Moon') an adventure novel based in Africa, a novel mentioned by some of the respondents from the two younger generations. His novel *Pather Panchali* (translated as 'Song of the Little Road') plays a significant role in the discourse of childhood, or more specifically, of boyhood in Bengal owing to the character of 'Apu', the innocent wide eyed boy of Bengal's countryside, who captured the Bengali imagination, and whose is often evoked in public discourse referring to childhood or the loss of innocence. The respondent Parimal Das, incidentally referred to this work by Bibhutibhushan and the character, saying he identified with the boy and described his childhood as being 'Apu-like'.

46 The autobiography of Rabindranath Tagore, the most celebrated figure in Bengali literature, *Chhelebela* literally translates as 'Boyhood'.

47 Jogendranath Sarkar contributed to Bengali children's literature in the nineteenth century. Notable among his works are poems for children, the children's magazine *Mukul* (translated as 'blossom') which he edited and his contributions in other children's magazines like *Sakha* and *Sandesh*. The book *Hashikhushi* (a compound of two Bengali words laughter and happiness) was published in 1897. (Source: Banglapedia)

ies. Moreover most other activities, that were not circumscribed within school related education or 'studies', were rendered the binary opposite of 'studies'. At the same time the culture valuing Bengali middle class felt the importance of introducing their children to classics in literature and music and it is in this that the paradox is felt, by the children themselves, in reading books 'outside studies' which were not forbidden in itself, but which came under parental restraint, lest too much of it was a distraction from school 'studies'.

Reading books in secret was not confined to any one generation. Interviews with the three generations showed a similar pattern where story books were read by children in secret, or where certain kinds of books were not allowed. Strikingly, for the two older generations, this was true largely for families with high cultural capital, where children were encouraged to read books outside school to some extent by parents.

The paradox therefore, lay in the context where the significance of 'other' books for a child's intellectual growth also caused this reading of storybooks to be curbed. The explanation for this is perhaps that both aspects, the familiarization of children with other books and the significance of school performance were aspects central to the families where education was highly valued. However, this trait, and this context has a different form in the contemporary generation of children. Instead of being limited to families with high cultural capital, the tendency is stronger among children from all families. The exceptions however, were found in families with high cultural capital, where children did not talk about instances where they were asked not to read or do 'too much' outside of studies. This points to two significant shifts in contemporary middle class culture in Bengal. On the one hand the model of childhood emphasising children's engagement with education and culture has noticeably spread since the two older generations among different groups within what might be called the middle class, irrespective of the degree of cultural capital possessed by the family – the process of *Bildungsmoratorium*. On the other hand, a reversal is noticed, where children in families with higher cultural capital experience greater permissiveness when it comes to leisure activities, in comparison to children from the two previous generations where the distinction between 'studies' and non-study activities were strictly maintained.

5.3 Linking History with Practice

> **"**Consider, for example, the primacy of manner and style, the value attached to naturalness and lightness, conceived as the antithesis of pedantry, didacticism or effort; the cult of the 'gift' and the disparagement of apprenticeship, the modern reformulation of the ideology of 'birth' and contempt for study... in short, all the ways, declared or tacit, of reducing culture to the relation to culture, in other words, of setting against the vulgarity of what can be acquired or achieved a manner of possessing an acquirement whose whole value derives from the fact that there is but one way of acquiring it"
>
> -Pierre Bourdieu & Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction In Education, Society and Culture*, 1977

In the years after India's Independence, the region of Bengal was sculpted and resculpted through political, social and economic changes. The Partition was one of the most significant among changes in the recent history of the region. Apart from changing the configuration of Bengal territorially, the mass migration on both sides of the border, the political riots, the communal sentiments shook the placidity of the middle class in the way two hundred years of colonial history had not shaken them before. The establishment of a Left Front Government in 1977 was another influence that shaped West Bengal.

Some of the decades after Independence till the 1990s still awaits its historian (a phrase used by Chatterjee 2007 for the 1940s) with the exception perhaps, of the period of the radical Naxalite uprisings in the 1960s and 1970s which took an entire generation of students by storm. The interviews with the older generations give an idea about certain practices of childhood and education in this time. A significant education policy that occurred in the meanwhile, when the generation of parents was halfway through school, was the West Bengal Government's decision to abolish the teaching of English in government schools till class six. This is an aspect that could not be directly captured in the interviews, though many things said by children and the generation of parents, point to the shift for which this policy might have been responsible. Much of the information available on this policy and its effects is in media debates. In the April of 2011, after a new State Government uprooted the Left Front Government of 34 years, the effects of this education policy which was reversed after a decade, has been resurrected in the media discourse ('Lest we Forget' in *The Telegraph*, Kolkata May 2011). Whatever the motives guiding this policy decision, it created a rift within the middle class in West Bengal with a section that valued English education shifting their children to private schools, and with children from low middle classes enrolling mostly in the State run schools which were mostly Bengali and Hindi medium. By the time the policy was reversed in 2004 the differences arising from the classed nature of English medium education had sunk in, and spawning inequalities of its own.

For the subsequent generations of children, degrees of familiarity with English and Bengali, the nature of curricula and therefore the kind of educational preparation for exams depended to some extent on class backgrounds. The final school leaving examinations are conducted by three main boards of education, the State board or the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBSE), the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) for public and private schools conducted by the Central Government of India and the Council for Indian School Certificate Examination (ICSE), which is aprivate board of education. There is a general perception held by many in West Bengal that the exam conducted by the West Bengal Board was more difficult than by the other two boards and children studying in schools under this board often resorted to tuitions years before their class ten exam. The practice, as found in the interviews with the contemporary generation of children appeared to be general, irrespective of which board they belonged to. Studies were just as important whether one attended a school affiliated to the WBSE or ICSE boards. However, as a consequence of the now reversed policy, education in different language media not only came to have a classed character, but the kind of school and the medium of instruction a child was familiar with, was now imbued with *class connotations* (Roy 1993).

Education in Bengal has specific significance for the middle class culture in the sense of sculpting the very identity of the region in colonial and even postcolonial India. The debates on education policies in the nineteenth century bring out the class character of the ideology uniting the *bhadralok* section. Notwithstanding the seeming paradox, of a 'modern' middle class that rejected Hindu tradition, the community seemed to reject only parts of this tradition, reinforcing certain forms of inequalities and creating new ones. The furore over the possibilty of mass access to education strengthens this argument.

In the last few years, there has been considerable research on the class character of education, often using a comparative perspective for children from working class and middle class backgrounds. The tendency of middle class parents to invest in their children's education is also a theme of research, with researchers pointing out to the common middle class tendencies of 'enrichment activities' and building of 'leisure careers' for children as examples of the educational enthusiasm of the middle class in the United Kingdom (Vincent & Ball 2007; Vincent, Braun, Ball 2008; Ball; Vincent, Kemp, Pietikainen 2004)

The association of education with performance and competition might once again suggest a wider transnational culture in many contemporary societies and this is perhaps in part an explanation of an overall tendency. The thesis emphasising the specific nature of childhoods in 'modernity' however, is partly undone in the pattern in which references to 'studying' or 'studies' crop up in the interviews with children and older generations in West Bengal, spilling out of their supposed specific location, the school, to a number of other areas. For here is a

link with the older generations' narratives of their childhoods in Bengali middle class families. Respondents from these generations often speak of a 'sea change' in their childhoods and that of children growing up in Kolkata today, sometimes children in the same family – a child or a grandchild, and the areas in which they see maximum change are related to the possession of objects, changing authority, clothing styles, or sometimes a more general perception of the city having become more dangerous for children to play alone in. However, the link with contemporary childhoods is in the usage of phrases connected to studies. Though practices at home and in the school are narrated as being different, 'having less pressure' in their childhoods, the relation to schoolwork is mentioned in a number of contexts – such as referring to leisure practices[48], or even sometimes describing their personalities as children or a parent or sibling saying that she or he was or was not 'serious in studies', or 'good at studies'. As the study considers narratives from three generations, this emphasis questions the notion that the predominace of the school is an overall product of socioeconomic processes in the last twenty years.

The historical background of the region of Bengal, previously undivided Bengal until Partition in 1947 and later divided into West Bengal in India and Bangladesh which was the erstwhile East Pakistan after Partition, – is significant if the cultural ethos of contemporary childhoods in urban West Bengal is to be understood. Even the phrases, values attached to certain combinations using the word 'studies' or the Bengali '*porashuna*'[49], and their relative significance for the respondents make sense in a cultural universe where the specific historical context must be discussed. Though a discussion of heated debates of political nature on higher education and fictional representations in the nineteenth century appear to be a long winding path in a study concerned with children in contemporary Kolkata, it is a necessary path in this research. The emphasis on history is not so much to prove that certain traits 'live on' among the middle classes in Bengal. It would almost be the sociological equivalent of making a statement of 'natural' or inherent traits of groups. Rather, the emphasis is on understanding sentiments and the meanings attached to things which are relevant in a study of contemporary middle class culture in urban West Bengal. While the section on historical background highlights the significance of education, some of the connotations attached to education. have also been explored in this chapter. The inequalities that were implied in the education system in nineteenth century Bengal and the *bhadralok* culture that emerged with its system of meanings and values that different

48 See the chapter on leisure practices of children. More than one respondent talks about reading storybooks in secret as parents saw an excess of the practice as undermining their school work.

49 The word '*porashuna*' which literally means reading and hearing, refers to studying or research and is separately used from the word *'shikkha*' or education.

practices and aspects related to education were imbued with, reflect the marked classed character of education in Bengal.

Since the nineteenth century when the new education system by the British administration was implemented in undivided Bengal under the Raj to contemporary urban West Bengal in India, change is not only expected, rather a statement of change ambiguously formulated, hardly merits mention. The Bengali community, especially those living in India since the Partition of Bengal, are often projected and sometimes satirized for their penchant for certain cultural artefacts or an inclination towards certain literary styles, or communities – such as Keats, Shelley, Tagore, Bankimchandra, Comte, fish, films by Ray and Mrinal Sen, a dislike of the rich Marwari businessmen who are cohabitors in the city, a disdain for North Indian 'Hindi' culture and a regard for South Indian, notably the Tamil culture. These have acquired something of an iconic status in the representation and the self fashioning of the Bengalis and are deeply associated with middle class Bengaliness. The iconic elements withstood the political, economic and social changes experienced by India since the nineteenth century till a period when a communist Government came full in swing and when trade unionism and radical left Naxalite student politics wore out the state economically. When West Bengal's status as something of a festering wound in India was established in the 1970s, the icons were nevertheless valid ones in the public discourse on and from the Bengali middle class. The rupture from this culture was felt by the middle class in Bengal only in the last twelve years or so. The sense of a break with an established familiar culture was felt by some sections among the middle class and more by some generations than others, particularly those who grew up in the post Independence period in the 1950s felt it more than those born in the 1980s. The public discourse in the Bengali and English language print media, in the popular music culture, in everyday conversations reflected this.

While the feeling of a loss, a fading of a culture has existed as a trope in Bengal for a long time, and has been especially significant in India in general, as part of the nationalist reconstruction of a golden past, it could be easily dismissed as a traditional tendency among the Bengali middle class or of all communities in general to see the past through rose-coloured glasses. However, the tone in the public discourse in West Bengal about how Bengal or Kolkata has changed in the last few years, suggests bewilderment rather than bitter criticism or cynicism reflecting an intellectual stance, even though elements of them are recognized. What comes through is a sense of a change qualitatively so different than what Independence, a new nation state, different governments had effected, that sneering comments or eulogizing a past culture no longer suffice as modes of articulation. The discussion is noticeably intensive when it comes to certain social groups, such as the changing patterns among sections of the lower classes, especially the domestic helps or about young people. In this context childhood,

like youth or the socioeconomic 'rise' of lower classes is a significant theme not just in itself, where the change in childhood is discussed, but because it provides a suitable background through which the discussion about cultural changes in Kolkata are commonly articulated.

While the class inequalities related to education and the special status of the middle class are emphasized in contemporary sociological research, the 'middle class', especially in West European contexts are usually treated as a universal category. Children of middle class families across cultures, in industrialized societies are thereby perceived as subjects of general middle class parenting which reacts spurred by class anxieties and ambitions. The studies which focus on differences within a class, as well as on culturally specific middle classes, have a different version of the story about the educational ardour of the middle class.

Class connotations of education are culture specific, even when the social section in question is the middle class. Identification with certain educational backgrounds is not necessarily a universal middle class inclination in the way it is sometimes projected. A study on the Norwegian middle class shows Norway to be an exception from the typical example of the 'middle class' that is often discussed. The study shows a disposition to understate the importance of education among the middle class. The researchers infer that in comparison to contexts like Britain, there is greater ambivalence in class identification, despite having educational diplomas and degrees, and attribute it to the culture of egalitarianism in the Norwegian context (Skarpenes and Sakslind 2010).

In the context of Bengal, education has been very closely tied to the emerging middle class in colonial Bengal and was the inherent aspect of the identity of the 'respectable' section of urban Bengali society. The higher school education that sections of the *bhadralok* tried their best to keep exclusive in the nineteenth century, spread to some more social sections in the early twentieth century. By the time of India's Independence, education for women as well as for men spread among a wider social section thriving on salaried jobs, and while the class of manual workers and the lowest castes continued to be out of this realm, the middle class in the 1950s in urban West Bengal had a less exclusive character than its earlier generations. In the post Independence period, at least a high school education for women (born in the 1950s and later generations) and at least a college education or Bachelor's degree was usually found in the middle class, with women having higher education, such as a Master's degree found among families with very high cultural capital.

In this background of its history, education came to have a consecrated status in the middle class culture of childhood. An entire culture of childhood was built on this principal where education was perceived as the ideal world of the child. The tradition of family stories of studious children in the earlier generations became means to inspire or chide children towards greater concentration on school-

work. The paradoxes of the middle class were translated into the culture of childhood where the need to develop the minds of children through fiction were realized, yet at the same time, the horror of compromising with the sanctified schoolwork overtook it for many, consequently books that were not part of the school curriculum were perceived as 'outside books' which children from the different generations sometimes 'secretly' read.

The flocking of upper sections of the middle class towards private English medium schools in the 1980s and 1990s added a layer to the class character of education in West Bengal (Roy 1993). In the meantime, several economic and social changes changed the nature of social mobilty in West Bengal. The effects of economic liberalization in the 1990s and the establishment of numerous private higher education institutes in this period changed the character of the middle class of the earlier generations, as well as the relationship to education. With sections of the lower middle class who had access to English education and salaried jobs in the IT sector and government sectors, education or even English education was not a distinguishing feature of an exclusive small social section.

In a curious reversal of practices, the interviews with the children and with the generation of parents, show a pattern where the stress on 'studies' or schoolwork is more central to the everyday lives of children from families with middle or low cultural capital than for children from families with very high cultural capital. This stress on studies is experienced through a greater amount of time spent in tuitions and in greater control of activities outside studying. About 20 of the 33 children said they sometimes had conflict with their parents and 19 of them stated watching television as a reason and mentioned that it displeased parents who thought it interfered with studying. This is similar to the accounts from the generation of parents who talked about reading story books in secret as it was seen as a deviation from studying. The accounts show a change in the nuance with the generations, with the middle class being more permissible towards 'storybooks' than towards television which in many families is seen as the conflicting diversion to the consecrated realm of studies.

These tendencies do not in any way imply a decreased or diluted importance of education in the middle class culture of childhood in Bengal. Rather, they reaffirm the primacy of status of education for children, with subtle changes in some aspects. In the course of sixty years the markers of middle class identity have changed in a way that appears deceptively alternative. In the 1950s, education for children was a hallmark of Bengali middle class identity, though emphasis on higher education beyond school was mostly for boys than girls. The indulgence for children's culture, expressed specifically through a burgeoning children's literature was also a feature of Bengali middle class childhoods which was not extended to the lower socio-economic sections. In the subsequent generations, competitions in the economic market and educational policies contributed

to the emergence of a tuition culture in West Bengal, where middle class children from ages 13 onwards had after-school lessons in different subjects to ensure their performance. Familiarity with English and a private schooling retained some of its exclusive character, especially in the 1980s, connoting high cultural and economic capital. The practice of tuition existed for the earlier generations as well as some of the interviews show, but it was usually typical in older children for their school leaving examinations. The practice extending to younger children was established in the 1980s.

With the spread of this culture and the entry of different social sections, these practices lost their earlier meanings. Most significantly, however, the homology between certain kinds of economic capital and cultural capital became ripped apart. It was not uncommon for children from very different backgrounds of cultural capital to attend the same private English medium school, as their families could afford it, even if the reasons for choosing the school might differ. The same was less usual but possible for children from different economic backgrounds, though the difference was more likely to be in the kind of economic capital, such as small business in textiles or parents in the private corporate sector, than in the degree of economic capital. As Skarpenes and Sakslind argue for the Norwegian context, in West Bengal, the processes of class disidentification are significant, in understanding the culturally specific Bengali middle class.

The narratives of the three generations unfurl like a Bourdieusienne plot. The kind of engagement children have with 'studies' set the background for the game of distinction. In all of this, education or 'studies' does not lose its primacy for children. Neither is it a direct expression of the utilitarian investment of a middle class that pins its hopes on salaried jobs. Through the discussion on the historical background and the trope of family myths of 'first girls' and 'first boys' in the interviews, I have tried to emphasise that for at least three generations, education for children came to be valued in itself even if salaried jobs were significant for the middle class. The entire ethos of education that developed in Bengal since the nineteenth century is imbued with many connotations which have some relevance even today. The family stories show an aspect of the middle class sentiment about education, where poverty or hardship of some kind faced by the young student glazed merit and made studiousness a virtue. Contemporary practices and values derive meaning from as well as consciously distance themselves from this legacy of education. This is how the lives of children in middle class families of Kolkata are linked to the history of the *bhadralok*'s love affair with education and culture. The game of distinction in this culture of childhood has shifted to other spaces of education, though not strictly school education, manifesting itself especially in the leisure culture of children. Today a frenzied schoolweek where a twelve year old child has tuitions six days a week and classical music and drawing in the weekend, is more likely to be associated with the fervour of middle

class families with less cultural and economic capital than an apparently more laidback routine of a child with less or no tuitions, where parents claim not to control television watching and where the reading of story books are apparently not subject to parental restraint.

6. Afternoons after School: 'Leisure' Culture and Space

An hour after noon when the office hour traffic in Kolkata begins to subside, the streets are thronged with schoolchildren, noticeable in their school uniforms, making their way through the traffic accompanied by parents, getting inside school buses, making their way to the cars which have come to pick them up, with drivers or parents taking the schoolbags from them. As the afternoon progresses, the school traffic disperses, but the children are visible on the streets, well after dark, yet to go home, hurrying with parents, sitting wearily in a public bus or underground train, on their way to the next destination a mathematics tuition or a guitar lesson – where the last hour after school is utilized until the day ends.

To the inhabitants of Kolkata and in other towns and cities in India, the sight of children sometimes as young as seven, hurrying off somewhere, long after-school hours, is a common one. Signs of where they go and what they do in these hours, are recognized at a glance, by passersby. The case of an instrument, carried on the back of a child, or kneepads, dangling from a child's hand give it away. In other cases, the nature of places and regions, and the nature of their relationship to school going children are recognized immediately, even when children are not visible. Dozens of children's shoes left on the doorstep of a house,or strains of harmonium and young voices from an apartment, mingling with the sounds of the neighborhood are almost always features of tuitions, or drawing and singing classes.

When I started interviewing children, the after-school patterns followed by children from middle class backgrounds were sometimes a hindrance, and sometimes a way of getting access to them. Sometimes an interview or a conversation had to be wound up, with an anxious parent hovering in the background, waiting to take the child to the next tuition. During the week, many of the children interviewed had more than one appointment after school, and interviews were done in between them or sometimes at one of the places they went to. The weekends were perhaps comparatively less hectic, but they were rarely completely free. Children of all age groups, even those outside the age range I interviewed

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seemed to follow similar patterns in their hours after school. Apart from that, there were advertisements of different kinds, from coloured print outs to hand written posters offering lessons in school subjects and in what many of the respondents refer to as 'extracurricular activities' dance, drawing, singing, computer – everywhere, at drugstores, on walls, in stationary shops in the neighborhood, where children and their parents were sure to see it, that gave a picture of the variety and trends in values and tastes that dominate a culture built around the after-school hours of middle class children.

Though tuitions and lessons in singing or dancing and sometimes in a sport were a general feature in the afternoons and evenings of the children who were interviewed, many other activities were recounted by the children themselves as to what they did when they were not in school. These, in combination with other things the children talked about– school, home, incidents, preference for some forms of entertainment, dislike for some articles of clothing, as well as the children's backgrounds pointed to patterns within a province that is far from homogeneous, even within a social section that is broadly seen as being part of a middle class the province of leisure culture for children in urban West Bengal.

In this section this expanse of the leisure culture of children are looked at, though the term 'leisure' is understood not so much in the sense of relaxation. Leisure, rather in this context refers to the time outside of school, though as the subsections in this chapter discuss, they are often connected to school and schoolwork. The emergence of what have been called 'leisure careers' and the 'leisure stress' experienced by children (Zinnecker 1995,Vincent & Ball 2007) are a pattern that childhood researchers,especially those writing on the context of the developed industrialized cultures have been referring to for the past two decades. The aim of this chapter is not to argue for a pattern in leisure culture that is unique to urban West Bengal or the Indian middle classes. The practices that cause schoolgoing children from certain backgrounds to have busy schedules and less time for what is sometimes seen as unstructured play in their 'leisure hours' are far from unique to a particular social context or geographical region. Rather, the focus of the chapter is on the meanings and values assigned by different groups to some practices which can be understood within a particular cultural context, that of the urban middle class in West Bengal.

The leisure career and culture of children that childhood research usually documents focus mostly on the context of contemporary Western cultures. Other cultural contexts, such as that of South East Asia are also sometimes discussed (Naftali 2010), but the contemporary practices of childhood in these contexts are usually perceived as part of a global phenomenon, in connection with the emergence of new market economies, global cultures and the emergence of new social sections. The focus on understanding childhood in a culturally specific context in this chapter counters the image of the near universal middle class or new

middle class as well as any notion of a global middle class childhood characterized by ballet lessons, computer games and parents in the service sector. As such, sections in this chapter also discuss accounts of leisure practices in childhood by older generations, to understand the historical context of the terrain of middle class childhoods in urban West Bengal. Apart from the different activities that children pursue, the structuring of the out of school hours of children in itself varies according to social background, age and gender of the children.

School and education form a significant aspect of the childhood moratorium, but an equally compelling association is play and 'playfulness', which in a broader sense support the burgeoning universe of leisure cultures and practices for children in many contemporary social contexts. The idea of 'play' is intrinsic to the idea of 'modern childhood'. From Rousseau's dreamy visualization in *Emile* of an unfettered childhood, to the rise of the contemporary genre of children's computer games, to critics of this game culture, the underlying assumption is that of play as an integral aspect of childhood, despite the difference of motives and positions. The attributes of 'carefreeness' and 'playfulness' paint the idea of 'protected' childhoods with a naturalness of spirit, that the importance of institutional education cannot perhaps achieve. However, play as it is understood and 'done' are varied across and within time and social contexts. The cultures of play for children are as diverse as the objects of play inundating the market aimed at children and young people. Acts of actually playing, and things one plays with make up part of the culture of play. This section analyses these aspects from the accounts of three generations. However, the question of space is of much significance in determining the form of play to some extent, but also, perceptions and meanings attached to some spaces are intrinsically linked to perceptions of play itself. Some of the accounts of respondents from the three generations related to play are discussed in the following sections. The interviews are with respondents of different backgrounds, and have been included to give an overview of play across three generations of girls and boys.

6.1 'Aunties', 'Going Out' and 'Coaching': Children and Private Tuition

The accounts of the children about their everyday lives mingle in a particular detail in their narration. Most of the children, when asked how their day was usually spent, gave an account of the whole week rather than talk about how in general a day was spent after school hours. The days of the week were significant in the narratives in the division of certain activities or classes that the children at-

tended, and the nature of the 'free time' and what was done with it was therefore not the same throughout the week.

33 children were interviewed, 23 mostly from parts of South Kolkata and 10 from Bandel, a town in the suburbs of the Kolkata metropolis. For most of the children the time outside school was structured around the after-school lessons either in school subjects or in other activities. Apart from 2 children who had no after-school lessons, the others had their week arranged and divided into lessons in school subjects, and other lessons, such as singing, drawing, dancing lessons etc. – their free time and the leisure options available in this time having clear boundaries.

As discussed in the previous chapter, education has a place of significance in the middle class ethos in West Bengal that goes beyond simply investing in the school performance of children. Though 'being good at studies' is a valued asset and is sometimes cast as a personality trait, the ethos of education pervades many aspects of the lives of children and the adults around them, and is not limited to, though often directed towards performance. The accounts of the children about their 'leisure' hours or after-school hours bear testimony to this.

In an improvization of the British word referring to instruction or teaching in a small group, and coming closer to the Latin origin *tuitio* meaning custody, 'tuition' in Indian English and in the Indian context has come to have a significance of its own, as a widespread practice of offering regular paid lessons in school and college subjects to children and young people across age groups, and specialising in 'guidance' for special tests and examinations, ranging from board examinations for those in the tenth or twelfth classes to admission tests for kindergartens and primary schools for younger children. In the urban and semi Indian contexts, even outside of Bengal, tuition has come into its own as a sub institution, supplementing the official educational institutions that children and adolescents attend, but sometimes operating like these very institutions in conducting examinations, evaluating performances and competeing with rival tuition classes or 'coaching centres' as the larger, organized versions are called. However, across India, tuition usually has a more significant role for those in the higher classes, particularly children appearing for their class ten and class twelve board examinations, and especially in some subjects like the sciences, commerce and mathematics than in others.

In urban West Bengal, the practice appears widespread even among younger children although the tuitions in their case usually involve smaller groups and single teachers teaching in their own homes or 'home tutors' who come to the house of the child or one of the children, if a small group is taught.

The children who were interviewed in this study were mostly in the fifth or sixth grade, with only some exceptions of three children Arunima (13) and Debasmita (12) in seventh grade and Dhriti (9) in fourth grade at the time of the interview.

28 out of the 33 children interviewed had tuitions after school. The interviews were done mostly in winter, when some of the schools had already finished the final end of school year examinations, and two of the five children who said they had no tuitions, said they had no tuitions for the time being, having had classes previously during the school term. The children and their parents had developed a vocabulary around the practice, often using different terms to refer to the nature of the after-school engagement and sometimes to the perceived significance of some classes (I have sometimes used the term 'classes' or 'after-school lessons' in place of 'tuitions' in this section on the vocabulary used by the children) over others.

The most common expression or phrase used by the children was the Bengali term '*pora*' the gerund form of the verb study. Sometimes an extended version of the gerund equivalent is used, as when the children said '*porte jaowa* ' – going to study or going for a lesson, thereby specifying that they went to a tuition teacher for lessons, whereas '*pora achhe*' – 'I have a lesson', is more general, implying both a person coming to teach the child at home or going to the lesson. The term was used by children in Bengali and English medium schools, alongside the word tuition. Another term that is used to refer to after-school lessons is 'coaching', used more by children, and parents, from families with lower cultural and economic capital. Similarly, the English word 'Aunty' was used by some children to refer to a female tuition teacher. The term is a significant indicator in a context where terms of fictive kinship are an integral part of everyday life, for children and adults. It is common for children and even sometimes adults to use Bengali terms for father's younger brother '*kaku*' or mother's sister '*mashi*' etc. for a host of relationships outside the social circles of friends and parents of friends where fictive kinship is integral. Particularly for children, by virtue of their age and status of dependence, terms of fictive kinship such as *kajer mashi*[50] and *driver kaku*.are used for figures such as domestic helps and drivers of the school van. The use of the English term 'Aunty' in this context conveys a mixture of respect and distance that the Bengali equivalents do not accord, as well as the terms 'Miss' or 'Teacher' in their English form. The children from families with middle and higher cultural capital, especially girls, used the terms 'Miss' or 'Aunty' to refer to their tuitions and those with very high cultural capital used 'Teacher' or said 'I take tuitions' to talk about their after-school lessons. Often, a person the children called 'Aunty' or 'Miss' were professionally equipped to teach the subjects and were often but not always teachers or retired teachers from another school.

The leisure activities of the children, which were often in the form of paid classes, were to a great extent structured around the pattern of tuitions, depend-

50 Literally translated as working aunt, or the aunt who works for the household.

ing on the child's or the families' priorities.The number of tuitions a child had, did not in themselves imply the number of days the child spent at the after-school lessons. Most of the children, who had one or two tuitions, usually had them in English and Mathematics, or another language like Bengali or Hindi. These usually meant two classes per week per subject, depending on the perceived importance of the subject, in terms of marks or other values attached to them. Mathematics usually meant more than one class a week, being a 'scoring' or 'important' subject, as was English. Children sometimes had tuitions in other languages like Bengali or Hindi, usually once a week, because their parents felt they could 'handle' the science subjects and History, Geography but not the languages. Estimating the amount of time based on the number of tuitions was misleading. Sometimes children said one tuition, or going to study at just one place, to refer to one person teaching them. The number of days depended on the number of subjects taught, and sometimes 'having one tuition' meant one person teaching them all the school subjects. Therefore having one tuition could mean as many weekdays of after-school lessons for a child as for a child having two or more tuitions. Over half the children interviewed had 2 or more tuitions after school, which were diverse in terms of the subjects, in the kind of expertise offered, and in the distance from their homes, factors which influenced their other leisure options to a great extent.

While most of the children gave an overview of their activities during different days of the week, some children typically focused on particular days of the week that were stressful or tiring as they had more than one tuitions after school, one after another. While most of the children had structured routines throughout the week, the tendency of having having two or three tuitions in a day was more common for children from families with low cultural capital. Mridula, a 12 year old girl from a Bengali medium school in South Kolkata whose father runs a small catering business gives an account of her week:

> „When I come back from school I have coaching. That is, Tuesdays are very bad for me. Tuesdays immediately after coming, at five I have my singing class. So when I come home at quarter to five I run right after eating. From there again at seven thirty I have an English lesson, after studying there, at half past nine I'm home. After coming back, that day it's a little bit..Otherwise I usually don't have coaching right after school. Usually I have it an hour or one and a half hours after coming back. Even if not that much, I eat, rest a bit and then go. The time for studying is very little...Tuesday mornings I have maths. From half past seven till half past nine or ten. I come back and leave right away for school. I have singing when I come back and then after doing English I go home. That day is very...“ (Interview with Mridula, December 2009).

Girls, especially from families from low or medium cultural capital backgrounds seemed to have more instances of weekdays with more than one after-school lesson, sometimes having tuitions as well as a singing or dancing lesson on the same afternoon. Taniya, who is from the same school as Mridula though a differ-

ent class, and whose father and uncles run a small business of wreaths, talks about her week:

> „Well, in the mornings, apart from Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays Aunty comes. Then after Aunty goes, I shower then go to school; after coming back from school sometimes the Maths and Science Aunty comes and sometimes the Bengali and English Aunty comes and every Wednesday there is dance class, I go to the dance class and on Saturday morning drawing Sir comes, and then comes my English Aunty. When English Aunty leaves, then in the evening the Aunty from the morning comes, who teaches history and geography“ (Interview with Taniya, December 2009).

The pattern of having more than two after-school tuitions a week, alongside lessons in a leisure activity is also common to boys from families of low and medium cultural capital. Despite the use of the terms high, medium, low, my impression of the domain of cultural capital from the interaction with the children and their parents, and sometimes with their grandparents is of one that is far too much in flux to permit a neat tiered perspective based on the educational qualifications and occupations of parents. However, based on an overview of the different backgrounds over the three generations, with the different combinations of cultural and economic capital that make up family backgrounds, I prefer to use terms referring to the three main fractions within the middle class for the backgrounds of the children who were interviewed. Traditional orthodox Bengali middle class, Traditional western-influenced Bengali middle class and an emerging mixed middle class, where overlapping cultural and economic backgrounds exist, sometimes owing to parents belonging to the two different fractions.

While for girls the weekdays mean accomodating tuitions and classes in singing, sport, dancing and drawing, for the boys the options were usually limited to drawing and sport and occasionally music. The priorities of the families play a significant role in how tuitions and leisure classes are accomodated. For example, Bumba's father works in the customs depatment and his mother is a teacher in a kindergarten. Sports is highly valued in his family, particularly as his father was active in state level football and had acquired his government job because of his involvement in sports. However, 'studies' are as important, and in accomodating swimming and tuitions, his after-school hours take on a similar pattern as Mridula and Taniya's.

> „Well, I wake up in the morning at six. If there is practice, then on Saturday and Sunday I have to wake up at half past five. From Monday to Friday, I wake up at six, then after eating, getting dressed, I go to school. I come back home at half past twelve from school. When I come back, I study till one or half past one. I study, then after showering, eating, I sleep a bit. Then at half past three I get up, get dressed and come to the club at four. We have to do PT (physical training) after coming, then practice, then from here I go to study. Then from the lesson, I come back at half past ten.“ (Interview with Bumba, December 2009).

The schedule during the week is similar for boys, sometimes even in families with higher cultural capital, and the absence of many tuitions towards higher cul-

tural capital backgrounds is compensated by extra lessons in a leisure activity. Rupam, a 9 year old boy I interviewed at the swimming club, came from a family with certain noticeable markers of cultural and economic capital. His father had a corporate job, his mother worked in a special school. Rupam went to an upper middle class boys' school in Kolkata and the family had shortly before, returned from holidays in Europe. Being younger, he did not have tuitions as many days a week as the older children at the swimming club, but his mother picked him up twice a week from school to their apartment in South Central Kolkata where he had tuitions, before they went back to their home in North Kolkata. Family values also played a role here. He had music lessons as his grandfather was fond of classical music and had swimming lessons at the swimming club in South Kolkata, on the days he had tuition.

Many of the interviews were conducted in the months of January and February in 2010 and 2011, when some of the schools affiliated to the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education had finished their end of school year examinations. In terms of after-school schedules, it meant a deviation from the usual patterns before the exams. For some children, there were no tuitions for the time being, not having the immediate need nor the school books of the next class to start. But the memories of frenzied weeks with extra lessons before the examinations were fresh. Some heard talk at home of new tuitions their mothers were thinking of signing them up for. Sometimes the school results meant they had one tuition less, occasionally, if they appeared to do well by themselves, or until a more satisfactory tuition teacher was found for them. In the free time this accorded, sometimes an extra leisure class was accomodated, something the child wanted to learn, but did not have the time for previously. The children sometimes calculated the amount of after-school time they would not have before they joined another tuition, typically after the final examinations, when performance in some subjects, or being promoted to a higher class meant new tuitions. For example Riju whose father is a civil engineer and mother a housewife, had more than one tuition at the time of the interview. Moreover, he had cricket lessons as he liked the sport, and before the new school year he joined another tuition as well as another cricket class.

> "What I had in class five, I will not have it any more. The reason is, that I am coming here (English tuition where he is interviewed) two days. Monday and Wednesday. So now on Tuesday I go somewhere to learn cricket. That is..that is here near where Bibekananda Park is, just nearby where the Riju sports club is, that is where I learn cricket.I started in class five. So now I go there, that is on Tuesday. That means on Tuesday evenings I have no time. Monday and Wednesdays neither. Mondays I come here..sorry sorry sorry..Monday Monday someone comes to teach me, he teaches me at home. He teaches me maths. So now..Monday I study with him and on Wednesdays and Fridays I come here. Three days. One day cricket..there goes Thursday. Thursdays he comes to teach maths"(Interview with Riju, January 2011).

However, for girls there is a markedly less hectic schedule as one goes towards the families with higher cultural capital. In an upper middle class girls' school where I interviewed five children, none of the three girls from Bengali families had tuitions though one of them, Shaswati. (11) had singing lessons. Among other girls' from the private or convent schools, especially among those children whose mothers were educated beyond high school, there was a tendency to have a tuition and a leisure class, but without any of the manic tempo of the children who travelled greater distances after school, from one class to another. Very rarely did one not have any after-school engagements, but they were woven in with apparent ease in the after-school hours, where the child had at least an hour's rest after school, and often, the tuitions were in fewer subjects, therefore giving the child more unstructured hours than the other children. For example, Mithoo, who attends a missionary girls' school in Kolkata, has after-school lessons but her account of a day is markedly different from the accounts of children like Bumba and Mridula. She describes her week thus:

> „Normally if I have an exam, I wake up at six. Otherwise I wake up at half past six. The alarm on the mobile rings. I feel a little lazy after waking up. I wake up..then after showering, getting dressed, tying my hair, I eat and go to school. Then when school gets over I come at half past one or two. I come home. Then I eat, take a small nap..I don't really get to sleep. Normally just one day a week I have a drawing class. Just around the corner there is a school at the Hazra crossing..that's where I learn. After that I come home, otherwise on other days I have studies (tuition) from five till seven. I study, then I take a bit of rest. Then I er watch a bit of TV, then again I sit down to study. After that I watch a bit of TV while eating, and then I go to bed (Interview with Mithoo, January 2010).

A similar flexible pattern is seen among some boys as well from families with relatively high cultural capital, where parents or other adults in the joint family sometimes supervised their lessons at home, and despite a tuition and a drawing class, the child talked about having a less structured evening with options to watch television or read or do as one pleased. Ishan, a 12 year old boy who attends the same private coeducational English medium school as Riju, has a very different week. Both his parents work in the service sector and as he has afternoon school, his mother takes him for swimming practice in the mornings before school. Apart from an English tuition and drawing lessons on Sundays, his parents supervise his 'studies'. Like Mithoo and Shaswati., his afternoons are more unstructured.

> „After school, in the evenings I have practice here (the swimming club). From practice, I go home. I go home and play. I study a bit at home,. Then after studying for some time, I have dinner at night, watch TV, read story books, then I sleep“(Interview with Ishan, January 2010).

In an apparently homogeneous pattern where tuition and leisure careers and television envelop the lives of children in class five and six in urban India, the accounts provided by the children themselves of how their after-school hours are spent, give an impression of a terrain with varied shades and nuances within a practice held as common. These shades and nuances sometimes imply significant

differences in the everyday lives of children, as discussed in the following sections. Disjunct from the lives of children from older generations, such patterns are likely to appear even more as the prototype of a hyper, childhood, appropriate in a competitive modern India. However, the accounts of the earlier generations make the historical context clear, of the pedagogical province of the moratorium of contemporary Bengali middle class childhood.

6.1.1 Who Plays What: The Children Talk About Sports

Many of the children mentioned play in their accounts of their afternoons or holidays, although often the accounts did not feature the children talking about what they played. Rather, the term was used in connection with a variety of situations, sometimes to give an impression of their week, and sometimes to illustrate tiffs with parents. In the beginning the children were asked about their leisure time and where they did not mention play themselves, questions were posed. When children mentioned or talked at length about playing, these were followed up with further questions.

Of the 33 children interviewed, over a half of them mentioned that they played, although a few of them even hinted that they would soon stop, not having enough time for it. Most of the children who said they played were children interviewed at the swimming club, and much of the 'playing' they referred to, was at the club. Most of the children understood play in the strictest sense of a physical recreational activity like a sport, or involved with games or toys and as such, the children who said they did not play, usually clarified that they did not 'play' nor 'go out to play' but talked about other forms of recreation such as watching television or reading at home. Among the children who talked about playing, most of them said they played at school, during the lunch break or in the games or Physical Training class, where children played partially unsupervised or under directions from a games teacher. However, some children, particularly those who said they did not play, mentioned a sports class in school, and clarified at the same that it was something they 'have', rather than saying they played at school. Most schools, particularly most of the schools the children interviewed attended, in Bandel or in Kolkata, had a playground, either within the school grounds, or an adjoining or nearby stretch of land, called a '*maath*' in Bengali where children play, practice drill, physical exercises and marchpast, and where occasionally cricket, football or basketball matches take place and where annual

sports day celebrations are held. Therefore, the clarification that 'it happens in school', or 'we have games in school' rather than an acknowledgement in the first person, implies in part the involuntariness (games classes or PT classes in schools are compulsory up to the higher classes of nine and ten in many schools) and the supervised character of sports in school. Among the children who prefer other ways of recreation at home, sports or PT in school are perceived as another class period of the same order as Moral Science or SUPW, something that has to be done, but not of the same order as other school subjects. Although there is no direct connection between what one played at school and what one played at home or outside of school, sometimes children found games or particular forms of sport played at school that appealed to them, and tried to play more of it even outside school if possible.

The difference in backgrounds of the children and the kind of schools they attended are closely linked, although attempts to determine which precedes or determines which, are not just impossible, paricularly as the focus of the research was on children and accounts of childhoods rather than parenting strategies, but also unrealistic. However, the schools play some part in providing a space to play in to children who normally live in apartments or in houses on the main street, but more importantly, the schools sometimes seem to filter and choose the kind of sports played by children, thereby familiarising children with some forms of sports over others and by developing a taste for some of them. A greater number children, all of them boys talked about playing cricket in the context of playing in school or at a playground near school. Football was mentioned by only one boy, 11 year old Abhigyan who attends a missionary boys' school in Bandel. Among the girls, the role of the school in fostering a liking for some sports was much more apparent than among the boys. Many of the girls mentioned other recreational activities than playing, and those who did, sometimes enumerated going to a friend or meeting other children from the neighbourhood, using more ambiguous phrases rather than mentioning a particular sport. My first encounter of girls being vocal about liking sports played in school was with a group of five girls interviewed at a private girls' school in Kolkata in the February of 2010. All of them were in class five and were 11 year olds. Three of them were Bengali, and the other two children Akansha and Tiya were from Punjabi and Marwari families settled in Kolkata for generations.

The school was established in the 1960s and is largely attended by children from upper middle class families from Bengali and other backgrounds. Unlike most of the other schools attended by the interviewed children, 'non-Bengali' children were not a minority, and the economic social background, as well as this cultural mix lent a school a different character from most of the private and government schools where Bengali children were dominant. Rather, cultural heterogeneity was typical of private English medium girls' schools, missionary schools

and Central Government schools and despite diversity of backgrounds, children from families of higher cultural and economic capital as these schools are also more expensive attended these rather than Bengali medium or State Government run schools.

In this particular school, I was given a large room reserved for piano practices, and where other lessons were sometimes held, with the five girls picked by the head of the primary section of the school. It wasn't very clear on what basis the children from the five sections had been chosen. I was fearing that it was academic performance, but on talking to the children, they seemed to have different relations to school performance. After telling the children I was interested in knowing about them, their families and their everyday lives, I asked them to introduce themselves and talk as a group or in turns as they preferred. The conversation turned to play, when one of the girls, Akansha, talked about the sports she liked in introducing herself. One of her classmates interrupted, emphasising how good her classmate was at sports. Thus the conversation turned to play before I asked the children about it.

A: My favourite sport is badminton, I love playing basketball

Shaswati. interrupts saying, "She's very good at it. She's very good at basketball..and she runs very well".

H.S:You play sports in school or at home as well?

A: Yeah, I don't have a garden, I go to badminton classes. I learn drawing, dancing, western and classical.

(Interview with Akansha, Shaswati, Tia, Prakriti, Shreya, February 2010).

Like Akansha, Shaswati. says that she plays in school, particularly when she comes to school earlier than others in her class. The school has a large playground with basketball hoops and on that winter afternoon, there were children playing badminton and basketball in different parts of the playground.

Another girl from among the group, Shreya talks about playing, although she mentions playing in her housing 'society' with friends rather than playing in school.

In another context, another girl mentioned playing in school, in my second round of field work, a year after the first. Rwiti, an 11 year old attends an English medium private girls' school in Kolkata. In her account of her week, she mentioned playing in school.

R:..in the break period, we have tiffin, and then sometimes we play.

H.S: Hm.

R: Running games mostly.

H.S: Ok

R: And then, because it is winter..as it is winter we play badminton. And then when I come back, I eat and take a nap..Yes, and then in the evening I..we er..go downstairs to play badminton. (Interview with Rwiti, January 2011).

The interviews with the children were mostly done in the months of December, January and February when winter in West Bengal is in its full bloom. The afternoons are sunny and not hot and humid like in summer, nor wet like the monsoon in July, making it possible for children to stay outdoors. Another significant aspect marking the months was that the end of the school year examinations were over in many schools and new terms had just begun, so the days at school were still slow and relaxed before they swung into class tests. The seeming popularity of badminton had a lot to do with this background, rather than being essentially a favourite sport or leisure activity for children in Bandel and Kolkata. Another aspect which possibly contributed to the relative popularity of badminton, was that, unlike football or cricket, the game is easily malleable and can be adapted to different spaces, as has been discussed in the next section.

While some children, with a greater number of girls, and all of them from private, English medium schools talked about playing badminton, most of the other children who talked about playing, spoke of playing cricket. While girls sometimes said they liked watching cricket, most of the children, with the exception of one girl, Shaswati., who talked about playing cricket, were boys. Cricket, was played in the playgrounds near school, within the 'housing society' with other children, in front of one's house or in the space in front of the building in which the children lived. In comparison however, football was mentioned by only two boys Abhigyan and Anand, who played in their school and in their 'campus'.

What was perhaps remarkable about the children's accounts, was the large number of children for whom play did not feature in their everyday lives. While perhaps most of them had to do some kind of sport at school, only the ones most enthusiastic about it, mentioned it. For some school was the only place where one 'played' in the sense of physical activity. For many others however, it was 'learnt'. I encountered this for the first time at the swimming club in South Kolkata. The swimming club functioned as more than a swimming club. Apart from a large swimming pool, the strips of cement bordering the pool, served as a space of play and practice for the children. The club was located near a large man made lake and the area surrounding it, was planted with trees and in a sense cordoned off from the streets and the traffic adjacent to it. The children used the space inside the club, as well as the surrounding space to 'practice'. 'Practice' at the club referred to running some rounds in the surrounding area, after doing physical exercises inside the club. As it was winter, most of the children did not swim, although some of them, like Bumba a 12 year old boy, and Ishan an 11 year old

boy, who were active in competitive swimming events, said they sometimes came for 'swimming and 'practice' early in the morning on weekends. The children were allowed to play as they liked after their practice. The first day I went there at four in the afternoon, many of them were playing badminton within the club. A little way off, on another side of the swimming pool, groups of mothers were sitting and drinking tea and talking. As it got dark sometimes fathers joined, back from work, and more usually the parents and the children left for a tuition, except for the very young children or those whose exams were just over. The 10 children who I interviewed there, in 2010, formed the greater number of children among the 19 who said they played. Despite differences in the kinds of schools they attended, or their family backgrounds, they all came from families who took sports and physical exercise seriously. Many of the children, did not live nearby the swimming club and their parents, usually mothers travelled with them and sat for two hours or more as the children practised and played, till they had a tuition or went home. The involvement in sports did not imply that these children compromised their after-school hours on 'studies'. Most of the children at the swimming club, had several tuitions after the swimming club and on weekends. When I visited the swimming club in 2011, 3 of the children I had interviewed, had already stopped coming, and some of the mothers said, it was because they were now in class seven and that it was understood that 'this' implying sports and swimming at the club in the afternoons could not be continued.

Children were typically a little perplexed when they were asked if they had toys or play things. Though it was not really explained, I had the impression that playing with toys or playthings, were associated with playing with dolls and as such perceived as something younger children did. Most of the children said they did not play with playthings. A few mentioned board games, and one girl Dipanwita laughed and said she owned a set of toy utensils and kitchenware but she did not play with them anymore. In Bandel, where the cartoon programme of Beyblade seemed to enjoy some popularity among the children, two of the boys mentioned playing with Beyblades, a version of the spinning top.

6.1.2 Going Out', 'Going Downstairs' and Corridor-Badminton: Accounts of Play and Space

The vocabulary of the children, used in connection with playing, conjures up a hard, clear imagery of spaces. The Bengali phrases used for play in the sense of recreational activity are usually '*khela*' literally meaning play in the same spirit as

the English term, '*kheladhula*' also meaning play, usually in the sense of sport or involving physical action, and '*khelte jaowa*', meaning 'going out to play'. The third was used by all the generations and seemed to have particular significance for the children who I interviewed. Sometimes, when accounts related to play were not mentioned, questions were asked, using one of the terms all of which are colloquial phrases for play in Bengali, the children mostly corrected the question by emphasising the first or the third terms as they saw it applicable for them. This clarification offered by the children fell in line with the spatial distribution of the different leisure hour occupations they mentioned.

'Going to play' is of the same order as the phrase 'going to study'. It evokes a sense of outdoors or moving out of one's home as against staying indoors. However, in a subtle difference from 'going to study', one could go to play without going out of the house, as accounts from a few respondents from the different generations point out, in the case of the child going to the terrace of the house. Such accounts were few, particularly among the children as most of them lived in apartments and as such, access to the terrace was not easy.

Other aspects, such as the nature of play, the playmates and the objects involved in play varied, or were modified according to where one played. Compared to the children in Kolkata, the children in Bandel, mostly the boys had slightly more freedom in going out of the house. There seems to be two main reasons for this. Although an urban region, with its fair share of people and buildings, the neighbourhoods in which the children lived were either secluded from the main streets, or did not have the kind of heavy traffic that made going out alone risky for children. Much of the day time and afternoon traffic in Bandel in the two neighbourhoods Debi Park and Latbagan where I interviewed the children, comprised cycle rickshaws, and small cars, cycles and motorbikes. Buses were few and navigated the main streets.

The second reason was the sense of neighbourhood that existed. Most of the children I interviewed in Bandel, attended one of two missionary English medium schools one for boys and the other for girls. Moreover, most of the families, especially in one of the neighbourhoods Latbagan had been living in the region for three generations, something that was less likely in Kolkata where families living in apartments, had at the earliest moved 10 or 12 years ago when the buildings were new. These created a sense of familiarity and security among parents in Bandel, which formed a background in which children could go out of the house and visit other children in the neighbourhood. The shortage of parks or spaces for unsupervised 'play' in Bandel seemed to be not starkly in contrast to that in Kolkata, if somewhat less dismal, and parents were as concerned about the safety of children when they went out alone. However, in Latbagan, the neighbourhood, where the sense of familiarity was strong, with children being classmates in school, and families knowing each other, 'going out' did not mean

no supervision whatsoever. Rather the adult eye was more relaxed, less watchful, and distributed within a small neighbourhood community.

Shubham, an 11 year old boy from Latbagan, said that the playground near their school was where he played with other boys.

H.S: Do you go out to play?

S: Hm..I go out to play in the morning

H.S: Where do you go to play?

S: I go to school. At 6:30 I go to school and again at 10 I come back after playing.

H.S: In the morning?

S: Mornings..on Sundays.

H.S: And on weekdays when you have school?

S: Then there is a stop on playing.

H.S: And what do you play on weekends?

S: Then cricket, football. Sometimes basketball, badminton. Always in school, that is, at the playground.

H.S: On weekends as well?

S: Hmm..only on weekends. (Interview with Shubham, December 2010).

Another boy from the same school, but from another neighbourhood in Bandel, lives in an apartment in a multistoreyed building. However the street outside is big and busy and playing has been adapted to the context. Abhigyan, who is 11 year old, plays 'downstairs' in the space in front of the building. Some of the other children from Kolkata also talked about playing 'downstairs'. Some of the children, such as Shaswati. or Anand lived in 'housing societies', where several buildings were 'housed' in a compound or campus. Playing inside the 'society' was slightly different from 'going 'downstairs', as the space decided the nature of the game, and children could play games like cricket. Badminton was suitably adapted to the different areas and many of the children who played 'downstairs' or 'in the building' mentioned badminton, the need of just one more playmate making it even suitable, where children did not have too many children of the same age groups in the building.

If the choice of games played were adapted according to where they were played, so were the choice of playmates. Abhijit, an 11 year old boy, lives in a house in Latbagan, where his family has lived for three generations. When asked if he plays, he said he sometimes played badminton on the terrace with his grandfather. Playing with a member of the family was not completely unkommon, especially among the older generations, where a greater number of respondents spent their childhoods in joint families although there were no accounts of children playing with adults in these generations.

Dipanwita, an 11 year old girl from Bandel was a little perplexed of my question about playing, possibly because of the way it was phrased.

H.S: Do you go to play?

D: To play (hesitates).. I have never gone..yes I have, but not like that.

Having an impression that the word 'going' was possibly the cause of her hesitation, I rephrased the question asking her if she plays at home.

D: At home..I play sometimes..alone.

H.S: What do you play alone?

A: I play with a basketball

H.S: And do you have playthings?

A: Yes.

H.S: What kind of things?

D: They..all kind..from toys for kids, the toy kitchenware things, I have everything, badminton racket, basketball, doll.

H.S: Where do you play badminton?

D: Badminton..at home. Just like that.

(The corridor between the front door and the living room is pointed at, as the space where badminton is played).

H.S: Who do you play with?

D: With Ma.

(Interview with Dipanwita, December 2010).

While the accounts about sports and games played, and the spaces they are played in, give a picture of some part of the leisure hours of children, equally telling in the absence of play in the accounts of many of the children about their week, as well as the contexts in which children mention play.

Most of the children who said they played, played mostly in school. Therefore, play in these contexts were not so much part of the children's after-school leisure hours as they were lunch hour activities during the school week. Among children who 'went out' to play, boys were the undoubted majority, as also in general, among the children who talked about playing. Sometimes children from the same family had different patterns regarding play. The difference usually lay along the lines of gender for some families, as well as age. Older children, particularly boys when they were over 14 seemed to have greater sanction for 'going out', and though my interview was confined to younger children, usually between the ages of 10 and 12, sometimes, while visiting the children in their houses or in the neighbourhood, the 14 and 15 year old boys were visible, who were just back from playing, sometimes it seemed from even another neighbourhood.

Two children I interviewed were cousins living in a joint family in a neighbourhood in South Kolkata. There were more children in the household, all of them older boys. The children I interviewed in that family, 11 year old Taniya and her cousin 12 year old Abhishekh, had markedly different relations to playing. Abhishekh said he sometimes went out to play in the neighbourhood and rode his bicycle, Taniya's leisure hours were taken up in her tuitions and other after-school classes. The remaining time she spent watching television or reading. When I asked Taniya if she had a cycle, she replied that despite insisting many times, she did not have her own cycle, although Abhishekh, her brother and another cousin had theirs. This was one context where I had a comparative perspective of gender-related differential attitudes towards children within one family. The line between structure and individual preference has for a long time been a subject of dispute. However, in some contexts the line is less or more fine which might permit less cautious treading around structure-agency questions. The family living in that house comprised of the families of three brothers, who ran a small business. The children in the family went to one of two Bengali medium government schools, one for girls and the other for boys. Taniya's father had a graduation degree and her mother had studied until high school. Economically the family appeared comfortable. When it came to books and schoolwork, the school and tuitions seemed to play the major role stepping in where the adults in the family could not. The background of the family was reflected in some of the practices with regard to the children, such as play, as well as assigned household chores discussed in the next chapter. Not being given a cycle in this context was possibly more than a discrimination of denial of an object. Parents, of other children who were interviewed, seemed to have great anxiety about the security of girls when it came to allowing them to go out of the house, unsupervised. While parents of 10 to 12 year old boys were also anxious, a considerably greater number of boys, compared to girls did 'go out' to play. Whether it was a question of greater permissiveness in the case of boys or of boys' ability to win more freedom in this context, could not be determined, as parents were not interviewed about parenting values or strategies.

Moreover, Isha had much less time to herself compared to Abhishekh, having a greater number of 'cultural' activities and tuitions than her cousin. Although not being allowed out might have influenced the absence of play in her case, her weekly classes and the hours she was actually 'free' also narrowed down options.

The greatest number of children who played some kind of sport were those interviewed at the swimming club. However, some of the children when asked if they played, said they didn't. Paromita, for example, said 'No, I don't get the time to play. I just come here'. The clarification was based on the perspective of some of the children of the swimming club as somewhere they 'practised' and learned swimming like singing or dancing. Most of the children at the swimming club

said whatever they played was at the club, not having time for it otherwise because of tuitions, as well as not having space to play in. Some of the children like Shubhro, Dhriti, Paromita, Darpan and Shubhojit said there were a playground not far from where they lived, but they played just in the club where they were accompanied by their parents.

An unspoken presence in the children's accounts of play was that of 'studies'. The children wove it in consciously or unconsciously when they spoke about playing. Consciously, children would sometimes talk about not having the time for it such as Bumba or Paromita both of whom were regulars at the swimming club. Unconsciously, they would often balance out accounts of play with accounts of 'studying'. For example, as discussed in the previous chapter, Riju talked about how his father played football, and added that he was also 'very good at studies'. Similarly, children, in their accounts of their afterschool hours, in the interviews as well as in the diaries that some of them recorded for a week, almost dutifully balanced out accounts of play or watching television with accounts of 'studying' even when they had no tuitions. Play was, even among children who were active in sport the binary of *porashuna* and spending time on it or performing well in sports almost always called for the need to balance it out if not outdo it in the context of 'studies'.

The tussel between '*porashuna*' and '*kheladhula*' is powerful, even in the imagination if not in practice, for in practice, very rarely do 'studies' take a backseat to playing for a child with the most relaxed of schedules. This tussel is sometimes unspoken, but is more obvious in case of conflicts at home. Ishan, an 11 year old boy from a private English medium school talks about coming to the swimming club for practice.

I:Then after school I again have practice here. From practice I go home. When I'm home I play. When I go home, I study a bit. Then after studying for sometime, I finish dinner at night, watch TV, read story books, then sleep.

H.S: Are there places to play near home?

I: Yes, there are, but I don't go there much. Just..when I have holidays, only then I go.

H.S: Do you ever have arguments with your parents? Something that your parents don't like?

I: (promptly says) Oh yes! (laughs)

H.S: Do you get beaten?

I: (smiles) Yes.

H.S: By whom, your mother or your father?

I: Baba.

H.S: About what?

I: Playing.. usually, if I play too much (Interview with Ishan, December 2009).

I had heard Ishan's mother earlier that afternoon, talking to one of the other mothers at the swimming club about how mischievous and energetic he was, and how they worried that he might not study enough. The undertone in the sentence, 'if I play too much' is more than clear, there cannot be too much of studying, but apart from that, too much of anything else poses a threat to studies and is therefore a cause of vexation to parents. Other children, who talked about having conflicts with parents, often cited diversions from sudies as a reason. The term play was used by some children in this case, in the sense of recreational 'non study' activities, and the ambiguity and the context of usage of this word are significant. 11 year old Rwiti, at first hesitated and said that she was scolded by her mother sometimes because of 'studies'. She explained, that sometimes when she 'played' or 'just did some thing' instead of doing her homework, her mother would constantly tell her to study, and Rwiti would keep putting it off, until her mother was angry and scolded her. There are similar accounts from other children about watching TV, or 'doing something else' when they should be studying that upset parents. 'Play' was sometimes used ambiguously in this context for 'doing something else', to give a general idea of fooling around, and signifying, in a negative way, things that were not 'studying'.

For children who are active in both sports and have tuitions as well, the significance of studies visibly encroach in their 'play' hours. Riju, like the children at the swimming club, 'stayed active in physical activities through 'learning' cricket. There were greater instances of children 'learning' a sport or attending classes such as swimming, or as Akansha learnt badminton, or in the case of Riju, 'cricket', than of playing unsupervised. Although the kinds of classes and sports varied across backgrounds, learning a sport in the form of a class for which a monthly fees was paid and where an expert taught the children, had a general stamp of approval, even among families that were active in sports for two generations or more.

Riju says there is a playground near their house. “I like cricket best..But..that is, from now on I won't have this time to play”. He explains it is because of his new classes in class six and the cricket classes that he joined in addition to another cricket 'coaching'.

> “What I had in class five, I will not have it any more. The reason is, that I am coming here (English tuition where he is interviewed) two days. Monday and Wednesday. So now on Tuesday I go somewhere to learn cricket. That is..that is here near where Bibekananda Park is, just nearby where the Riju sports club is, that is where I learn cricket.I started in class five. So now I go there, that is on Tuesday. That means on Tuesday evenings I have no time. Monday and Wednesdays neither. Mondays I come here..sorry sorry sorry..Monday Monday someone comes to teach me, he teaches me at home. He teaches me maths. So now..Monday I study with him and on Wednesdays and Fridays I come here. Three days. One day cricket..there goes Thursday. Thursdays he comes to teach maths”(Interview with Riju, January 2011).

He says that on weekends he does not have much time either because he goes for cricket classes on Saturday and Sunday to a second cricket camp. When asked if his week was so hectic even in class five, he says, “Yes..no I mean in class five I did not have this. In class five I'd go..you could say I had two days free. And the other five days I did (tuitions and cricket), but I had two days free”.

> „At home we play the Brainvita marble games. Then..mm..there is a quizzing game called Go To the Head of the Class, we have been playing that. That is in the game one person has to ask questions and another person answers. There are many of these class groups, one in language, one in history, like that. There are twelve seats, so for all the questions you get a seat..So we are playing with that.And..sometimes we go downstairs..not downstairs..we go to the playground to play badminton“ (Interview with Riju in January 2011).

The accounts of the children, conjure the picture of the sub province of leisure hours of the children. Within this context there are fine lines dividing and merging sections according to space, backgrounds, gender, and the kinds of sport played. And tinting the domain of afternoons and evening after school, is its other, the province of books and grades and class tests – the domain of studies.

6.1.3 Remembered Afternoons: Accounts of the Older Generations

In the interviews with the older generations, after-school occupations could not be captured in the way it was in the interviews with the children. Narrative snapshots of afternoons after school are as difficult for those who lived their childhoods 30 years ago as they are for those who were children 60 years ago. The problem is not so much of recollection as the focus on a particular period within one's childhood and to recall practices or how time was spent in that period. Respondents of course referred to specific years or phases that were significant, such as reading a particular novel in class six, or the year of moving cities, or of a political incident. But in general, in recounting their childhoods, childhood is sometimes an indeterminate expanse in the accounts of the older generations, sometimes blurring into biographical phases when the respondents were in their early twenties. However, accounts of specific practices such as play, or after-school lessons enable a comparative perspective to some extent. In this section, accounts from the two older generations have been discussed in two subsections, in keeping with the themes of tuitions and play, as significant aspects of children's after-school activities.

The practice of taking tuitions was not completely unknown to the two older generations, although the English term was seldom used, especially among the generation that grew up in the 1950s. However, the contexts and the terminology associated with taking after-school lessons are in contrast to the widespread prac-

tice among contemporary children. Although respondents, especially grandparents often used the phenomenon of 'pressure of studies' or tuitions as an aspect that was starkly different from their own childhood, they usually referred to the increased intensity of the practice rather than the fact that it did not exist in their childhoods.

Respondents rom the '50s generation understood the word 'tuition' or 'tutor' as an expensive affair and something that families like theirs could not afford. However, 6 out of the 11 respondents, one of them a woman, said they took extra lessons in the higher classes in school, before appearing for the school leaving examination. Parimal Das, who grew up in a joint family in North Kolkata says:

> „No, there was no question of taking tuitions. Er..but when I was in class nine, then I had a tutor, for English and Mathematics. Later, in class ten, there was someone for Sanskrit, that was all. Then..during college life I had no tutor. I would do things myself. After that I did not ever need tuitions again“ (Interview with Parimal Das, January 2011).

Again, from a very different family background Shubhash Kumar Mandal talks about going through school without taking tuitions.

> “I did without any kind of..taking any help of a tutor..the time in which I studied, I couldn't even have a tutor. When I went to a tutor it was only when..at the time of the IS..in class ten when I was allowed, then (emphasis), the school teachers so to speak, would you know, teach me. Teach me as in..hm..you know know, till I appeared for the final examinations” (Interview with Shubhash Kumar Mandal, December 2010).

Similarly, Nalini Haldar, the grandmother of one of the children interviewed talks about playing the guitar or reading story books in her spare time. When asked if she took tuitions, she says,

> “No, there weren't things like tuition in our times. We would study at home. Later perhaps a little bit, in nine and ten I mean,a tutor would come, for Economics” (Interview with Nalini Haldar, December 2010).

The practice of tuitions appears to be more widespread in the next generation, though out of the 19 respondents interviewed, 8 said they had tuitions while in school, 6 of them being women. That the practice was more widespread is evident in the accounts of the respondents from the two generations. In the older generation, respondents usually those who did not have any after-school lessons, usually responded by saying it was not something that existed in their time. The significance is not so much in the verity of this statement, but rather in the difference in response among the next generation. Respondents who grew up in the next generation, rarely answered with 'it did not exist in our time'. Those who didn't have tuitions, usually mentioned two main contexts. One was, of not being able to afford it. The other, of not having a tuition, or not having a tuition until class nine or ten was usually accompanied by accounts of the respondent 'being good at studies' and of having sufficient help and supervision in 'studies' in the family.

The relation between taking tuition and cultural capital is noticeable in the accounts of the two generations, although it is by no means a straightforward one. Tathagata Kumar Upadhyay grew up in the 1980s in South Kolkata. His father had a grocery shop and died when he was in school. When asked about his after-school hours he talks about playing most of the time and helping with running the shop. He explains not taking tuitions in terms of his family background.

> TKU:In my, in our lives, we didn't have opportunities like that. And the fact is, see, Baba did not have an education
>
> H.S: Hm.
>
> TKU: Therefore, we did not have much of guidance, that we should study this, or study that..Nowadays at this age, now we tell children, we see what they have a nack for, we make them follow it.
>
> H.S: Hm. Did you have tuitions or something like that?
>
> TKU: Tuition..we had very little of that. Because we did not have money, right, so we were not sent for tuition. That is..we did not have problems with food or so. We never had trouble with having food.
>
> (Interview with Tathagata Kumar Upadhyay, January 2011).

Some of the respondents said that they studied themselves or were supervised by their parents and most of the respondents, like respondents from the older generation said they did not have tuitions until class nine or ten, or until class 12. The term tuition was also sometimes interpreted differently by the respondents. One respondent distinguished between taking tuitions and having a 'private tutor', saying she had a private tutor in class nine and ten (Interview with Ketaki Sengupta, February 2011).

The accounts of the older generations about their after-school activities, especially when looked at alongside the accounts of contemporary children are significant in three main aspects the relation of certain practices to cultural capital of families, the vocabulary and narrative styles used, and the sentiments associated with certain practices. All three reflect aspects of the ethos of education of the *Bhadralok* culture in West Bengal, that forms the historical background of certain practices that dominate the lives of children from middle class Bengali families.

In both the generations, particularly in the older generation, the respondents who said they had extra school lessons in school subjects as children, were usually from families with higher cultural capital than most of the other respondents. Although economic capital was significant to the extent that one's family had to be able to afford tuitions for the children, being well to do or not alone did not determine it. In the generation which grew up in the 1950s, 5 out of the 6 respondents who had tuitions came from families of service sector professionals, mostly engineers, or owned family businesses. Shubhash Kumar Mandal, was the only respondent who grew up in rural Bengal and came from an agricultural

background. The background of the other 5 respondents reflects higher cultural capital in their accounts about their families. The mothers of all these 5 respondents had completed at least high school and even college, in itself a high marker of cultural capital for women in the 1930s. In other accounts, such as about books the respondents said they read as children, or about prevalent practices of protecting children from adult life, the cultural capital of the families of these respondents are reflected. Parimal Das, one of the respondents from this generation, came from a family that ran a business. However, he mentions that his father worked as a journalist at the start of his career and that his family was inclined towards 'studies' (mentioned in the previous chapter). Similarly, other respondents in this generation, such as Birendra Ghosh, whose father ran a business with his uncles and Nalini Haldar, whose father worked in a British owned tyre manufacting company, gave accounts where parents were educationally qualified and intent on cultivating their children's educational and cultural potential. The relationship between cultural capital and taking tuitions was also similar for the next generation. However, taking extra lessons had become more widespread in the 1980s and changes in the educational system meant that certain subjects emerged as more significant, or perhaps more difficult for students, particularly for the board examinations. The responses from the two generations show that English and Mathematics were unanimously the two most significant subjects in which extra lessons were taken. The accounts of the respondents from the next generation show that taking lessons outside of school was an acknowledged requirement if children were to keep up or improve performance in the board examinations. Those who had parents to supervise them, had tuitions for other subjects.

Two things are of note in these accounts. First, is the narrative style which is similar in all three accounts. Only one of the respondents from this generation, Keshab Chakrabarty, aged 69 said he had tuitions from the age of 12. The other three respondents evoked a style of denying the practice of taking extra lessons and then affirming that they did in fact have a tutor in their school years. The manner and the phrases used in their denial are significant. The three respondents said they had no tuitions to accentuate the difference in practice with the contemporary generations of children. The terms used by them, and by some of the respondents of the '80s generation were usually different from the terms 'tuition','*porte jaowa*' (going to study) or 'Aunty' the terms used by children and the older generations to refer to the contemporary practice, where younger children study in groups or individually with a tuition teacher, at home or at the teacher's home or at a tutorial where more than one teacher and a greater number of students are involved and where tests and evaluations are common, similar to the schools. The older generations used the English word 'tutor', as well as the more general Bengali phrase of 'having someone' for some subjects, a term used by the '80s generation as well. In denying that they did not have 'tuitions' but 'had

someone' or a 'tutor' in class nine and ten, the emphasis on the school year is significant. Taking tuition before the board examinations comes across as 'natural' in the accounts of this generation, distinguishing the practice from what is sometimes looked on as a partially 'unnecessary' and hyper practice among contemporary children in class five and six.

6.1.4 Accounts of Play in the Older Generations

As the narratives about play and recreation unfold through the three generations, the spatial imagery of the leisure hours of children of the urban Bengali middle class, contracts and changes in the accounts. However, the changes are not necessarily linear, progressively moving towards more domesticated childhoods, uniformly for all children within the Bengali middle class. Rather, in this section I have argued that it is far from a simplistic process where children in the previous generations were generally less fettered and had greater 'freedom', spatial and temporal, compared to the younger generations. The accounts of the older generations about their after-school hours no doubt differ from that of the contemporary children. Beyblades did not exist in the 1950s, and rarely does one grow up in an urban middle class family today in a joint family with 6 or more children of the same age group. However, patterns in the accounts of the older generations make the cultural context of the urban Bengali middle class more vivid in a way that enriches the perception about leisure among contemporary children in urban West Bengal.

The accounts of the older generations paint a colourful picture of the world of leisure of children decades ago. The act of looking back and narrating about afternoons spent long ago might automatically lend a richness of story telling quality to the accounts, that is different from the accounts of the children, talking about the week gone by, standing knee-deep in their childhoods instead of telling a story about it afterwards. Instead of attempting to bridge this gap between the two kinds of accounts, rather than seeing it as a discrepancy that needs bridging, the two kinds of accounts are seen as qualitatively different, and as such used inasmuch as one can use them, to understand aspects of children's everyday lives across the three generations.

The previous section shows that leisure hours in childhood were comparatively unhindered by as many regulated 'lessons' or 'tuitions' for the respondents from the '50s generation, and to some extent the '80s generation as well in con-

trast to that of the contemporary children. Most of the respondents, when asked if they remembered what they did around the age of 10-12 apart from going to school, enumerate different forms of recreation, play being one of them. Many of the respondents, women as well as men, talked about reading, listening to music, and spending time with other children in the house. A common response, particularly for the '50s generation was, that they did not have to go out to seek recreation, living in a house full of cousins and other children of the joint family. 7 out of 11 respondents from this generation, and 6 out of the 19 respondents from the '80s generation spent their childhood in a joint family. Among those who did not live with a joint family, particularly in the first generation, the number of siblings ranged from 2-4, though the age differences between some of the children within a family were sometimes as much as 15 years. However, many of the respondents from this generation emphasized that there was no dearth of playmates in one's leisure hours and the convenience of having them in the house, made going out of the house unnecessary for some. Some respondents talked about playing in the *para* or neighbourhood, though this did not require venturing far from the house.

Particular games feature in the accounts of the older generations, no mention of which are found among the contemporary generation. Again, certain sports that the children recount as popular, are present in the accounts of the older generation, without seeming to have the status enjoyed by them among children today. Among the '50s generation, courtyard games find mention, several times. Games such as *Ekka Dokka*, *Golla Chhut*, and *Kabaddi* were played by girls, although one respondent pointed out, that even boys in her childhood played a variation of *Kabaddi*, though it was known by a different name. Chandramallika Chakrabarty, a 72 year old respondent enumerates all the games played by girls in the neighbourhood.

H.S: What did you do in the time outside of school? When you did not have school?

C.C: Yes, yes..I would do my school work, homework and things, and then..if the friends in the neighbourhood were there, we would all sometimes play Ekka Dokka.

H.S: Were these girls or boys?

C.C: Girls, girls. Not boys..not boys. There were no boys. That thing did not exist then.

H.S: And what else did you play ?

C.C: Well..you know what else we played? It was called Golla Chhut..well you made a circle and someone would stand there..

H.S: Hm?

C.C: There would be two groups there, two parties. They would try to run to a corner..and again the other party had its turn..one would be out first. This was called Golla Chhut. You had run out of the circle. Another was the game Ha du du du..A border was drawn and there were two teams on either side. You had to run and chant ha du du and try to catch other players from the other

team. And if they capture me and I run out of breath, then I would be out of the game..which was later Kabaddi kabaddi...

(Interview with Chandramallika Chakrabarty, January 2011).

Minati Dhar, 64 also mentions playing *Ekka Dokka* in the courtyard of their house. Among men, there is no mention at all of *Ekka Dokka*, although one of the respondents, Shubhash Kumar Mandal says he played *Ha du du* in his native village in the South 24 Parganas. Historians of sport have pointed out the involvement of girls and women in Bengal in *Kabadi,* post-Independence, a variation of the aforementioned games, that is now a national sport (Basu 2009)

The accounts of respondents saying they did not or 'could not' play much are several, in both generations, particularly among women. This reflects a pattern where family background is related to practices of leisure, especially play. For example Pranati Sengupta grew up in a politically inclined business owning joint family in South Kolkata. Both her parents had completed their Masters' degree from Dhaka University and the children as well the adults in the family were enthusiastic about cultural activities, particularly reading and listening to music. Purabi talks most about listening to music, when she is asked about her leisure hours as a child. She says that there was an old gramophone and a few records at home and she and her sister would listen to them often. The children, however did not learn music. She had many friends in the neighbourhood. She uses the collective pronoun 'we', indicating perhaps that the friends were friends of the children of the house, not just of one child. Like Chandra and Minu she mentions courtyard games. She played games like Chu-kit-kit[51], Badminton, but always at home. She says that she was not enthusiastic about sports and they did not 'have' to go out, there were as it was enough people at home.

While having enough people at home rendered it unnecessary in the perspective of some respondents, even respondents who grew up in small families with no children around, sometimes speak of leisure activities other than playing which would require them to 'go out'. The board game *Ludo* was mentioned by some of the women respondents, and was particularly mentioned in contexts where respondents said that they played nothing else but *Ludo*.

There appears to be a sharper line of difference between games played by girls and boys in the older generations. Men from both the generations, talked about playing football and cricket, which did not find any mention in the accounts of the female respondent about leisure activities. In the '50s generation none of the respondents mentioned cricket, although football was played by two of the respondents. More than playing in the sense of an active sports or a game with rules, most of the respondents talk about having played in a more ambigu-

51 Chu-kit-kit is a game involving hopping on one leg across clearly demarcated areas of a 'court' drawn on the ground with chalk. Popular among younger children, it could be played on the streets but as well in a parking space or a closed space.

ous sense, particularly when they played alone. The terrace appears more than once, among male and female respondents in this account of playing. Parimal Das, a 69 year old respondent, who grew up in the more traditional part of North Kolkata, talks about his house in the context of leisure activities.

> „Eh..the house we lived in..that was a brick house..there were four rooms, a courtyard, and a huge terrace. The terrace was my greatest companion in my childhood. I would be there alone..when I didn't have brothers and sisters, I would play there, fight with shadows..because then I was hearing the stories of the *Mahabharata*, and all the battles from Baba Ma. Yes, so that is what I would do. Then, when I started reading Bibhutibhushan, then like Apu I would... I would imagine that I was Apu. I would imitate his ways“ (Interview with Parimal Das, January 2011).

The reference to Apu is an interesting one. A character in the novel of Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay, published in 1929, the boy character Apu spent much of his time roaming the countryside of Bengal, enacting battles he heard stories about from the epic *Mahabharata*. The character stirred the Bengali imagination in the twentieth century and despite being located in the context of rural Bengal, Apu epitomized the *Bhadralok* ideal of boyhood, and the wide eyed innocence of the eight year old, became emblematic of all that the urban Bengali middle class believed desirable in an ideal childhood – innocence, scholarly promise, and the protection of his mother and elder sister – aspects of which they sometimes, fondly imputed to their own childhoods, nostalgically merging memory with fiction.

Parimal Das also talks about playing hockey and football sometimes, but emphasizes that there was not much of playing sports outside as a child. He emphasizes, that cricket did not have much currency although afterwards, he had sometimes played cricket :“Play..there was not much of playing games and all that. But..I'd play hockey. I'd play quite well..So in my childhood I played in this playground. There was a big open space just next to our house. We would play there. I was centre forward. I played quite well then”. Similarly Birendra Ghosh, a 63 year old respondent talks about playing football sometimes in a playground near the house.

Cricket finds greater mention among the '80s generation, although football is mentioned by more respondents. The spaces in which children played in this direction, shift to some extent, from the accounts of the respondents. Sudhanya Sengupta, a 42 year old respondent talks about playing cricket and football in his leisure hours, but unlike the previous generation who mostly said they played in the '*maath*' or playing space, he played with friends in their 'housing complex'. While he is one of the few respondents who mention living in an apartment or a 'housing complex' from his generation, there are other accounts of respondents all of them male, playing in clubs and spaces other than the '*maath*'. It is also telling in itself how leisure, especially play and sports were adjusted and influenced to some extent by spatial changes in urban West Bengal. While the re-

spondents who grew up in Bandel in the 1980s, talked often about having a choice of playgrounds near their vicinity, in Kolkata the playgrounds were beginning to disappear in some parts of the city and in some neighbourhoods. What is also significant, is that most of the playgrounds or '*maaths*' respondents mentioned playing in, were often plots of land where houses had not yet been erected. In the accounts of the children, there are very few mentions of playing in such a space or of having a '*maath*' nearby.

Just like the children at the swimming club were a divergence from many of their contemporaries in the extent of their accommodation of sport in their everyday lives, the parents of some of these children at the swimming club also stood out in their accounts of leisure activities. All 7 of the respondents who were parents of children at the swimming club talked about the primacy of physical exercise and sport. Women and men emphasized that playing was a significant part of their childhoods and football and cricket feature were sports often played by the boys in the neighbourhood, sometimes even on the streets, while the women mention running games and swimming. Several of the respondents from this group, mentioned the role of the camps of the National Cadet Corps (NCC), the Indian Military training organization that often organized camps for school and college children. Two of the women mentioned *Manimala*, children's camps organized by the Communist Party of West Bengal, that was in circulation in the 1980s. While 2 of the respondents from this group Prasanta Dutta 46 and his wife Mita Dutta 41, said reading story books and children's magazines also formed a significant aspect of their leisure time as children, the other respondents spoke of after-school hours immersed in playing outside, with exceptions when schoolwork had to be done.

This is what set some of these accounts apart from those from the previous generation, as well as their contemporaries. The presence of play in the accounts of the respondents at the swimming club is not surprising in itself. What is remarkable is the relationship between play, other leisure activities and 'studies' narrated by these respondents as compared to the other respondents. Apart from the 7 respondents, others from the 1980s generation spoke mostly about staying indoors and reading or playing board games or courtyard games. Men who went 'out' to play cricket or football did so very near the house, as Sudhanya Sengupta says, within the housing complex. Rather reading is mentioned more often by the other 12 respondents, both men and women from this generation, or playing by oneself. Also, even if taking tuitions were not as much in practice among children as for contemporary children, the female respondents outside the swimming club narrated afternoons being taken up in singing practice and dance lessons, rather than 'going out ' to play in the neighbourhood. Most of these practices, reading, singing were and to a great extent are encouraged by parents, particularly in families with higher cultural capital, where such activities, even if they

conflict with 'studies' to some extent, are believed to enrich the children's education and sometimes benefit their 'studies' as well. In contrast, playing, particularly going out of the house and playing poses a double threat of the child being alone unsupervized, and of a distinct threat of children's 'studies' being compromised. This is most clearly reflected in the accounts of children like Ishan who say they get into conflict with parents for 'playing too much'.

In contrast the family backgrounds, of the respondents from the swimming club are distinctly different from the other respondents. While many of the respondents in general, said their families ran a small business, many of them from such families also talked about their parents particularly of note, even their mothers having a graduate or a postgraduate degree. Apart from that, practices within the family, of introducing children to literature and being involved in the nationalistic movement are all generally indicators of cultural capital. Of course despite the presence of some of these markers, accounts of different families differ in the shades of cultural and economic capital they had, differing according to family history etc. Most of the 7 respondents from the swimming club, describe their families as dealing in fish (Madhuri De 40 and Parikshit De 45), owning a grocery store (Tarun Kumar Upadhaya 39), being a gazetted officer (Shubhra Chatterjee 48) and having a job with the Indian Railways (Prasanta Dutta 46). Apart from Prasanta Dutta, most of the other respondents parents' were not as educated as those of the other respondents. With the exception of Prasanta Dutta, the fathers of some of the respondents were graduates and some had completed high school. Most of the respondents were not sure if their mothers had completed school. From the accounts of the respondents, their family seem to be on the side of the lower middle class, although apart from one respondent whose father died when he was a teenager, no one spoke of economic hardships. Rather, Madhuri De explains the influence of their family in their locality saying, 'Our house was the highest in our area'. Even Tathagata Kumar Upadhyay, whose family struggled economically, after the death of his father, mentions the shortage of money when it came to taking extra lessons, adding that otherwise the family never had any problem of food. Noticeable here, is the enthusiasm described of their parents in encouraging them to take up a sport as other parents encourage children to read, sing etc. For example, Madhuri De, who grew up in a relatively comfortable family of fish dealers, talks about her family's interest in sports:

> “The time outside school..when I came back, I would do exactly this (referring to her daughter 9 year old Dhriti who learns swimming). I would swim when I was a child. When I was in class two, my younger brother joined the swimming club a day before. Now Baba took me there to show me to see my brother at swimming. So he took me to College Square..so when I went there I liked it very much and I joined swimming that same day. So just like Mom (Dhriti's nickname) I swam at Advance. Till class nine. When I started I was in two, so I was ten..no, not ten, six or seven years old. I swam at Advance till class nine, Then I left swimming. Because well..then because I was in class nine I left swimming”(Interview with Madhuri De, January 2011).

When asked if she played anything apart from swimming she says:

> "Yes, yes. Well I would swim, and like they do here (at the swimming club) PT (Physical Training) and those things I would do them. On holidays everyone from the neighbourhood would come and there would be playing on the terrace" (Interview with Madhuri De, January 2011).

Similarly, other female respondents from this group talked about their parents encouraging them in a chosen sport, usually swimming. Also significant is that the only account of a respondent talking about being more involved in playing outside than in 'studies' comes from this group. Parikshit De, husband of Madhuri De also grew up in a family of fish dealers in central Kolkata and when he describes his school, he says that the school encouraged a lot of sport, adding almost in a pattern, that the school was also 'good in studies'.

> P.D: I always think a lot..that I loved sports..and school had this infrastructure, games teacher. Depending on who loved which sport, teams were made, and they would go out to play
>
> H.S: Hm
>
> P.D: And..in the area of 'studies' our school was also good
>
> H.S: And what did you do outside of school?
>
> P.D.:I would go to the club. Did gymnastics, at the club. In a disciplined way.
>
> H.S: Was it in the neighborhood?
>
> P.D.: No no..it was near Eastern Rail
>
> H.S: ok.
>
> P.D.: There where the railway quarters are. That is it had an auditorium. I would practice there. When I was younger I would do gymnastics. Then afterwards simultaneously I played cricket..subjunior, even football, I played..district. I would swim as well.
>
> H.S: Hm.
>
> P.D.: That is playing was all..I loved it much more than studies (Interview with Parikshit De, January 2011).

These accounts exist side by side with accounts from respondents who said playing had very little role in their childhood. While 'going out' to play, sometimes even in another neighborhood was common to some respondents, particularly men, the terrace or the courtyard were the spaces others, particularly women remember having spent their childhoods in. However across generation and gender the pattern of more protected, spatially bound in leisure activities belongs to families with higher cultural capital, typically families where women were more educated than in other cases and where despite the family occupation there were teachers and professors within the joint or extended family exerting some of their influence. And this protection, and cultivation of leisure hours in something other than rough sports, was not restricted to the female respondents who were interviewed, but rather seemed a general pattern among children. An extreme example is that of Timir Sengupta, a 70 year old man whose father and

uncle were teachers and professors. The family was education centric and politically inclined. The background is reflected in his account of his leisure activities. Timir Sengupta was brought up by his three sisters and says that he wasn't allowed to go out of the house, and as such, spent most of his time reading, as a boy. As he was not allowed outside without adult supervision and had no friends, chess took up some of his leisure time. He played with an uncle, a cousin of his father's and it soon became an addiction."Inside the house I would play chess. Two gentlemen from the house next to us would come to play. There was an addiction in playing chess. That one thing that was likeable. *Baba* learnt chess from one of *Baba's* cousins.....he initiated me in chess".

Another incident he narrates is about how he went to play football on the sly when he was twelve years old. His first and only game of football.

> 'Once in my life..Dada secretly took me watch a game. He wrapped my trousers and my shirt in paper and threw it..Chhoto Didi (Youngest of his sisters)would not hear of it.".He played football on that occasion and hurt his foot. The muddy clothes wrapped in paper were not smuggled inside and were duly discovered by his sister and his deception was exposed." As one would imagine..she simply started screaming as soon as she saw it. She used the paper package as proof, then for seven days I was confined to the house..my one game in life" (Interview with Timir Sengupta, February 2011).

The accounts of the older generations when looked at alongside those of the children, reflect more than an increasing difference with the generations, an intertwining of patterns that link space with leisure, family background with permissiveness towards some pursuits, and gender with space. The changing architectural and spatial landscape s of the city is one such pattern. The disappearance of the '*maath*', the apartment buildings emerging in parts of the city, the disappearance of the courtyard or the bylane where girls draw out 'courts' with coloured chalk or pieces of bricks for a hopping game are one aspect of this change. The connection between class and space is another (Muchow, Muchow & Zinnecker 1998). While many of the children who were interviewed lived in apartments, 'housing societies' are typically still some of the more expensive residences in Kolkata, usually inhabited by those working for the corporate sector. The mistrust of the neighborhood is assuaged to some extent and replaced spatially in such housing societies, at least for children by the 'campus' the enclosed space where all the buildings are, occasionally with a small play area for children. Only three children interviewed lived in such housing societies, all of whom talked about playing sometimes in the 'compound' or 'campus'. The relationship between leisure, particularly play, space and family background is therefore layered, as the accounts from the three generations show. It is significant as the ideal of pedagogized childhood that influences leisure activities of children in urban West Bengal, emerges from a context that was marked in the classed nature of its perception of some practices, particularly physical culture such as sports. These aspects have been discussed in the following section.

6.2 Class, Space and Culture in the Accounts of Leisure Activities of Children

> "Indeed there seems to have been a tension throughout the history of the physical culture movement between the ideal of the gentleman amateur and the temptation of professionalism. The Hindu Mela group right from the start wanted the director of each new akhra to be "a man of education and a gentleman" as well as a professional athlete; but the two qualifications seem to have been felt as in some way incompatible.“
>
> John Rosselli, *The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in nineteenth century Bengal*, 1980

> "The roots of Bengal cricket went deep – to help permeate ideas of self-respect, manliness, and self- worth among the natives.Educated men from middle-class backgrounds promoted cricket, trying to legitimise physical activity in Bengali society and win respect for the players. The sport emerged as the mirror wherein an Indian/Bengali identiy started to reassess itself, and in that sense Bengal cricket was certainly part of a nationalist enterprise“
>
> -Boria Majumdar, *A Case of Indian Exceptionalism. Bengali Middle-class Patronage of Sport in Colonial Bengal*, 2010

The relationship of the *Bhadralok* to physical culture during the colonial period, earned it the image of 'effeteness' that became as much a part of the self-image of this section, as well as a humorous prototype to other communities in India. That the *Bhadralok* was not pleased with this image and occasionally tried to shake it off in the form of fiction as discussed in the previous chapter, and patronage of some forms of physical culture, such as wrestling, did not change its relationship towards physical culture, much of which was rooted in the class character of the *Bhadralok*. The disinterest in particular forms of physical culture stemmed from disdain for and association of these forms of sport with 'helpers and servers,lathiyals, door-keepers, low-caste men and Muslims', people who were not, in Rosselli words, 'acknowledged as full members of Bengali society' (Rosselli 1980,pp.148) In the earlier part of the twentieth century the relationship of the educated Bengali elite to sport was more nuanced. Cricket, introduced in the Bombay and Bengal Presidencies in the nineteenth century by the Raj, as well as football both gained renewed popularity, particularly in the context of the nationalist movement.

Historians have argued that although cricket was initially an elite sport, played in the princely states and among the aristocratic sections, in Bengal, in the twentieth century, the popularity of cricket was not so much a case of imitation, as it was an attempt to challenge the British on their own turf. Similar arguments have also been made about football as reflecting a nationalist spirit. However, cricket became less the reserve of the elite, especially after winning the World

Cup in cricket for the first time in 1983, although it's association with the upper sections of society continues (Majumdar 2009). Versions of street cricket, played by young people within the neighbourhood became more and more common. Although the relationship of the Bengali middle class to football was also well known in the twentieth century, almost dividing all educated Bengali men into supportors of one of the two football clubs of *Mohun Bagan* and *East Bengal*, in the hierarchy of games, football came to be more associated with the lower sections of the middle class from the 1980s, whereas cricket took the place as the sport for the educated Bengali middle class. What perhaps lent further intimacy to the relationship, was the rise of the cricketer Sourav Ganguly in the last decade. Ganguly's background, a middle class business owning Bengali family from South Kolkata, as well as his success in the national and international arena, took cricket in urban West Bengal to a new position. The general perception, that middle class Bengalis had flair for a particular sport, combined with the history of cricket in the region made cricket a more commonly played sport within the middle class. While physical culture in general, retained their class associations for the Bengali middle class, and was not practised, cricket, with its mixture of class character, promise of achievable success and historical background earned a place among the urban Bengali middle-class in a way that it was the perfect solution to the tension between the educated gentleman and the athlete that Rosselli says haunted the *Bhadralok*.

Some of these aspects of the *Bhadralok* legacy are identifiable in the childhood accounts of leisure. This does not signify a general disdain for sports or a lack of flair for sports among the educated Bengali middle class across the three generations, rather the accounts point to patterns in a different direction. 'Flair', and even inherent dislike or disdain for a practice are rarely intrinsic to a culture or a community and appearances of either are almost always connected to historical and cultural processes. The focus on children's accounts of their leisure activities or the childhood accounts of older generations, despite their differences in character, form a curious context which poses a problem to and also enriches an approach that focuses on cultural capital and economic capital. This aspect, of basing research on children, is related to the structure agency dichotomy that is often raised in childhood research.

Children, including respondents from the older generation talking about their childhood, are not often the active owners of economic and cultural capital because of the nature of the autonomy of their position. To some extent, practices in childhood are chosen for them, sometimes in a process of what families consider an 'investment', and sometimes owing to the limitations of means of families. The practices and values related to childhood that influence the everyday lives of a child, are therefore, influenced to a great extent by the cultural and economic capital of her or his family. However, a research that bases itself on ac-

counts about children, with preliminary information about parents based on occupation and educational degree and sometimes income, has to rely greatly on the children or the respondents' accounts of family values, practices, residence etc. to form an idea of the backgrounds of the children, or the respondent as a child. Again, owing to an essence of a child's existence, submission or sometimes unquestioned obedience, does not go without some form of protest, or reflection on a sense of unspoken conflict, or some richness of detail that offers an insight into the background of a family. The numerous accounts of children staying indoors or reading more than playing, or going to great lengths for swimming classes, thus paint in rich colours the entire universe that emerges from the intersection of 'being allowed' and 'obeying' or protesting, accepting with delight or doing with misgiving, between 'structure' and 'agency' of childhood, that might not explain in crisp determinate answers the relations between class and cultural capital, but which by highlighting particular patterns show how class forms a significant context in which childhood is experienced as well as enacted.

Though differently articulated in and with differing emphases, childhood researchers in the last two decades, have pointed out a tendency among the middle classes in different social-cultural contexts to engage their children in a number of 'enrichment activities and an increased emphasis on education (Donner 2008; Naftali 2010;Vincent & Ball 2007; Zinnecker 2000), a tendency that is manifest in the increasing number of after-school lessons, the emergence of 'leisure careers' (Zinnecker 2000) and as a consequence, the gradual disapperance of 'spontaneous' play from the lives of children coming from urban middle class, lower middle-class backgrounds.These studies do not necessarily support the 'hurried child' thesis, – few really engage in this debate, their focus being more on the influence of class background, habitus and cultural capital on children's education. At the same time, all the studies indicate some patterns within the middle class, with respect to child-rearing or stances on childhood, that have, judging by writings in the last few years become comparable if not common to middle classes in western and non-western contexts. Against this background, the mood of contemporary childhood among the urban Bengali middle class in Kolkata, appears to be in keeping with these more widespread trends of middle class childhood. However, the particular practice and values within such leisure activities derive meaning from the specific historical cultural context of the childhood.

The relation between leisure, class and space are also significant in the accounts of the three generations and they vary within and between generations and gender. Some aspects of the relation between space and class have been discussed in the previous section in terms of class background as closely linked to the kind of residence and the relationship in turn, to the leisure activities for children. However, space is connected to leisure activities in another aspect.

In the accounts of the three generations, the term that is often used in the context of playing or of 'going out to play' is that of the *para*. Most of the respondents who used the term play or played in their childhood mention the *para* as the context of play and playmates when leisure hours were not spent at home or in a supervised space. The Bengali word, roughly translated means neighborhood, though in the everyday lives of the Bengali middle class, it implied a close community living in the neighborhood and connoted a sense of security, activities organized together by those living in the *para* and sometimes even a club and a playground where children and adolescents could be without adult supervision. The spatial aspect is what has significantly changed within urban West Bengal, particularly in the last twenty years and the narratives of the children about their evening spent away from home in a tuition or a cricket academy in a neighborhood far from home is an example of how the middle class culture was affected by this transformation to some extent. However, the incidence of tuition in afternoons for children of class five and six cannot be solely attributed to spatial change. While the disappearance of a sense of having a safe neighborhood is connected to the everyday lives of children, family arrangements and family structures are also significant. In the older generations, some respondents, especially women, said they did not go out to play much even if there was a *para*. For those who lived in a joint family, with a number of children living together, the respondents said they felt no need for outside playmates. “We had a sort of a club inside our house” says one respondent who grew up in the 1950s (Interview with Pranati Sengupta in February 2011).

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The incidence of private tuition has become widespread all over India to the extent of official condemnation of the practice by the Government and appointment of commissions by governmental and non-governmental organizations to investigate the causes of private tuition. In West Bengal, the proportion of schoolgoing children in rural areas taking private tuition has been found to be higher compared to most states in India by studies like the Annual Survey of Education Report in 2010. The reasons mostly attributed to this high incidence are poor teaching quality in the school, and lower teacher to student ratio in government schools. Some have even pointed to the difficulty of such a stance, pointing to studies by other organizations such as the Pratichi Trust which shows a higher proportion of students taking tuition even in private schools in West Bengal (Ghosh 2009).

Many of the children interviewed in this research attend private schools and although their context are different from the contexts of the studies on private tuition in rural West Bengal, the incidence of tuition among the children seem general, irrespective of the kind of school and the teaching quality. It has not been the aim of this chapter to look for explanations for the practice, rather, the subject of private tuition came up by itself when the children talked about their week, and the discussion of tuition in this chapter seemed imperative in this background, where many of the interviewed children narrated their week in terms of the after-school classes they had.

Based on the interviews with the children, one had the impression that after-school lessons for children sometimes served more than the purpose of educational and cultural backup for the middle classes. At the swimming club for example, as the children played and practised, the parents, mostly mothers had a space to meet and talk and exchange information. On many occasions the conversation between different groups of mothers positioning themselves around the swimming pool, was on intimate themes. Other times, the conversations also focused on the education of their children and a sort of information base pooling in on accounts by mothers of children from different schools had formed on examination questions, relevance of some subjects, information about tuitions etc. the kind of network and information that Vincent and Ball call 'hot knowledge' in the context of middle class mothers (Ball & Vincent 1998).

The after-school lessons sometimes provided a similar space for the children, who otherwise had no other social base with children outside of school. Sometimes the children were asked if they liked going to tuition and many of them claimed that although on particular days it was stressful, they did not usually mind it, and some even said they liked it. In ethnographic research, one always runs into the danger of taking respondents too seriously, and in research based on

10-12 year old children, some amount of caution is perhaps sensible. However, stray accounts of the children, having friends at tuition, joking about in tuition sometimes with the other gender a novelty in itself, R. L. Stein books being swapped (Interview with Mridula in December 2009) point to a different space of social interaction, particularly among children for whom 'going out' or meeting playmates is not a part of after-school hours.

The relationship between leisure and cultural capital of the family is many layered. In the older generations, having a private tutor sometimes signals the importance given by the family to education, and the necessity felt to spend money on extra lessons. Among the children, the incident of tuition is far more widespread, however nuanced differences in practice are seen corresponding to the backgrounds of the families. Although most of the children had tuition, the children who had no tuition or a more flexible week with time for other leisure activities than studying, were invariably from families where mothers were educated, often beyond graduation, and where the family divided the school subjects between them to supervise the child's studies. Shubham, an 11 year old boy who took no tuition, said his grandfather went over with his lessons with him. Shaswati, an 11 year old girl recorded in her diary that her father, who was an engineer, supervised her in mathematics on weekends along with some neighbouring children. Another pattern was that children who had several tuitions and after-school classes in the afternoons, were taken by their mothers from one place to another, and sometimes, when the intermediate classes were far away from their homes, mothers would often spend the time waiting for the children, either on the doorsteps of the house, or on the streets, till they had to go home. Working mothers, typically had less time for this and accordingly, unless there was someone to take children to their classes and pick them up – which was possible more for joint families – children whose both parents were working had fewer after-school engagements and less hectic weeks. The confidence to deal with children's schoolwork at home, the context of working women, as well as pedagogic principles where some families do not want to overburden their children with 'studies' – are all intrinsically linked to cultural capital and economic capital particularly when the residence and school attended by the children are taken into account.

In the context of physical culture, the relationship to class and cultural capital is equally significant. As discussed in the previous sections, physical culture among the educated Bengali elite in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, was usually associated with the lower castes, or working class migrants from outside Bengal, or the uneducated poor – groups that were not part of the *Bhadralok.*

In the twentieth century, against a specific historical-political backdrop certain forms of sports gained currency and new meanings and were accepted by the

educated Bengali middle class. While cricket is not so much the elite sports it was during colonial rule, it is one sport which gained acceptance among the educated urban Bengali middle class, while football, despite its popularity even in post- Independence Bengal, became more and more associated with the lower middle class and the lower classes.
Given the focus of the research, it is impossible to comment on over parental values and strategies. However, where interviews with parents of children were done, about their childhoods, one has an insight into some practices of leisure for children. At the swimming club where all the 7 respondents from the '80s generation talk about being active in sports in their childhood, the accounts of their family background points in general to a section of the lower middle class with low cultural and economic capital. The association of these families with sports like football is therefore significant in its correspondence with the social location of these families. When this generation came into adulthood, sports played a significant role in some of their careers. Sometimes the children or the parents themselves talked about having participated in sporting events and winning in their young adulthood.

One of the respondents mentioned that her husband got his job in the State Government because of his sporting abilities. The recruitment of employees in government jobs based on the 'sports quota' is a general practice in West Bengal. This practice, as well as the accounts of some of the respondents reflect a perspective where sport is also an investment for some social sections who in this generation through occupational and educational mobility are now part of the educated Bengali middle class. Sport in this sense is for some social sections a capital as 'studies' are considered among many sections of the Bengali middle class.

The pedagogical province of childhood as a cultural moratorium that Zinnecker talks about, can be easily identified in urban West Bengal within the ethos of education, in the widespread practice of taking after-school lessons, in the increasing protection of children. Although it makes some aspects of childhood increasing similar across different social sections, it far from leads to a process of standardization of childhood that the concept of *Bildungsmoratorium* apprehended. Rather, in an axiom of the dynamics of class and culture and cultural and economic capital, while the province of 'studies' creates a common space for the everyday lives of children from different backgrounds, the finer lines of distinction between different groups within the urban Bengali middle class are reflected in the leisure practices of children – the subprovince of the pedagogical moratorium.

7. Doraemon to Dance Lessons: Children, Leisure and Cultural Heritage

The practices and values connected to clothing and household chores show strands which set girls and boys apart within the domain of midle class childhoods in the three generations. The aspects discussed in the previous sections show children, particularly girls as occupying a place within the *Bildungsmoratorium* where in aspects of their everyday lives, particularly in the older generations, girls and boys remain unmingled, even in contexts where traditional practices attached to gender are not followed. At the same time, in accounts of the children about other aspects of their everyday lives, as well as that of the older generations, different groups of children – girls and boys, across family backgrounds – come together and mingle sometimes in the same physical space, or in the shared experience of their everyday. While the emphasis on *porashuna* or the significance of 'studies' and the practices and values associated with it draw together the children from the three generations and from different family backgrounds in a common trope, in the contemporary generation of children an equally powerful contender is the media and the popular children's culture shaped by it.

As most of the interviews were with individuals, children coming together in the same physical space was not always observed, except in the context of the swimming club. Rather, the 'mingling' was in the narratives and not always in the same sense of being in the same physical space, but where common experiences or practices were overwhelmingly present despite difference in gender, family backgrounds, and in some contexts generation. Outside the school, leisure culture is such a space in which the experiences and tastes of children mingle and diverge, reflecting the 'with-then-apart' aspect of children's interaction, capturing the fluid, changing character that research on schools and the playground have sometimes pointed to.

If 'leisure' in the strict sense of relaxation in free time is considered, then after- school lessons or 'tuitions' are very much related to schoolwork, although for a majority of children they take up the greater part of the 'leisure time' in the

H. Sen, *'Time-Out' in the Land of Apu,* DOI 10.1007/978-3-658-02223-5_7,
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loose sense of after-school hours and weekends. The tradition of play has been discussed in the previous chapter, although many of the narratives from the three generations point to the fact that the culture of playing outdoors unless in the form of a 'class' or 'coaching' is not very powerful, among middle class children in urban West Bengal.

The narratives in the previous chapters also point to another aspect of the leisure culture of children from Kolkata and Bandel's middle classes that come closest to the understanding of leisure as free from obligations. In the chapter on the educational ethos, the place of 'storybooks' in children's free time as well as watching television have been discussed to some extent, in the context of conflicting strands in the ethos of education among the Bengali middle class. One or both of the two activities occupy a significant part of the accounts of many children as popular leisure activities. But the line between leisure and 'lessons' become blurred for children in the context of 'leisure careers' where learning – a cultural activity like singing or dancing – cannot be distinguished from 'free time' or enjoyment, outside of school. Again, what is of interest is that despite a continuity in the pattern among the Bengali middle class finding it important that the children 'learn a bit of something outside school', the meanings of these different 'leisure classes' as well as the kinds of classes considered appropriate for different groups of children, according to gender and family background keep changing across the generations. As many of the classes (class in this context refers to the group of children who are instructed in some form of activity as opposed to 'social class') involve a group of children learning something from an instructor in a classroom, or a residence – it creates its own dynamic of together and apart just as the family, school and playground create.

In the less physical sense children's culture, especially media is another domain where this sort of dynamic is acted out, whereby groups of children are drawn in a common experience or set apart in what they can consume, and their tastes in what they consume. This leisure culture in which media has a siginificant position, changes with changing economic and cultural processes in India, thus bringing into focus how children's everyday lives are inscribed within broader social processes. In the broader Indian context, two of the significant influences on children's culture and media have been the colonial legacy and economic liberalization of India in the 1990s. Children's media, and children's engagement with different aspects of this children's culture, raise questions about cultural heritage, particularly about an 'Indian' or 'Bengali' tradition in children's culture against 'foreign' influences in children's culture (McLain 2011). The transformation of children's culture in Bengal is far from a simplistic shift from a more Bengali children's culture to a more foreign influenced one, in the same sense as the 'other' cultural influences in children's leisure culture are not essentially 'western'. The influence of other cultures, most notably the British tradition

in children's literature and children's leisure culture in Bengal, goes back a long time and as the interviews with the older generations show, they continued to be strong for decades after Independence. In this context, some groups of children in all the generations have a shared experience in leisure culture, particularly books and comics, and to a lesser extent in – films and television. However, it must be noted that the different sections of the middle class with this shared experience of consuming a 'foreign' influenced children's culture changed considerably in the three generations, as the content and nature of the media. These aspects have been discussed in the next subsections.

7.1 Children and Leisure Classes[52]

In the narratives of the three generations about leisure, extra lessons in a cultural activity emerge as a significant part of the everyday life of children. While the number of such 'leisure classes' children had were greater and more general among the contemporary generation of children, many of the respondents from the older generation said that they had had at some point a music teacher or a dance class as children. Most of these cultural classes have been discussed in the previous chapters where children talk about their weeks organized in tuitions and 'leisure classes'.

One of the most common classes mentioned by all three generations were singing, particularly classes in the genre of *Rabindrasangeet*[53]although classical music was mentioned by some. Dance –particularly the dance forms of *Bharatnattyam*, followed by *Rabindranitya*, *Odissi* and *Katthak* was mentioned by some respondents from the '80s generation, and was more general among the contemporary generation of children. Not unusually, in all three generations the children with a greater number of lessons in cultural activities were girls. Boys though present to some degree in accounts on singing classes tended to have either no 'leisure classes' in the older generations or, as in the contemporary generation of children, joined the girls in the neutral cultural realm of drawing classes. The association with music and girls are understandable particularly in

52 Class in this context refers to lessons. The term is also common among the children in Kolkata and Bandel, where they refer to the various 'singing classes' or 'dancing classes' they have after school. The term leisure class is not used in this context to refer to a social section.

53 *Rabindrasangeet* is a genre of music that consists of songs written by the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, and developed some time in the early twentieth century. It is considered a significant cultural tradition of Bengal and continues to be practised among Bengalis.

the context of the project of the Bengali upper middle class in colonial Bengal to redefine girlhood and womanhood, where an ideal female partner was to have cultural skills and training to some extent, to be a suitable partner for the educated middle class Bengali man. An education to some extent and training in singing or playing a musical instrument were some of the valued attributes in keeping with this new perception of domesticity. The relative absence of boys in 'leisure classes' is apparent in all the three generations, excepting some children whose families had a long tradition in classical music and where familiarity with some instruments were insisted on by the families.

In the interviews with some respondents, the practice of 'leisure careers' appear to be a realm of parental desires. Many of the children, when asked who chose their 'cultural' classes for them, such as dance or synthesizer, often said that their parents chose them for them although they liked the classes and continued. Sometimes, there were were hints that children, after hearing from friends and other children in school or the neighbourhood, asked their parents to sign them up for classes. For example in Bandel, there was a trend among adolescent boys in a closely knit neighbourhood *Latbagan* – of taking guitar lessons. One of the children interviewed from that neighbourhood, Rohan, 12, said he really wanted to play guitar and joined the classes with the older boys. Similarly, some of the other children in the neighbourhood, said they had asked their parents if they could join the classes, and one boy, Abhijit, 11 said he would start taking guitar lessons in the neighbourhood from the coming session.

For most of the children, however, the 'leisure classes' were as much a part of the routine as tuitions and studying for school. Even when they liked it, and to some degree had themselves chosen what they wanted to learn, – either a cultural activity or a leisure class in sports – these classes figured in many of the children's accounts of a hectic week, alongside tuitions. 'Free time', a term often used by the children themselves, was carved out amidst all these classes and usually referred to the unregimented activities of reading and watching television.

The insistence with which the leisure classes were pursued alongside schoolwork, reflect the educational ethos of the Bengali middle class, where time spent by the children learning something is deemed as time spent worthily. There is also a two-way relationship between perceptions about 'studies' and 'leisure classes' in that studies are undoubtedly considered to be of supreme importance for children. At the same time, the sentiment of 'learning a bit of something alongside' – is strong among sections of the middle class with higher cultural capital – where just 'studies' are not considered enough. The question of class background and cultural capital are undoubtedly of significance in this context. In the older generations, the pursuit of leisure classes or leisure careers for children imply – sufficient economic capital to afford 'cultural classes' for children, as well as the mentality that deemed cultural lessons important and not an extra-

vagance. Respondents like Shubhash Kumar Mandal, 74 and Tathagata Kumar Upadhyay, 39 – who grew up in lower middle class families with straitened economic circumstances and lower levels of cultural capital (neither Mandal nor Upadhyay's parents completed school), emphasize that they could not afford to have exra lessons in a cultural activity, when they could not even afford tuitions.

The practice of learning music or singinging among girls, has additionally had the connotation – as discussed before – of being groomed to be culturally equipped Bengali women, and wives from the early twentieth century. At the same time, in many of the accounts, especially with the younger generations, the practice of engaging children in cultural activities, have had the double connotations of a particular pedagogic value, as well as of maintaining a family tradition. Both point to sections of the middle class with higher levels of cultural capital. In this context, leisure classes, as a space of sometimes unfulfilled childhood desires of parents, – reflect sociocultural transformations in Bengal over the generations,and also highlight the significance accorded by the Bengali middle class to 'learning'. The account of one respondent, Srilata Maity, 41 (daughter of Nalini Haldar and mother of Abhijit Maity) brings together all these aspects. Srijita grew up in Bandel in a family with high levels of cultural capital. Her mother and her grandmother were passionate about music, and found it important that she learn it too. The interview with her particularly reflects the influence of her grandmother, who despite being interested in music, had not learnt any instrument in her childhood and started only after her marriage at the age of 14, with the support of her husband (Interview with Madhabi Sikdar, December 2010).

H.S: Did you learn anything else, like music ?

S.M. : No..I was taught all those ***forcefully***..like, one of them was dancing, which I..that is I realized it later..because in my childhood my ***opinion*** did not work much, so even if I knew what I wanted, I could not express that. And that I had so much *interest* in drawing, that I loved it so much, I didn't realize it back then. Perhaps if I *requested* Ma Baba, they would let me, it isn't that they wouldn't. But..because my grandmother loves singing,music, that is why I too was ***forcefully*** taught dance.

H.S: What dance did you learn?

S.M. :*Katthak*. But what happened to me as a result was,..because they *dominated* me, that, 'no, you must learn it', I have an *allergy* towards dance. Dance or singing..I developed an *allergy* towards those things. Because they made me ***forcefully***..I did not like to dance at all!

H.S: Did you ever have conflicts then, about this?

S.M.: Yes. In one phase I did not practice (dance), there was a lot of scolding about that. That I,..that you must do it. When there were holidays, they would drag me to Kolkata to be taught by somebody called Bandana Sen. They would do the thing ***forcefully***. That is why, I have something of a feeling of distaste towards it.

(Interview with Srilata Maity, December 2010, italicized portions originally in English, italicized portions in bold emphasized by the respondent).

While the narrative is emphatic than most accounts about the 'forced' nature of leisure classes for children, it lends voice to the more muted aspects of reluctance or obligations that colour other accounts about leisure classes in some interviews.

While the insistence with which children were made to pursue leisure classes ('they would *drag* me to Kolkata', 'you *must* learn it') put them in a sense in the same order as schoolwork, leisure classes, although important, are never quite on the same level as 'studies'. Many of the children interviewed in the month of December, before the examinations, said they were about to leave a leisure class for the time being or for good, to concentrate on their studies. Sometimes children with more than one leisure class, were also faced with the decision of continuing one, while leaving the other, as they went up to a higher class, where the time for studying was more important.

This perpetual compromise or conflict between 'studies' and 'leisure classes' for children is reflected more clearly in the accounts of respondents from the older generations. Sudhanya Sengupta, a 42 year old respondent who grew up in a family of teachers, similarly talks about the influence of his grandfather, an authoritative figure in their joint family in deciding what was more significant for the children in the family. Shanto says that he was passionate about singing and wanted to learn singing, but his grandfather, who was the retired principal of a boys' school, thought he should concentrate on his studies as a child. He says he learnt singing only when he was in college, enrolling himself in *Dakshini*, a singing school in Kolkata when he was no longer in school, with studies as his prime objective.

> „My grandfather said, you can keep *Saraswati* in one of the ways“ (Interview with Sudhanya Sengupta, February 2011).

The anecdote bring out the essence of a complex liberal Bengali middle class family. The reference to a Hindu Goddess, *Saraswati*, is significant. *Saraswati* being the Hindu goddess of learning and music is a the Bengali middle class symbol for the two sides of learning – education in the sense of scholarly learning and culture in the sense of music and the arts. The statement that the goddess could be respected in only one way at a time– – implying he couldn’t mix music with studies – emphasizes the undercurrent of conflict between the two forms of learning in families with higher cultural capital, as well as as acknowledgment that 'culture' in the sense of music or dance were respected attributes even if schoolchildren were to on no account compromise with their 'studies' for acquiring them.

7.2 The Bookshelf: Children and Children's Literature in Three Generations

In the accounts of the three generations about leisure activities, reading occupies a significant place among unregimented leisure hour activities, and is mentioned by a greater number of respondents than playing outdoors. While the habit of reading in itself reflects different family backgrounds, the language in which children prefer to read, as well as the kind of literature that children across and within generations prefer, point to significant sociocultural patterns and transformations in the Bengali middle class in the last fifty years. The practice of reading books and the conflict of books with 'studies' have been discussed in one of the previous chapters. In this section, the focus is on the different kinds of books read by children and their pattern across social sections and generations.

As discussed in a previous chapter, the practice of reading books, particularly among the older generations was found more among families with higher levels of cultural capital where children were encouraged to read books to some extent, just as the practice of 'reading books in secret' corresponded with this section because of the importance placed on 'studies' in these families. At the same time, the accounts from the three generations about reading show different patterns even among the section of respondents who read books emphasizing that high cultural capital cannot be understood simply from a familiarity with 'high' culture. The narratives of the three generations point to a shift, not simply in the genres of literature read by children in the different generations, but also to the shift in the distribution of sections of the middle class, children of which were familiar with particular forms of literature.

Most respondents from the '50s generation said they were more familiar with reading in Bengali than in English as children, although English was a language taught in school. Though most respondents could not exactly recall at what point they started reading in English, the general age given by most, was in early or mid teens. One of the main reasons for this, although it was not mentioned by the respondents, – was that most of the schools attended by the urban middle class in Kolkata and Bandel were Bengali medium schools, and children, became familiar enough with English to read books, when they were in a higher class, such as class six onwards. Some of the works mentioned most by respondents were those by Tagore, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay and Saratchandra Chattopadhyay. All of them belong to the genre of modern Bengali classics from the nineteenth century, although most of the works of these writers were for older age groups than exclusively for children. At the same time it must be remembered, that when the respondents mentioned 'books read as children', childhood was an expanse that

blurred into teenage and adolescence, and it was difficult to assess exactly when what was read.

Some of the other books mentioned by respondents from this generation also point to the rising popularity of genres of literature, publishers and authors exclusively directed at children and adolescents in Bengal. Some of the interviews also emphasize the popularity of children's magazines in Bengali. Nalini Haldar, a 64 year old woman, talks about what she read when she was her grandson's (Abhijit Maity) age.

> „When I was Abhijit's age I read those..then Deb Shahitya Kutir[54]printed..those puja editions[55] would come out..I would read those..Later, I would em..read..I liked..I read detective stories..In English and Bengali. In English I could only go so far.. those Harold Robbins or those books which were..that is those books which were in *easy English*. I would read all of those“ (Interview with Nalini Haldar, December 2010, italicized portions originally in English).

Genres like detective stories were popular among children of this generation and as some of the accounts show, the circulation of books especially a series of books among groups of children in school or in the family introduced children to popular forms of children's literature apart from the classics that parents picked for them. The friendship networks were significant in this practice of 'swapping' of books among children of the same age groups. The interview with a 72 year old respondent who studied in a Bengali Medium girls' School in the late 1940s and early 1950s mentions this practice in detail:

> H.S: What kind of books did you read?
>
> C.C.: As I said, we were four friends in school..very close friends.
>
> H.S: Hm.
>
> C.C.: So what we would do is on birthdays..we knew we didn't need invitations, we just showed up..with serious faces we would march in with a book in hand...what is it called..a mystery..suspense thriller..*The Bandits of the Himalayas*..all these suspense thrillers.
>
> H.S: Hm.
>
> C.C.: Detective books as well at that time..I don't remember anymore who wrote them. There were different writers..these were so popular that many editions were published.“ (Interview with Chandramallika Chakrabarty, February 2011)

The English books mentioned by the respondents, were mostly classics, particularly adventure classics for young people, such as *Huckleberry Finn* and

54 A publishing house in Kolkata which is known to produce books and series and magazines for children in Bengali. The publishing house is also known for its association with some particular genres, such as the detective series for children and young people (Roy 2008) and children's comics, as well as particular writers, such as the cartoonist Naryan Debnath, known for cartoons strips and cartoon figures in Bengali such as *Handa Bhoda* and *Bantul di Great*.

55 Many magazines and journals in Bengal have special editions in the months of September or October during the festive season of the *Durga Puja*. Publishing houses such as Deb Shahitya Kutir ; similarly had such *Pujoshankhya or Pujabarshiki*, which were special holiday editions containing stories, novels and cartoons for children.

Coral Island. Though most children in this generation could read in English as it was a school subject, the practice of reading story books in English was mastered when one was older and not always from books. The narrative of Sudhir Dutta, a 66 year old respondent, shows that reading a whole book in English was also time consuming for children who were used to reading more in Bengali:

> „I read less in English, more in Bengali.. *Treasure* Island, no *Coral Island*. It was a wonderful adventure book. At that time I borrowed it from the school library. Then I read a whole book for many days..fifteen to twenty days. *I was very thrilled* that I finished a whole book..I liked it very much..In English I read newspapers..from childhood. The house next door took a paper called *Indian National* from Patna that was in English..not our house – we took the *Ananda Bajar.* In that paper I would read about sports – tennis, English Premier League. I think at that time I followed the English Premier League from the age of ten. And then English county cricket, yes, county cricket..Yorkshire..their games, I would follow those“ (Interview with Sudhir Dutta, Jnauary 2011, italicized portion originally in English).

The source of books read by children in this generation were families and school libraries – particularly for books in English. Consequently, the schools attended, and by some implication, the levels of cultural capital of the family influenced the exposure to the English classics. Not just respondents who attended missionary schools, even Bengali medium schools, particularly which had the reputation among the generation as 'the good schools for Kolkata' – reputed for its teachers as well as producing students who were visibly 'good in studies' going by their position in the all West Bengal board examinations – stocked their libraries with not just Bengali books but also English books, particularly adventure classics for children and adolescents. While adult supervision controlled that children did not read too many storybooks distracting them from studies, the content of what was being read was also subject to parental control, forbidding books that were not seen to be 'fit for children'. As a respondent says,

> „There was a bit of distinction in book..books for grown ups..in those days it was, don't read Sarat (Saratchandra Chattopadhyay), read *Ramer Sumoti*. I did not listen. Whatever there was in print, I read“ (Interview with Pranati Sengupta, February 2011).

In the following generation, much of the same Bengali classics were mentioned by respondents as books read in childhood. However, the interviews show shifts in two areas from the '50s generation. One of them was the greater number of English or Western literature mentioned by the respondents, though many of them were read when one was older, at the age of 13 or 14. The second shift was that a greater number of works which were exclusively children and youth literature were mentioned in Bengali and in English. Barnali Mukhopadhyay, a 42 year old woman whose parents were teachers, talks about the books she read as a child.

> “I read a lot (emphasis) of story books. I used to read Bengali story books. At home there were innumerable (emphasis) books, a huge library. I would mainly read the Bengali classics that were there.. In class six..at that age (at her daughter's age)..I read Bibhutibhushan's *Chander Pahar*..

And all those things that came out, I read them. I read *Thakumar Jhuli* as a child..everyone has read that"(Interview with Barnali Mukhopadhyay in December 2010).

The popularity of children's magazines like *Sandesh* where prominent figures in Bengali children's literature and from the intellectual community of Bengal contributed was mentioned by Barnali Mukhopadhyay and other respondents from the same and previous generations. Like many respondents Barnali talks about reading some books in secret, although the reason she narrates is different from the distraction to 'studies', drawing attention to another aspect of the Bengali middle class sentiment about culture.

B.M.: I used to read some things. But some things, like Upendrakishore's books, Sukumar Ray's books, these my mother would *secretly* (emphasis) give me to read.

H.S: Secretly from your father?

B.M.: Yes, so that he didn't even have a hint that the books were removed from the bookcase.

H.S: Why?

B.M.: The books were bought to adorn the bookcase.

H.S: Ok. Was there something considered objectionable in the books?

B.M.: No. They were meant for children. But..that is..books must not be taken out of the bookcase. It was like that then, that was it. (Interview with Barnali Mukhopadhyay, December 2010).

As in the generation before, the genre of detective stories was popular among respondents of the '80s generation. What was significant is the entry of detective stories exclusively for children in the accounts of this generation, written in English by British and American children's writers. Especially among respondents who attended missionary girls' schools in Kolkata and Bandel, the school library as well as the friend networks among children were two main sources by which children from the '80s generation were introduced to western children's literature, apart from classics by Mark Twain and Robert Louis Stevenson, that parents and schools considered 'educational'. The fictional characters of *Famous Five* and the girl detective of the American series, *Nancy Drew* also make their appearance in the accounts of this generation. While exclusively children's literature, mostly in the form of short stories and fairy tales were mentioned by the '50s generation, these were almost all in Bengali. In the '80s the popularity of western, particularly British children's literature to some degree competed with Bengali children's literature, though like the previous generation, some children, found it difficult to read books in English, until they were older. The schools attended were also significant in this context. There were a greater number of respondents who attended English medium schools than in the previous generation, and among children who attended Bengali medium schools, some were more comfortable in English than others, particularly because of the influence of English teachers, as well as familiarity with books in English at home. Sudhanya Sengupta, a 46 year old respondent who grew up in a household of teachers talks about reading *Pride*

and Prejudice in Class VIII and says Darcy was a hero for him and his cousin though there were parts of it they did not understand. In addition he says, "Rabindranath was a significant part of our growing up, and I read Saratchandra and Bankimchandra. Typical of what one would expect in a family of masters (teachers, derived from the word headmaster or schoolmaster).

Among the western literature popular among children, a notable figure is the British writer Enid Blyton. The popularity of Blyton's books, especially her mystery series for children were not confined to middle class children in Kolkata but were also read by children in different parts of urban West Bengal, as one interview shows. Srilata Maity, 41, who grew up in Bandel and studied in a missionary school for girls, says:

> "When I was his (her son Abhijit's) age, then I read a lot of Famous Five..that is, I was a complete fan of Enid Blyton..I read almost everything by Enid Blyton..Famous Five, Secret Seven, all of these. Whatever I would get I would devour. From class five I was a fan of books" (Interview with Srilata Maity, December 2010).

However, the practice of reading in English, or of reading literature specifically for children in Bengali or English pertained to the respondents from families with the highest levels of cultural capital. While the act of reading in itself reflects high cultural capital, encouraging children to read books in another language as well as books of fantasy and mystery especially meant for young children, rather than educational works by Bengali and Western authors valued for their stature as classics, reflects a different mentality within the section of the educated Bengali middle class. It points to a strata within the Bengali middle class that despite an educational ethos that saw 'learning' as the ideal occupation for children, – encouraged culture in a different form for children – stories of fantasy and mystery solving – that were perhaps not valued for their literary significance, – and in this sense encouraging or choosing such books reflected an indulgence where children could be children. At the same time, the practice of reading such books were perhaps far from a simple act of indulgence on the part of families which had nothing against a 'bit of fantasy'. It is far from coincidence that all the respondents in the '50s and '80s generations who talked about reading notable children's writers in English, were from educated professional middle class families where fathers worked for private companies or where parents were teachers and professors. Though the familiarity with English, was a factor which allowed children to read some works at a particular age (usually before the age of 14), it was in itself a marker, a sign of a level of cultural and social background of the family. Similarly, children's literature in Bengali, particularly in the writings of Upendrakishore Ray, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay, Sukumar Ray, Leela Majumdar, and short stories by Saratchandra Chatterjee, had a high stature by their very association with she authors, all of whom were key figures among

the intellectual elites in twentieth century Bengal, not just in children's literature, but in Bengali literature in general.

In the contemporary generation of children many of the works mentioned by children are the same, although their distrbution across groups of children is a significant change. A far greater number of children were comfortable with reading in English at the age of 10-12. Rather, the pattern from the '50s generation was upturned where a greater number of children who said they liked reading, were more familiar with, or said they preferred reading in English than in Bengali. This owes to a great extent to the increase of English medium schools in West Bengal compared to the older generation, as well as the greater distribution and availability of children's books in English. This also meant that more sections of the middle class in urban Bengal attended English medium schools or read in English, than the strata of the highly educated middle and upper middle classes in the previous generations where children's familiarity with English, automatically reflected very high levels of cultural capital.

In the contemporary generation of children, Bengali had to a great extent faded from children's leisure hours. Many of the children also said that they did not read at all, in Bengali as a matter of preference. For example, Paromita (11 years) when asked about the kind of books she reads says she does not like reading in Bengali.

> " I like reading books a lot..In English I have read Around the World in 80 Days..then Beauty and the Best.. I like reading books like that..No, I do not like reading Bengali at all. (Interview with Paromita, December 2009).

Similarly, other children like Titiksha 11, Parikshit 10, Rwiti, 11 and Riju 11 talk about reading *Famous Five*, and Agatha Christie books but apart from *Thakumar Jhuli* or other Bengali fairytales they read when they were younger, do not mention any Bengali books. Schools have much influence influence in reading preferences in case of children whose families were not acquainted with much children's literature or children's literature in English in their childhood. As an 11 year old boy studying in a private English medium school in Kolkata says:

> R: I like things like..I like detective stories a lot.
>
> H.S: Hm.
>
> R: There are not so many English books at home, but that is, whenever I get the chance..that is there are plenty in our school library. Fridays we can go to the library. And I take not just English books from there..but the *maximum* number of times I take *detective stories*.
>
> H.S: What kinds of detective stories?
>
> R: Enid Blyton's writings.mm..Secret Seven, like that. Then..but the story I liked very much is..*Call of the World* (Call of the Wild), written by Jack London. *Call of the World* is about a dog. And..dog is my *favourite animal* (Interview with Riju, January 2011, italicized portions originally in English).

Most children mentioned parents, school libraries and the Calcutta bookfair as sources of books. At the same time, it was not that children from Bengali medium schools read nothing in English or that children from English medium schools always preferred reading in English. Some children like Mridula a 12 year old girl, who studies in a Bengali medium school, talked about reading horror stories from the American series by the writer R.L. Stine that were swapped in her tuition by some of the boys. Or the reverse is seen in case of Ishan, 12 who studies in an English medium school in Kolkata and says he does not read books in English. Comics were mentioned by some children, like Tintin as well as a few Bengali comics like *Handa Bhonda*:

The practice however, of reading children's books in English and Bengali were found among a specific and narrow section of the Bengali middle class. In the girls' school where five children were interviewed together, two of the children from Bengali families mentioned reading classic children's literature in Bengali and English.

Pra: I like reading er.. Enid Blyton. I started reading Agatha Christie..'And then there were None' with my mother.

H.S: You found it in school or did your parents ask you to read it?

Prakriti: No, I got it in my birthday, er..then I started reading it in my school library.

H.S: Do you read *Bangla*?

Pra: (pauses) yeah, I read many. I have read er.. Leela Majumdar..er..a big book..*Kishor Upanyash* and I've got many other books in Bengali.

Tiy: I..er..I have a quite a good..er..I love to dance and draw..So I usually do that.

H.S: Hm?

Tiy: Ah..er..I read this er..Roald Dahl. I read..I have read all the.. I love..like..*philosophical books*.

H.S: Okay. Like what?

Tiy: Like..There's *Letters from Morrie*, *Letters from Father to a Daughter.* Then I read..death..*Dialogues with Death*.

H.S: Do you read in Hindi?

Tiy: (with emphasis) No. Ii.

Shr: I don't like reading books too much. I like the Nancy Drew series.

H.S: Do you read *Bangla* books as well?

Shr: No.

Shaswati.: I do. I read Feluda[56]series, then Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay[57].....My mother chooses my books and then in English I have a whole shelf of books. I read Enid Blyton, then Charles Dickens. And then..(stops to think) Jules Verne..a lot like that. I like Johanna Spyri as well.

Aka: I've got a library of books because my bro loves reading books. So I'm right now reading Percy Jackson.

H.S: Hmm

Aka: Lightning Thief. I just started. And then I used to read Roald Dahl which I loved.

H.S: Charlie and the Chocolate Factory?

Aka: Yes. And I've read Matilda and many of his books. Most of my books my mother chooses and she advices, like which to read. And I find Hindi a little difficult (laughs). I prefer English more than Hindi."

(Interview with Tiya, Prakriti, Shaswati., Akansha Singh, Shreya in February 2010, Original interview in English)

Here, the families and the school played an important role in the reading preferences of the children. In an English medium school attended by children from the upper sections of the middle class from Bengali and non-Bengali families, familiarity with classic western and Bengali children's literature were ensured by the school and the families, whereas, newer genres of children's literature (Percy Jackson), or even books for older age groups were familiar through a varied friendship network in school.

The educated Bengali middle class, has been long accused of its Anglophilia, although there have been different sections of the middle class who were more comfortable with aspects of Western culture and literature than others. However children of the age of 10-12 being familiar with British children's literature usually pointed to sections with very high cultural capital, and a particular kind of cultural-economic background in the older generations. Being able to read an entire book or novel in English at that age, as well as having access to such books or familiarity with exclusive children's literature in the '80s generation and before, narrowed down the proportion of children reading such books to a particular section of the Bengali middle class. The professional middle class, families where fathers worked in private companies, many of which were formerly owned by British owners, had both the institutional cultural capital of the parents

56 *Feluda*, or Prodosh Chandra Mitra, is a fictional private detective created by the Bengali writer and film director, Satyajit Ray. The first *Feluda* story appeared in 1965, in the Bengali children's magazine '*Sandesh'* and enjoyed much popularity in the 1980s and 1990s among children and adolescents.

57 Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay is a contemporary Bengali writer of fiction for children and adults. The writer's political inclinations are to an extent known, and suggest a disenchantment with the Communist government of West Bengal. The children's fiction by him reflects a similar disenchantment with contemporary urban culture in West Bengal and a nostalgia for values associated with rural Bengal. Often characters like ghosts and misfits in the city are heroized in his novels.

as well as familiarity through their social network with western culture. Children from the families of teachers and professors were also similarly familiar with new and western genres of literature, as parents were involved in and had the cultural resources to form reading preferences.

7.3 Children and Television

In the interviews with most of the children, the week was narrated in the form of days that were broken up into parts with specific routines followed on particular days of the week and times of the day. Mornings and afternoons were usually divided between school and a rest and the beginning of a long evening of tuitions and other classes. On the other side, television was a constant in most of the interviews, and even in the diaries some of the children kept, marking the last part of the day for many. While other unregulated leisure activities like playing and reading were something of a gamble, depending on whether class tests were announced for which one had to study, or how dark it was outside before tuitions were over and one had time to play, – the television with its very location within the house, and its accessibility even at night, fits into the everyday lives of schoolgoing children in urban Bengal.

Although television entered India in the 1960s, national telecasts were started in the 1980s. As a result television was not a part of the narratives of those from the '80s generation, barring a few respondents. Not only does it make an intergenerational perspective of children's relation to television impossible, but also in the period between the '80s and the current times, Indian media was swept over by such powerful changes that they changed the very character and look of urban India from what it was in the mid-nineties. Before the liberalization of the Indian economy *Doordarshan*, the government owned service provider of television was the sole service provider in India. In the 1990s, after the Indian economy opened itself to private and foreign investors, cable television arrived in India with a number of foreign and private broadcasters. The number of regional channels as well as Hindi language channels also grew with international channels, most of which were in English. From 1999 to 2004 several new channels appeared specifically directed at children. Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon were some of these foreign owned or Indian channels where all programmes were for children of different age groups. In the last few years many of these channels have been changed and adapted further under new owners and market demands.

Much of the content of these channels are cartoons, though a few are not exclusively cartoon channels.

In the '80s generation a few respondents talked about watching television as children. *Buniyaad* – a drama series based on the Partition of India and *Chitrahaar* –a programme playing Hindi film songs – were two programmes that were mentioned as television programmes watched by respondents in their childhood. Neither of them were specifically children's programmes, but were watched by families in the early period of national television.

In contrast the accounts of the contemporary generation of children about television reflect a different universe of media, not just in the number of television channels and programmes, but in their content, the kind of cultural referents and their combinations. Television was a part of the everyday routine of most of the children interviewed. What was overwhelming from these accounts was the overall popularity or familiarity with particular television programmes despite differences in family backgrounds, schools and also despite differences in other aspects such as playing, reading and so on. The children, while talking about what they watched on television, usually mentioned the channels that they watched most and the times they watched particular programmes. In the interviews, Hungama TV appeared to be one of the most popular channel, airing some of the most watched cartoons among the children.

Initially owned by an Indian company and currently a unit of Disney, Hungama TV is one of the many children's channels in India, airing animated programmes mostly from Japan and some other countries like Canada, which are dubbed in Hindi. The children talked about watching Cartoon Network and the Disney Channel among others but most of them said that programmes on Hungama TV were fixed in their everyday routines. While the different channels for children had programmes for children and teenagers, the content of the programmes were different across channels, based on the owners and also the languages in which the programmes were aired. Not all programmes on these channels were animated although cartoons formed a bulk of the programmes aimed at children between 10-12. Neither did the children watch only children's programmes. Many of them mentioned watching other programmes alone or with their family,on other channels including serials, family dramas and reality dance programmes. However the programmes that were followed on almost a daily basis were mostly those on children's channels like Cartoon Network and Hungama TV.

A remarkable aspect of the children's accounts is the overall popularity of Japanese animés, most of which are based on original *manga* comics. A number of programmes such as *Kiterescu*, *Kochikame*, *Perman* as well as non.animé cartoons such as the Metro Goldwyn Productions' *Tom & Jerry* and the American Ben 10, or non animated programmes such as *Hannah* Montana were mentioned

among programmes children liked and sometimes watched. A particularly significant animé that all the children knew about and that most of them watched, was the Japanese programme *Doraemon* aired on Hungama TV. Many of the children mentioned watching *Doraemon* after they came back from playing or tuitions before they had to study at home. The programme based on the Japanese *manga* created by the *manga* artist duo Fujiko Fujio is about a robotic cat who is sent from the future to help a schoolboy, Nobita Nobi by the boy's great great grandson. The stories are spun around the different experiences of Nobita with the robotic cat *Doraemon*, where the boy uses *Doraemon*'s powers to make his everyday life easier, in terms of tackling homework and bullies and other things. Nobita, although a main character is not a superhero, and is portrayed even in the animated series as a boy who is swamped by schoolwork, is not good at sports and uses *Doraemon* to escape the unpleasant demands made on him as a Japanese schoolboy.

Another animé mentioned by the children to almost the same degree, is *Shin Chan*, also aired on Hungama TV, about the antics of a five year old Japanese boy whose use of language forms the context of humour in the series.Regional variations play a significant role to some degree in the programmes watched. When the children in Bandel were interviewed in December 2010, many of them said they watched *Beyblades* more, because a change in the cable service providers in their neighbourhood meant that they had Cartoon Network but not Hungama TV. Just as significant as the popularity of the animés among children in Bandel and Calcutta is the fact that most of the programmes are dubbed in Hindi. As some of the major cartoon channels broadcast in Hindi, the children watch the programmes in a language that some of them have not yet started to learn in school.

Like some kinds of story books, some television programmes were popular among children of the same school, and children sometimes mentioned non-animated programmes they watched as well as some like quiz shows or dance competitions on other channels. *Hannah Montana* was a programme on the Disney Channel that was popular among some children, especially girls in private English medium girls's schools. The extent of parental supervision was not always clear, although as discussed in one of the earlier chapters, watching television in itself was sometimes a source of conflict with parents, as was reading books, where a compromise with 'studies' was perceived. However sometimes children directly mentioned their parents' disapproval of some programmes. For example Mithoo 11, says her father dislikes it when she watches a reality show with her elder sister where celebrities learn to live with a baby (Interview with Mithoo, January 2010). Similarly, Taniya 11, says that her parents do not let her watch *Mr. Bean* as the show has 'naked scenes' sometimes (Interview with Taniya, December 2009). Children also mentioned watching serials with their families

sometimes, though these were mostly historical dramas in Hindi or Bengali period dramas. Some children also mentioned that their parents wanted them to watch channels like *National Geographic*. But in general it was remarkable that the soap operas and reality shows that dominate Indian television were largely absent from the children's accounts even if other programmes such as quiz shows or historical dramas were mentioned to some extent, though none of these were mentioned as much as the programmes on the children's channels.

Many of the children, given the popularity of detective fiction among them, said they sometimes watched television programmes about crime solving Intelligence organizations like *CID* with their families. Some even differentiated between television watched by the rest of the family, and themselves, although in quiz shows or some detective series, there was a common space of television viewing for children and others in the family.

Of particular significance is the fact that through the children's special television channels and programmes, there seemed to be a fine line between television for children and that for adults. The distinction was however far from clear and fixed, and constructed around several aspects of the content of the programmes. However, it was more apparent when the children encountered conflicts with parents or earned disapproval for watching some programmes, that drew attention to a barrier that became more visible in its resilience.

As with story books, friend groups in schools sometimes determined television preferences of children to an extent. Children from the same school sometimes talked about watching the same programmes as their classmates, or were familiar with them. In the girls' school where a group of children were interviewed, the children showed a preference for particular children's shows on Disney Channel among other programmes, and were aware of the content of what their friends watched, explaining the stories on behalf of their friends.

H.S: What do you watch on TV?

Tiy: Do you know Jonas Brothers?

H.S:Nope.

Sha: I'm really glad.

Tiy: Shut up. Shut Up!!

Sha: They are three brothers. They sing. There's one girl called Hannah Montana.

Tiy: I watch Jonas Brothers and Taylor Swift. I *love* (intones) listening to songs.

Pra: I'm sad because my Disney channel went away so I can't see them Jonas Brothers or Hannah Montana. So I see Shin Chan, Doraemon.

Shw: Even I watch Jonas Brothers. I watch Hannah Montana also. Then I watch another show..Lizards of Mayorly Place.

H.S:What channel is that?

Sha: Disney Disney.

Tiy: Celina G... is the star. It comes at 3:30.

Sha: 4:30 4:30. It comes from 4:30 -5:00.

H.S: (To Shaswati.) What do you watch on TV?

Sha: I don't like those er..elderly things, I watch very babyish cartoons like GB.. which comes out..and Tom and Jerry and then I watch some magical things called (intones) *Son Pari* and all that. (shouts of laughter in the background).

Aka: I watch Dance India Dance..

Sha (in the background): I don't watch reality shows.

Aka:..on AXN..that's also a dance programme in English. And I watch Wipe out AXN..It's like a..yeah er..it's like you have to perform many stunts.

(Interview with Tiya, Prakriti, Shaswati., Akansha Singh, Shreya in February 2010, Original interview in English).

While the children in this group watched a greater number of programmes than animés compared to the other children, the sense of distincton between children's media and other kinds of programmes is strong, even if they are humorously referred to as 'babyish' by the children themselves. The children were not usually asked if their television programmes were controlled by parents, but rather, questions about conflicts with parents sometimes led to accounts about watching Hindi films on television among other things. However, it is almost as if the children's television viewing is dictated by an invisible hand where the number of children's programmes, by their sheer presence absorb the children's leisure time.

7.4 From Clotted Cream to Doraemon: Childhood, Moratorium and 'Other' Cultures in Bengal

„I saw and smelled modernity reading *Life* and American College catalogs at the United States Information Service library, seeing B-grade films (and some A-grade ones) from Hollywood at the Eros Theatre, five hundred yards from my apartment building. I begged my brother in Stanford (in the early 1960s) to bring me black blue jeans and smelled America in his Right Guard when he returned. I gradually lost the England that I had imbibed in my Victorian schoolbooks, in rumors of Rhodes scholars from my college, and in Billy Bunter and Biggles books devoured indiscriminately with books by Richmal Crompton and Enid Blyton. Franny and Zooey, Holden Caulfield and Rabbit Angstrom slowly eroded that part of me, that had been until then, forever England. Such are the little defeats that explain how England lost her Empire in postcolonial Bombay"

Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at large*,1996

„Let all the foreign tongue alone; Till you can read and write your own“

Calcutta Schoolbook Society[58]

In the accounts of the three generations about leisure activities in childhood, some practices and cultural objects are found in all the generations. Learning *Rabindrasangeet* and reading detective stories in secret are things children from any of the generations in post Independence West Bengal can relate to. In themselves, none of these appear to be practices that are particularly remarkable or practices that should be questioned. However, a slight change of details lends a completely different colour to the practices, taking them beyond narratives of childhood to questions of a cultural heritage, the Indian route to modernity after Independence, and to one of the questions that is most frequently asked in the social sciences, – the shadow of the Empire.

Though Bengal has a rich history in children's literature, the influence of Western, particularly British children's literature of the 1930s and '40s on Bengali childhood has been always acknowledged. The popularity of these books was not just confined to Bengal but true of other parts of India as well, – as Appadurai's comment shows – particularly in the lives of children from the middle and upper middle class children of the two other former presidencies of British India – Madras[59] and Bombay.

A specific genre that was popular was that of fantasy and magic as well as adventure stories based in schools. Stories about an enchanted world, or school stories existed in Bengal in the 1950s – but their forms were usually of short stories or fairytales as in *ThakumarJhuli* – usually for younger children. In this context, the stories of magical forests and little people and school pranks in a British boarding school were novel in their content and in their form of books for an older age group of children.The popularity of Enid Blyton has been often a theme of discussion about middle class childhoods, especially in the Bengali print media, when talking about childhood in the previous generations. As mentioned before, the practice of reading British children's literature was not uncommon in Bengal, although it was not widespread among the older generations. As the interviews show, chidren from specific family backgrounds were familiar with the books – particularly those from families which not only had high levels of cultural capital, but cultural capital of a particular kind that accorded them a great degree of familiarity with English culture.

58 The author of the quote is unknown. Cited in Mitra 1999, p.55.

59 Ellis (2011) in *'Snapshots' of the* Classroom*: Autobiographies and the experience of elementary education in the Madras Presidency, 1882-1947* gives a vivid account of children's experience of childhood in the Madras Presidency. Her accounts is comparable to some extent with the childhood experiences of the older cohorts in West Bengal, particularly in the predominance of values and practices related to education.

In their very themes – of child detectives, adventures led by children, children discovering a world of 'little folk' to which adults had no entry – created a greater sense of distinction of children as different from adults – brave, clever, and with special gifts that grown ups did not have. In a cultural context where not very long ago young children were given in marriage or widowed or where it was socially forbidden for girls to have an education, literature of this kind for girls and boys from 10-13 years was a step further in respecting and nurturing a 'time out' for children, where they were not only protected from adult experiences, but where the idea of creating and developing a world of their own was supported. Another significant aspect of these children's books, was their language. Written in English, and at the same time about an entirely different cultural context with pixies, clotted cream, and half terms at boarding schools – the books in themselves became markers of the cultural backgrounds of its readership among the Bengali middle class.

There has been considerable discussion about the influence of western culture in Indian childhoods. Enid Blyton's writings have been one of the most significant examples in this. The discussion usually takes one of two standpoints, – of focusing on the absurdity of this popularity, where the fascination for stories set in the British countryside or in the fantasy format that is closer to the British context – raises important questions about postcolonial India. In this standpoint, the very popularity of British children's literature in the Indian cities and suburbs becomes one of the exemplars of the curious nature of modernity in countries with colonial pasts (Rosenberg 2010). Another standpoint is to defend western literature for children, against criticisms of excessive Anglophilia, with the argument that the cultural aspect of these books are not as significant as the joy and the imagination involved in reading them as children (Roy 2011). In both of these, works such as Blyton's, become a symbol, of the Empire that lives, or that is fading, where western children's literature is one of the more acceptable legacies of the colonial past. What the discussion misses, in its equation of modernity with 'western' influences, and their relation in postcolonial India, is the perspective on class.

The children's literature in Bengali from the late nineteenth century till after Independence also had a connotation of high culture, particularly because many of the proponents of modern Bengali children's literature, beyond fairy tales – were also iconic figures of Bengali culture such as Dwarkanath Tagore, and later Rammohan Roy and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. From its very birth, children's literature in Bengal was closely tied to influences that could be called 'foreign'. Mitra (1999), tracing the history of Bengali children's literature emphasizes the role of the missionaries in Srirampore[60] in setting up printing machinery, and printing books for children, particularly books for the Calcutta Schoolbook Soci-

60 The first youth magazine for children, *Digdarshan* was also published in Srirampore in 1818.

ety, „whatever their intention“ (Mitra 1999, p.33). The policy of the Society in the nineteenth century according to Mitra, was to some extent developing children's acquaintance with their native language, as reflected in the verse „*Let all the foreign tongue alone, Till you can read and write your own*“. Yet, children's literature in Bengal, in the nineteenth century, also borrowed from different foreign influences, English being one of them, Arabic tales being another, although these were adapted and translated in Bengali.

The association between upper middle class intellectuals and Bengali children's literature continued into the twentieth century. Many of the writers of children's fiction as well as children's magazines and publishers were run by families, who were intellectual elites in early twentieth century Kolkata. Fiction, exclusively for children older than seven or eight and younger than adolescents, reflected a new sentiment whereby children of a particular age group were seen as readers separate from their elder counterparts. Moreover, the section that afforded and encouraged this sentiment were those with a certain educational background, and sufficient affluence. Though this sentiment has long existed in Bengal, in the years before Independence and immediately after, it was further heightened and influenced by western genres of literature as well as Bengali literature for adults, and new series and genres were produced in Bengali – Satyajit Ray's *Feluda* and *Professor Shonku*, school stories and ghost stories for children, and short novels by writers like Leela Majumdar were some.

In the following generations, partly owing to politics of a Left Front Government in West Bengal, english education became even more than ever a marker of upper and upper middle class. The gradual disappearance of Bengali, as a preferred language of reading for children, can be partly understood in this context, because of its connotations with lower and less privileged sections of the middle class. Parents, anxious to ensure their children's performance in a competitive world where English was the language of the professionally successful, might have encouraged reading more in English over Bengali. However, in the '80s generation, the respondents were in school before the policies of the Left Front Government banned English from government schools, and many of the respondents read Bengali as well as English as children, to different degrees, depending upon their access to them. In the contemporary generation of children, among a wide majority of children, reading in Bengali or in a mother tongue other than Hindi (the non Bengali children interviewed did not read other than English) translates into something 'uncool', almost picking up with feelers, the hierarchy of the languages. English although widespread was also not just confined to British classics for children, and books in English, particularly American paperback series of horror, circulated among children. These were however new, and were introduced to children among friend networks. Among children whose parents picked out books for them, – books they had themselves read as children,

both Bengali and English books were likely to be chosen, – although they were strictly British and Bengali classics in children's literature read by the children in the generation before, from families with high cultural capital.

If in the older generations Blyton was an emblem of a certain kind of middle class Bengali childhood, children's leisure culture in the contemporary generation is also determined by a culture that is not completely indigenous. From the 1980s onwards a significant change in children's culture not just in West Bengal but in India is seen in the emergence of a genre of comics, cartoons and children's magazines that combined western influences and themes specific to specific regions of India and presented them to children all over India in English. McLain in *Gods, Kings and Local Telugu Guys* speaks of the popularity of the Indian comic book series *Amar Chitra Katha* based on characters from epics and Indian history and modelled upon American superhero comic books, that targeted „the middle class Indian children who were attending English-medium schools and receiving 'Westernized' educations“ (McLain 2011,p.158). Bengal too was influenced by this mixing of western and indigenous themes especially in the 1980s. However, specific comics and cartoons such as Narayan Debnath's *Handa Bhoda* or *Bantul di Great*, which according to Murthy in *An Art Without a Tradition* are themselves inspired by 'British funnies' such as 'Beano' or 'Rodger the Dodger' (Murthy 2009; Kundu 2001) started losing popularity in the last two decades. This was partly owing to the more cosmopolitan English language Indian comics.

In post liberalization West Bengal, numerous children from urban middle class families are held captive by the spell of yet another 'cultural export' – that of Japan. As has been discussed in other places in the present study, the media culture of children has been a particularly significant aspect in which older generations see their own childhoods differing from contemporary childhoods in Bengal. A common perception was that children are increasing moving away from their 'own' cultural heritage and language, even when the previous generations were to some degree enthralled by a genre of books and comics from a different cultural context.

The significance of animés in the everyday lives of the children was impossible to ignore. Even some of the children with a number of after-school classes all week said that *Doraemon*, *Kiterescu* and *Shin Chan* were a part of their evenings before dinner or bedtime. In a week where other forms of leisure activities were tentative, owing to the children's schedule the television programmes by their very convenience of location within the house and the stamp of approval of 'children's programmes' were one of the best getaways for the children from 'studies'. The popularity of the *animés* in cultures outside Japan also point to an emerging transnational media culture for children. Previously, the popularity of *Godzilla* and then gradually programmes like *Pokémon* as well as

games and toys based on them, were seen as symbolic of the inversion of the American domination of children's media culture (the contributions of Cary, Hatyama and West in West 2009). The popularity of *animé*s as a dominant feature of contemporary media culture for children and adolescents is itself a subject of discussion about cross-cultural processes in a transnational media culture. The anthropomorphism in programmes from the 1980s such as *My Neighbour Totoro* or programmes like *Dragon Ball*, the emergence of fan sub-cultures of *animés* as well as the growing popularity of *animé* based merchandise such as Hello Kitty products or the gaming culture have shown the dominance of a culture of non-western origin in western social contexts. The children interviewed in the present study are also part of this media culture which cuts across cultural boundaries. The influence of such programmes, or the 'japanification' of children's culture in West Bengal have two significant implications for the cultural moratorium of childhood. One is that the consumption of such programmes by children from the urban Bengali middle classes that has appeal in other countries, in South East Asia as well as in the United States and Europe, point to an emerging global children's culture. As many of the *animé*s have some form of differentiation among its target audience, aiming some shows for children of specific age groups, some for adolescents, and so on, the concept of a specific genre of *animé*s for children between 10-12 becomes possible. The second aspect that is of interest is the relative popularity of some programmes over others in different cultural contexts. The writings on the popularity of specific *animé*s (Allison 2009, Condry 2009, Nakano 2002, Patten 2009, Peters 2002, Shiraishi 2000), when seen in connection with the narrative interviews, show that specific programmes have greater appeal among the children in West Bengal than others which are more popular in Europe or the United States. In the western context shows such as *Sailor Moon* or *Dragon Ball* are some of the most popular, whereas the popularity of *Doraemon* or *Kiterescu* are specific to South Asia. The exact reason for this are not known, nor if it depends on the choice of programmes broadcast in the different countries, or on the actual preference of the children for them. But this does point to divergent genres and their culture-specific appeal than a homogenous media culture for children.

Another significant aspect about programmes like *Doraemon* and some non animated shows for children, was their language. Barring some programmes, most of the children's channels broadcast in Hindi, a language that hardly entered the lives of children from Bengali middle class families in the previous generations. The animés that the children usually watched belonged, not unlike the British children's books popular in the older generations, to the genre of 'wish fulfillment' (Schodt 1996). But in content as well as cultural nuance, they are miles apart. A curious thing about shows like *Doraemon* is the chord it strikes with the everyday lives of the children who watch it in urban West Bengal. Nobita Nobi,

the 10 year old Japanese boy faces as much pressure of 'studies' as his viewers in Kolkata. The content of fantasy is also context specific. Whereas in Bengali and Western children's books and comics that were read by the three generations, fantasy or wish-fulfillment entailed magic people taking children to see their world, or children roaming the countryside finding clues beating adults in their investigation, in *Doraemon* the gadgets, the robotic cat, the adventures in the time travel machine have a chief concern – getting away from the grind of schoolwork. As an analyst of *manga* has pointed out, the success of *Doraemon* in Asian countries could perhaps be understood in possible similarities in cultures of education and family (Hatayama 2009). The possibilty that the writing desk that enslaves many schoolchildren is also the space of freedom from it – as *Doraemon* comes out of Nobita's desk – possibly explains more than any theories about 'cultural exports' (Peters 2002).

It might be of course argued that the media culture, by exposing children to several themes such as sexuality or violence works in the opposite direction of the ideal of the *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood. Media that is consumed by children often comes under criticism, as has been discussed before, for sullying the 'innocence' of childhood. My argument in this section is not on whether the 'innocence' of childhood is maintained despite the children's consumption of television, while one refers to an ideal, and the other to the practice. It has rather been of interest to see how children's television consumption, as part of the leisure culture is related to the *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood in urban West Bengal.

The overall increase in the numbers of children's television channels and programmes particularly cartoons and serials for children, have also created a heightened awareness on the part of children about a distinctive form of media appropriate for children –„I don't like those er..elderly things..I watch some magical things". This on no account means that children do not watch anything other than cartoons or children's channels, but the media that come with the official marker of being exclusively for children usually involve less negotiation with parents and parental control, than others. Animés often contain adult content, a theme discussed in the context of cultural reactions to manga and animé in other cultures such as the USA (West 2009). In *Doraemon* as well, there are references to romance, a theme that is not highly approved of by parents for children in Bengal, – one of the reasons why most Hindi films are not encouraged. One of the programmes, *Shin Chan* was temporarily taken off air because of its inappropriate language and the way children were said to be influenced by *Shin Chan*'s behaviour. However, children's programmes are subject to less control for appropriateness than other programmes. Being animated and broadcast on a children's channel seem to automatically carry with it the image of child appropriate. It is possibly this character of the Indian children's media and the values related to

childhood in urban Bengal, that account for a relatively standardized space of children's media culture, where different groups of children irrespective of gender, family background and school, come together. The children depending on their backgrounds, might or might not have read Enid Blyton or *Bantul di Great* comics (Kundu 2011) or heard of Leela Majumdar, but almost all children were familiar with *Doraemon*.

The media contributes to the cultural moratorium of childhood, by producing a range of shows and by heightening the sense of children being a distinct group from adults and adolescents, even in their tastes as consumers. Additionally, regardless of the reasons of the success of foreign media, it is significant that they have a more standardized presence in the lives of middle class children than other foreign influences in children's leisure culture have had. While children's books in Bengali and English, emphasize a sentiment of childhood as a special phase to be nurtured, in the previous generations, and to some extent in the contemporary generation, they indicate certain levels of cultural capital and family background. In contrast, the children's familiarity with animés is standard irrespective of these differences, and to some degree, irrespective of parental wishes to acquaint children with something 'more educational'. *The Famous Five* and *Doraemon* represent different ends of a spectrum in the journey of protected childhoods for some sections of the Bengali middle class to a more standardized phenomenon. In this sense the adventures of Nobita Nobi are emblematic of the *Bildungsmoratorium* in Bengal.

8. Together and Apart: Class, Gender and Generation in Children's Culture

In her seminal work on gender and children's play Barrie Thorne effectively uses and discusses the significance of Goffman's expression 'with-then-apart' to refer to ways in which children are separated in temporary instances according to gender and come together in other contexts rather than absolute segregation between girls and boys (Thorne 1999). I have borrowed from Thorne's perspective on gender with regard to children and children's culture, as also the title from one of her chapters in *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School* in this chapter to discuss some aspects of childrens culture, particularly leisure culture, and its relation to gender, class and the different generations.

The concept of 'with-then-apart' used in the context of gender is significant because it draws attention to the changing, fluid forms of interaction and also softens a perspective of dichotomies into a perspective that allows the terrain of everyday interaction and relationships to be seen in its layers and complexity, – pointing to the 'together' and the 'apart'. While this approach is suitable in areas where the everyday lives of girls and boys show patterns related to gender, as has been discussed in the later sections, the perspective is useful for other aspects, especially related to the leisure culture of children where crosscutting gender, class, and generation, some patterns emerge, and diverge in other contexts. The dualism of 'girls' and 'boys' that Thorne thinks is misleading, and draws attention to in her discussion of 'borderwork', exists in other contexts apart from gender, especially between groups within the middle class differing in levels of economic and cultural capital, and also between the three generations. In my interviews, especially when children talked about leisure culture, or older generations talked about the difference in the cultures of childhood, the empirical data seemed to resonate with Thorne's together-but-apart approach, that drew attention to how dualisms of generation and background are sometimes framed.

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Unlike Thorne's study or other studies of children at play, this research is based on interviews with children about their everyday lives and with two older generations about their childhood. Separation and union, in the sense of 'together' and 'apart' cannot be observed in the sense they are in a study of children's interactions in a school or playground. At the same time, the accounts of the children and the older generations showed patterns where children across generations, or family backgrounds or gender talked about similar practices, tastes and experiences which separated in other contexts. Thorne's concept evoked mostly in the context of ritualized play is not used here to specifically discuss process of 'framing' but to examine aspects which crosscut across generations, cultural capital and gender and sometimes vary within a generation, gender or class background. This interweaving in which children, as well as practices in childhood come together and diverge is suitably represented by this imagery of the fluid changing aspect of children's interaction.

The difference in which childhood is experienced by girls and boys is often addressed in childhood research, particularly reflected in the terms 'girlhoods' and 'boyhoods'. Gender, however was not sought essentially in this research as an aspect of sovereign difference, bifurcating children's and childhood experiences into those belonging to girls and those to boys. At the same time, it was an aspect that came up, in different contexts for example, in accounts about friends, playmates, clothes and household chores. Some of these aspects are discussed in the next sections.

While the previous chapter explores 'leisure' hour pursuits, in the sense of certain kinds of after-school lessons and 'play', the leisure activities of children in all three generations involve other kinds of 'extra lessons' such as singing, dancing and art. Differences of family background, especially cultural capital are reflected in some of these practices, though to a greater extent, they are aligned according to gender. Again, within the contemporary generation of children, cutting across gender, certain leisure pursuits and leisure lessons are common to children from similar family backgrounds, with similar levels of cultural and economic capital.

Another aspect of children's leisure that is dominant in the children's accounts and the accounts of the older cohorts is culture predominantly in the sense of books and for the contemporary cohort of children, other forms of media, particularly television. The domain of children's culture, though visibly different across the generations, reflect alignment with cultural capital – most particularly in the case of books, and in the domain of visual media, particularly television, certain kinds of television programmes are more commonly consumed among the contemporary generation of children, irrespective of cultural capital, economic capital and gender – thereby contributing to the standardizing influence of

childhood as a cultural moratorium among the middle classes in urban West Bengal.

Leisure culture of children in itself is a significant reflection of the urban Bengali middle class culture, where apart from a rich tradition of children's literature in Bengali, a preoccupation with European culture, particularly British literature, as well as a hostile attitude to some Indian cultures, notably the 'Hindi' culture of North India – find their roots in the *Bhadralok* legacy of Bengal and are strong even in the accounts of the older generations about their childhood. The affiliation to different forms within this leisure culture, in the accounts of all three cohorts reflect a tendency that has been for a long time reflected in the public sphere as a tussle between 'Bengali' and 'Western' children's culture (the next chapter). In this sense the narratives about reading in leisure hours reflect a similarity across the generations, at the same time the nature of 'foreign' influences on children's culture in urban West Bengal changed noticeably and enormously after India's economic liberalization in the 1990s, when foreign media entered the Indian market, changing the genre of media culture, and the leisure culture in general of children in urban India. The emergence of certain forms of children's programmes in television – such as cartoons, and the popularity of specific cartoon and other programmes among the children, signal a terrain of leisure culture that unites children across gender and family background within the urban middle class in West Bengal, strengthening the moratorium aspect of middle class childhood.

In these different domains particularly within the space of the family and media – leisure careers, household chores assigned to children, tastes in clothing, picking out of books, swapping of comics or trifles about favourite television programmes, the approval or permission to watch or read some things but not others –an entire universe becomes alive through the accounts of the three cohorts, that markedly reflects a terrain of culture specific to children. The narratives draw attention on one hand to the cultural moratorium of childhood among the urban middle classes in West Bengal, at the same time reflecting changing patterns within and across generations that derive meaning from practices and values related to gender, culture and family backgrounds that occur within a seemingly standardized tradition of middle class childhood.

8.1 Girlhoods and Boyhoods

> "Extensive gender separation and organizing mix-gender encounters as girls against the boys set off contrastive thinking and feed an assumption of gender as dichotomous and antagonistic difference. These social practices seem to express core truths: that boys and girls are separate and fundamentally different, as individuals and as groups. Other social practices that challenge this portrayal – drawing boys and girls together in relaxed and extended ways, emphasizing individual identities or social categories that cut across gender, acknowledging varation in the activities and interests of girls and boys – carry less perceptual weight. As do efforts by kids and adults to challenge existing gender arrangements. *But the occasion where gender is less relevant, or contested, are also part of the construction of gender relations*".
>
> Barrie Thorne, *Gender play:Girls and boys in school,* 1999

When I set out to do the interviews with the children, looking specifically for gender related patterns in the accounts was not a dominant part of my agenda. Particularly, since the method of data collection was interviews with 10-12 year old children, most of them invidually, some in groups, there was less scope for observing children's interaction with one another. However, after several interviews, in the children's accounts of and reactions to some of my questions about friendship, there were glimpses of what Thorne calls 'borderwork' (Ibid). Most of the children went to either girls' schools or boys' schools. Friendships were mostly within the same gender, a pattern comparable to children in other cultural contexts as documented by many researches. In addition, a majority of the children, 22 out of the 33 were the only children in their families, and even fewer with siblings of the other gender of a comparable age, therefore comparison of being a girl or a boy within the family was not possible. The patterns began to take shape, with the interviews of the older cohorts, where respondents, both male and female, sometimes referred directly to the specificity of being a girl or being a boy. Women, more particularly referred to gender, although the context was not always one of duality between girls and boys. Rather, relaxation of gender roles for children, that were normative for adults in Bengali middle class families, was often cited by several women, sometimes to emphasize the generosity or 'broad mindedness' of their families, though the assertions were sometimes more implicit, as humorous incidents, or simply as childhood anecdotes. These addressed the issues of being a girl or a boy in a direct, reflective way while the interviews with the children gave a picture of what they did, who they interacted with and how, what clothes they wore or did not like to wear and so forth. Together, they form a comprehensive picture of how strands of gender are woven into the everyday lives of children from middle class families.

As Thorne (1999) emphasizes, focusing on gender essentially as something that has to be dichotomously understood is misleading in many ways. Yet such dualism of perspective in the case of childhood is tempting, particularly because

of the availability of terminology, practices, differentiated schools, and media objects and images that reinforce this frame where girls and boys are separate, opposites, Sarah Crewe against Tom Sawyer, Hello Kitty against Beyblades. In West Bengal, the gender dichotomy among children exists as in many cultures, in anthropomorphic depictions of the gods and goddesses in their childhood, in folklore, popular fiction for children, rhymes and encompassing all of these, in the Bengali language. The term *chhelebela* or boyhood is often used like the gender neutral *chhotobela* or childhood, to refer to childhood for girls and boys. The portrayal of girls and boys in twentieth century children's literature and in popular conception mirrored the adult world to some extent. However, the ways in which gender informs the everyday lives of children is far from the pitting against one another that a dualistic conception of girlhood against boyhood presumes. In the interviews with the children and the older generations, the aspects where, just as Thorne (1999) says, gender is less relevant, are particularly significant in the meanings and values they derived from existing or previous gender relationships.

In the next sections, I have looked at some of these aspects which are related to gender but where class, levels of cultural capital, family background, culture and relative age of the children are significant in defining some practices of childhood as well as family values of childhood, which have a bearing on the children's everyday lives, as well as that of children in the following generations of a family. Some of the respondents from the older cohorts come from markedly lower middle class families with lower levels of cultural capital (where family occupations include fish business, running a grocery store) and some from families which are markedly high in cultural and economic capital (where both parents were educated till postgraduate degree, where fathers worked as engineers or in white collar posts for British companies). These differences in family backgrounds provide a rich diversity that enables one to see the patterns in which gender in combination with factors of class, cultural capital and generation has different meanings for different groups of children across time and social background.

8.2 Gender, Generation and Changing Insignia in Childhood Moratorium

In the transition from a society where special sentiments of childhood did not exist to one with an increasingly heightened sentiment about children and childhood as separate from adults and adulthood, certain practices become imbued

with special significance, marking the acknowledgement of this separation and guarding the boundary between the world of adults and that of children. In the context of West Bengal, an exact idea of the historical context of the emergence of childhood is not known, nor is it known if society in the region known as Bengal, was devoid of a sentiment about childhood in the sense Ariés argues for pre-17th century Western Europe. What is however known is that certain practices that were essential aspects of Bengali, often Bengali Hindu tradition, came to be questioned in the nineteenth century by colonial administrators and by indigenous social and religious reformers as inhumane, especially as they involved children (Burton 1998; Sen, Forbes & Raychaudhuri 2000; Kerkhoff 1995). Child marriage and widow burning were some of the most common among these practices that were held up by reformers and colonial administrators as ills of a society where the tragic destinies of children portrayed the decadence of and the need to reform the moral fabric of Bengali society. The children or young people in question were as young as five to girls in their teens.

The reference to girls in fiction and autobiographies from the late nineteenth century show a picture of a social context that was still too close to its history of *kulin*ism and child widows, but with significant markers of a new era, where colonial rule and social reform movements brought with them new values and practices attached to being young and female among the Bengali *bhadralok* – new insignia of urban middle class girlhood. Between colonial policies and the *Brahmo* reformers, the age of marriage of girls was raised (Sinha 1995), compared to earlier times and the portrayal of girls from this period till well into the twentieth century, point to an in between stage for children, notably from the age of 10 and above, where the conflicting roles of future womanhood as well as the *Bhadralok* sensibility of 'letting' girls be children are reflected. The emergence of specific notions of 'girlhoods' in Bengal and in other parts of India is on the one hand very closely linked to the colonial context, but on the other hand, as some scholars point out, a particular focus of historical research on different social issues in colonial India also impede a clear understanding of children's lives or girlhoods as issues in themselves, pitting them rather, as objects of symbolic and political struggle between 'colonialists' and 'nationalists' (Anagol 2008, Ellis 2009). In an analysis of the portrayal by both sides of the issue of child marriage and legal sexual intercourse with child brides in the wake of the trial of Rukmabhai[61] in the nineteenth century, Burton (1998) says that “Rukhmabai's case be-

61 Rukhmabai was a woman from western India, who was married at the age of eleven to a nineteen year old man. She did not however, move in with her husband for over eight years. In 1884 when she was nineteen, her husband Dadaji Bhikaji petitioned the Bombay High Court, so that his wife would be directed to stay with him. Rukhmabai's refusal to cohabit with her husband, and the ensuing debate surrounding the proceedings of the trial, became themes of discussion in Britain and India, and is regarded as one of the precursors to the Age of Consent Act.

came something of an ideological football" (Burton 1998, p.1123), not unlike the case of Phulmoni, which triggered intense debate between indigenous reformers, Hindu traditionalists, and colonial administrators on the subject of the stipulated age of sexual intercourse for child brides.

Kerkhoff's (1995), *Save Ourselves and the Girls!* is one of the few works which look at the question of girlhoods in colonial India as a subject of research in itself. She provides an indepth study of how girlhoods were constructed, practised and remade by reformers, missionaries, administrators, families, and by girls themselves during the Raj. She focuses on the emerging significance of girls' education in nineteenth century Bengal and locates it within the context of the nationalist movement. The accounts of Kerkhoff and other scholars, on the issue of girlhood, point to the project of female education in nineteenth century Bengal, as signifying the emergence of an idea of 'girlhood'. The childhood of girls were not so much emphasized in these 'projects', as the ideological significance of the socialization of the girls. Chatterjee (1989) says that the issue of female education was a 'contentious' one, as it became a battleground between the Christian missionaries and the indigenous reformers. The present study focuses more on the experience of girlhoods among the Bengali middle classes than on the symbolic significance of childhood or girlhood in the nationalist and colonial debates. However, the 'project' aspect of childhood, especially the ideals behind the socialization of Bengali middle class girls into *bhadramahila*s, is a significant aspect in the construction of girlhoods among the Bengali middle class, and in the implications it had for the experience of childhood of girls not simply in colonial Bengal, but also among the contemporary Bengali middle class.

In the following decades, the coexistence or the suggestion of the roles of 'womanhood' further receded from the notions and practices of girlhood, especially among the upper sections of the educated urban Bengali middle class, but the childhood of girls nevertheless bore significant markers of the context it emerged from. These markers in the form of dress, play, access to education, took a more dominant and visible shape, almost in defense of the childhood that orthodox Bengali Hindu tradition threatened in the decades before and haunted the modern conjugal middle class domestic sensibility in its ebb. The childhood of girls in this context, has a special significance, as the cultural moratorium of childhood in Bengal begins to be visible from around the same time as the emergence of the sentiment that girls needed protection and 'time out' from their future roles as *bhadramahila*[62], and protection from the adult world had a double significance for girls because apart from recognizing them as children, it exempted them even if for some years, from adult roles and expectations that their male counterparts did not experience until much later.

62 The female counterpart of the *bhadralok*, and the Bengali equivalent of the term 'lady'.

8.2.1 The Journey of the Bengali 'Frock'

The 'frock' heralded this modern urban *Bhadralok* sensibility of girlhood in the late nineteenth till mid twentieth century Bengal. The term derived from the name of the British article of clothing, is a dress, sometimes with special sleeves, worn by women and young girls. The frock was possibly brought to India as children's clothing by the colonial rulers. Though the origin and the background of the tradition of wearing frocks in India or in Bengal is not known, the interviews with women from the older generations draw attention to the significance of the 'frock' for Bengali children even in the years after Independence. The significance of the frock, derives meaning from its divergence from the traditional attire of the sari for Bengali girls and women of all ages in the nineteenth century. For the generation of women who grew up in the 1950s, the tradition of wearing frocks was already in practice among the urban Bengali middle class. However, in the negotiations of a permissive middle class childhood with tradition, the age till which one could wear a frock and put off wearing the sari, as well as of course the style and the length of the frocks differed with family values and therefore also across class backgrounds. Also, because of the western connotation of the frock, in the early twentieth century, it was limited to certain social sections of the Bengali society and had three prerequisites – i)those who could afford separate western attire for children whereas the sari was cheaper and usually at hand, not necessarily having specific sizes for children and adults and therefore allowing children to wear saris of other women in the family, ii) those whose values and habitus exposed them to the practice of European clothing for young children as well as access so as to procure these; and iii) those whose values and beliefs permitted them to stand against or put off tradition in their decisions related to their children, especially girls.

All these prerequisites encompass aspects of economic, social and cultural capital that limited the frock to the upper echelons of Bengali society till the early twentieth century so that the practice of wearing frocks was largely a mark of educated urban upper middle and middle class childhoods. For the oldest respondent in this research, some of this social and cultural context had already changed, and the frock was worn and afforded by a greater number of social sections in the 1950s, though these sections mostly belonged to the middle class. However its history left its mark in the forms of negotiation that was made between the frock and some aspects of tradition.

In many girls' schools in West Bengal, the school uniform decided the age till which the frock was worn in the 1950s, and usually after a certain class girls were required to wear the sari. Though practices at home and practices in school did not always resonate, it seemed a natural decision to start wearing a sari at

home, once a girl got into the habit of wearing the sari to school every day. Possibly economic reasons made it all the more practical, however, the wearing of the sari also signaled womanhood and youth opposed to girlhood, and could have well been a novelty for young girls after wearing frocks, in the phase before it wore off. Therefore, the choice between or the transition from the frock or 'dress' as it is also sometimes called, was a more complex one. On the one hand while it might have stood for the affectionate indulgence of parents who wanted to delay their daughters' entry into young womanhood and the roles and difficulties that came with it, it did not necessarily mean that young girls resented wearing the sari, particularly as its association with being 'grown up' might have made it attractive in the eyes of some girls. These cannot be definitely known, however the accounts of some of the respondents from the 1950s generation give a glimpse of the different practices of children's attire and the attitudes and values of some families that were reflected in this.

Nalini Haldar, a 64 year old woman who went to a missionary girls' school in Kolkata, mentions the rules of school uniform as determining her transition to the sari:

H.S: And what clothes did you wear in your childhood?

N.H.: Clothes..well, I mostly used to wear frocks, and sari. Nothing else apart from these.

H.S: Did you choose them, or did your parents, or someone chose them for you?

N.H. : No, with saris..when I was older, maybe sometimes I would go and pick out and buy something I liked, but not so much with the frocks.

H.S: When did you start wearing the sari?

N.H. : Sari, I think..from (class) nine ten. In our school at that time, it started from nine ten..

(Interview with Nalini Haldar, December 2010).

Some respondents talked about negotiations about the cut and the style of frock that they wanted or did not want to wear. In the accounts of Mitali Dhar, a 64 year old woman, the anecdotes related to attire emphasize the broadmindedness of her family on one hand, at the same time hinting towards forms of attire that were considered unsuitable for young girls.

„From the age of twelve Thakuma helped me wear my first sari. I was 5'3“. If I wore frocks, my knees would show. That's why sari..the clothes we wore as children..tied with two small ribbons..nowadays fashion designers make just clothes like that. We would wear something over that. I didn't ever wear *salwar kameez*“ (Interview with Mitali Dhar, February 2011).

The accounts are closely intertwined with the views of her family and the statement 'knees would show' as well as the reference to the *salwar kameez*[63] is a direct reflection of family values as well as general social values dominant among

63 The traditional long blouse with pants worn in North and West India and traditionally associated with the Muslim communities of these regions.

Hindu Bengali middle class families, where some forms of attire were considered improper for girls especially because of their cultural connotations. At the same time, conservative values of the family did not not go without some form of defiance. She narrates an anecdote where she expressed her distaste for the frocks she was made to wear as a child:

> „I was then in class three. Ma at that time made me an *enormous* (emphasis) frock..it reached till much below our knees. I cut it up (laughs)..I didn't get scolded. Baba said, 'make her a frock the way she wants it'„ (Interview with Mitali Dhar, February 2011)

Other accounts of respondents from this and the next generation reflect such conflicts arising from a family background with high cultural capital, at the same time with a mix of liberal and traditional conservative values that was far from uncommon among sections of the educated Bengali middle class. Anecdotes sometimes highlight both aspects within the family –that of the generous indulgence of families in allowing an attire that was wholly western, and thereby acknowledging girls as children, – as well the Bengali Hindu traditional values that were guarded despite some amount of permissiveness. Pranati Sengupta, a 72 year old woman who grew up in a family with considerably high levels of cultural capital in comparison to other respondents – both men and women from her generation – similarly draws attention to both these aspects. She says she wore dresses till the age of 12. The indulgence of her family as well as levels of economic and cultural capital are reflected in her accounts about how she was sometimes taking to the dressmakers' – a decided novelty for little girls – to buy frocks of her choice.

> „Ma made some of my dresses and sometimes we bought them from P. Majumdar, (a dressmakers')... at the Deshapriya Park turning. Once after I returned from holidays in Delhi and saw how girls in Delhi dressed, I wanted to wear a *Salwar Kameez*,. But I did not dare ask for one". (Interview with Pranati Sengupta, February 2011).

While most of the respondents from this generation spoke of frocks being made at home by their mothers with material their fathers bought, some respondents talked about 'ready-made frocks' which were a novelty. A further novelty was taking a child to a dressmaker's to get her fitted for a frock. The practice reflects two aspects that are significant to the class background of the children. Going to a dressmakers' implied a certain degree of affluence as well as a mentality of the family, where indulging in the wishes of children, even occasionally as a luxury presumes a certain level of cultural capital. While these point to the upper sections of the middle class, other strands in the anecdotes of the respondents draw attention to the layered nature of family habitus, where family sentiments and class values display an apparently paradoxical mix. Like Mitali Dhar, Pranati Sengupta was introduced to the sari by the authoritative female figure in her joint family, her father's mother. „At the age of 13, Thakuma gave me the sari, after

that not one day did I wear anything but the sari..I would sleep in a sari“ (Interview with Pranati Sengupta, February 2011).

Clearly, the lines of cultural permissiveness were drawn along the length and form of attire for girls as well as the age till which it was considered appropriate for girls to dress in frocks. While knee length frocks negotiated with the modesty for Bengalis from '*bhadro*' or respectable households, despite some amount of leniency, the attitude towards the *salwar kameez* draws attention to another aspect in the cultural dimension. The *salwar kameez* was traditionally the attire of Muslim girls, especially among Muslim communities outside of Bengal. The attire had therefore the double connotation of being associated with the Islamic tradition, as well as with non-Bengali culture, particularly of the Hindi speaking regions, – the attitude of the *Bhadralok* towards which, was less than cordial. In this sense, the frock despite being a Western import, was more neutral than the *salwar kameez* in terms of religious and cultural connotations, and in the emerging cultural moratorium of childhood that included girls, even if for a shorter period than boys, – the frock or the dress became the chosen emblem in 'letting' girls be children.

That the frock was not always well received by children, is also reflected in some accounts where respondents speak of some resentment they felt towards the kind of frocks they were made to wear.

Dipshikha Kundu, a 66 year old woman who grew up in Kolkata talks about her mild dislike for the frock. „Sometimes Baba would buy the material. Ma made it at home, My sisters would sometimes buy me readymade frocks..those who were married.....Then I didn't like it, now when I see it I think (laughs) – 'I could have worn something like that (laughs' „ (Interview with Dipshikha Kundu, January 2011).

At the same time, in the accounts of remembered childhoods, the frock, for several women of this generation, typically represents the vestiges of a girlhood left behind for an adult life from which they did not turn back. In this sense the British frock, moulded and fitted to the Bengali sentiments were as much an emblem of childhood to some generations of women from sections of the Bengali upper and middle classes, as it was a flag of the cultural moratorium of middle class childhood for girls, standing for a lifephase that was in some aspects carefree, protected, where education was tolerated and play was allowed. This flag was also a reminder of all that was being warded off – puberty, womanhood, marriage, motherhood, familial responsibilities – that waited for girls on the other side.

In the accounts of the following generation where childhood as a cultural moratorium was more established, particularly for girls from the middle and lower sections of the middle class, than the previous generation, there is a decided shift in cultural practices for girls related to clothing. The shift reflects not

just a shift in culture, but also a shift in the meanings that some cultural objects came to have for the Bengali middle class, and that different sections of the middle class chose to associate or distance themselves from, just as groups of children in revelling or resenting in a certain attire, added further meanings to these objects, paving the way for the reaction of following generations of children towards them.

Frocks were mentioned by some of the women respondents in the following generation although the clothes mentioned by women were more varied compared to the previous generation, as well as to that of boys. Skirts and blouses fashioned from the western style were worn by girls alongside frocks. The term 'dress' is used more often in this generation than the term 'frock', possibly implying to some extent that its novelty as a foreign and special garment had worn off for this generation of middle class children. In addition, the widespread practice of frocks for young girls meant it was no longer a forte of the 'cultured' middle and upper middle classes. The affordability of children's frocks, as well as its widespread usage made the frock déclassé, at the same time it became a standard attire of girls from most sections within the Bengali middle class.

Madhuri De, a 40 year old woman who grew up in a family that ran a fish business mentions the frock in a context that is in absolute contrast or rather, inverted, to those in the accounts of the previous generation.

H.S: What kind of clothes did you wear?..When you were about Mom's (her daughter) age?

M.D.: Most of the time I would wear frocks,..it was a conservative family. My mother very eagerly..that is she liked it very much... bought me a..hat they call three quarter now, a pedalpusher like that...

H.S: Yes

M.D: At that my *Jethu* (father's older brother) was very angry..That is, he said girls in the family..Well he scolded only Ma (emphasis) that at such a young age I was wearing something like that..because no one from our family wore things like that, to the extent that there was not even a trend of wearing sleeveless. Ma and the other women would sometimes secretly wear (sleeveless blouses worn under the sari) or when they were visiting someone.

H.S: Yes.

M.D.: That is, in those days it was a little..these things were a little conservative, and my mother and the others (women) even now cover their faces in front of my *Jethu* or *Dadu* (Grandfather) with the *ghomta*[64].

H.S: Ok

M.D.: That is they still do, even my younger brother's wife does. Because my father and my uncle are there.

64 The *ghomta* is a part of the sari which is used as a veil to cover the head and the face. It was traditionally worn by married Hindu women in front of males and though the practice is less widespread among urban middle class families today, it nevertheless exists in some households, and found on some religious and cultural occasions.

H.S: In your childhood did your opinion count, about what kind of clothes one wanted or did not want to wear?

M.D. :No, one didn't listen to them much..I wore whatever Ma bought. When I was a bit older, maybe sometimes I would say that I want to wear this dress like this, or this thing. But as I said, because I wore pants, I was..they did not scold me..scolded me just a little, saw me. He scolded Ma terribly (Interview with Madhuri De, January 2011).

The most striking comment in this interview is the association made by the respondent between wearing frocks and a conservative family background dominated by a hierarchy of male authority. On one hand, the example shows the widely established practice of frocks for Bengali girls, where it was usual for children to wear dresses from families with lower levels of cultural capital and from lower sections of the middle class unlike their previous generation, where most of the respondents were from families with higher levels of cultural capital. On the other hand, the relation established by the respondent that appears very obvious – is a remarkable expression of how the meaning of the frock had changed in a generation, along with its exclusive class character.

If the older generation's accounts of the frock point to an emerging moratorium of childhood for girls, this remark signals the establishment of girlhood as a cultural moratorium for increasing social sections in urban West Bengal. However the standardization of the dress in the cultural moratorium of middle class childhood did not mean negotiations with tradition did not have to be made. Rather, the dress was no longer against Bengali tradition, as long as it conformed to certain cuts and styles and was worn by girls up to a certain stage, before they wore the sari. New forms of clothing, like pants or sleeveless blouses were the bolder and more anti-traditional forms of clothing for children, and thereby reserved again to some sections of the educated urban middle class in West Bengal. In the meantime the S*alwar Kameez* attained a new status among young girls, though presumably in their early teens. It was no longer unthinkable, or taboo for sections of the Hindu Bengali middle class to allow their daughters to wear it, yet the taste and the cultural values that permitted its wearing, mostly confined it to those sections of the middle class who were liberal, less conservative and by implication with greater cultural capital.

Just as in the previous generation, the style of frocks and the age till which it was seen as suitable for girls – usually until puberty – reflected the generosity and liberal outlook of families, in the following generation, the permission to wear other forms of attire and the age till which these were worn similarly represented the attitudes of the family and family towards the children and the family background. Shubha Thakur, a respondent who grew up in Bandel and Kolkata in the 1980s in a family of teachers and service sector professionals gives an account of her childhood.

H.S: What kind of clothes did you wear in your childhood?

S.T: Clothes, we wore everything. No, well..we wore so to speak..things like pants were not very common in our time. I wore the salwar kameez, I wore a lot of skirts. And that is,..when they were looking for a match for me..that is even while shopping for my wedding, I went out wearing skirts.

H.S: Was there anything that you did not like to wear or had to wear..clothes?

S.T: No, nothing specific. I didn't wear saris much. Eh..in school, in (class) eleven twelve the dress was sari..then I wore it. That is, in school. But that did not mean I wore it at home (Interview with Shoma Thakurta, Decemeber 2010).

The reference to the age till which skirts were worn – upto her marriage, – as well as the clear distinction between mandatory practices at school and practices in the family are a decisive shift from the previous generation, marking an extended period in which some adult roles, – at least in the case of attire – were put off, as well as the emergence of the family as a more permissive and protective domain of the moratorium, where girls had 'time out' even if in other institutional settings – school or outside – they were required to abide by a more adult, and traditional code of conduct.

While in some of these accounts of this generation, especially those from upper or middle sections of the middle class mention other forms of attire, the status of the frock although partially reflected in these accounts is clearly articulated by some respondents. For example in an interview with Ketaki Sengupta, a 47 year old woman, the question was asked if she could choose her own clothes. She emphasized that her clothes were chosen for her until she was in class 11 or 12, when she went with friends and bought s*alwar kameez* from New Market. At the same time she clarifies the kind of clothes she wore when she was younger, and her narrative style and choice of words and intonation convey how she regarded this clothing.

„During *Pujo* [65] they would buy a piece (dress material) and it was given to the tailor to have the frocks stitched..and do you know *which* kind of frock it was?..That long frock with belts“ (Interview with Ketaki Sengupta, February 2011).

The humour as well as the disfavour with which the frock was perceived is unmistakable in this account. Although one respondent from the previous generation mentioned a similar dislike towards the length of the frock, in this account of a woman growing up in Kolkata in the 1980s, what is reflected is more than an individual taste. It had already become *the* frock – a type, a trope ('do you know *which* kind of frock it was?') of an attire that groups of children from one section of the middle class from a particular generation had no choice but to wear, but which gradually came to be perceived as unfashionable and ridiculous even as the girls entered their teens.

65 The *Durga Puja* or *Pujo* is the biggest cultural festival of the Bengali Hindus. The tradition of wearing new clothes in this festival, meant that many children and young people were given new clothes mostly this time of the year, where some amount of choice and luxury could sometimes be exercised.

In the contemporary generation of children interviewed, some of them – girls and boys talked about clothes. An advantage was being able to observe in person the kind of clothes the children were wearing. All the children interviewed attended school where school uniforms were mandatory. Moreover, despite different uniforms in terms of style and colours and monograms, there was a common code of dress that pertained to gender – for girls it was usually a skirt and a tucked in school shirt, though in some schools children wore tunics with a belt in the lower classes, or a *salwar kameez* in the school colours; for boys it was always a shirt and shorts or the 'half-pant' or trousers, depending on if it was summer or winter. Apart from that, many of the children who were interviewed at home or outside school, wore a variety of clothes, pants, t-shirts, jeans being common to both girls and boys, though sometimes with difference in style, as well as skirts and blouses and pinafores worn by the girls. Unlike the previous generation, girls from different family backgrounds wore or mentioned jeans, *salwar kameez* and skirts and leggings as things they usually wore or liked to wear. Boys almost unanimously talked about liking cargoes or jeans.

The practice of wearing the *salwar kameez* and its adaptation in urban Bengali middle class culture as well as children's culture reflect a shift in the cultural connotations of the attire not just in West Bengal but all over India. In the previous decades though the *salwar kameez* has not entirely lost its association with Muslim culture, its north Indian, and later pan-Indian images have become more appealing associations and as such won it a cosmopolitan status in different parts of India, significantly in regions like West Bengal where sections of the middle class were opposed to many aspects of north Indian culture. However the *salwar kameez* to some extent like the sari – because of its traditional background, has something of an adult status, possibly a reason why some of the children, usually 11 or 12 years old, mentioned adaptations of the traditional outfit. Some of the girls mentioned that they sometimes wore or liked to wear *kurtis* – a term that is possibly comparatively recent and derived from the *kurta*[66] – a diminutive version of the longer tunic worn by adults. The cut and the styles of the *kurtis* aimed for children, teenagers and women were varied, often coming close to the more Western attire in their length and collars and material used. Neither was the *kurti* as mentioned by the children interviewed, always worn with the traditional loose or fitting pants. In another adaptation of the outfit for children, it appeared to be worn mostly with jeans or leggings.

Although in no interview with the contemporary generation of children, was the sari once mentioned, – the sari, and other forms of traditional Indian attire for women or men in general, were an overpowering aspect in the contemporary children's culture in their very absence. Though even a generation ago, the sari was unquestionably the garb of adulthood for middle class Bengali women, that

66 The *kurta* is the long tunic worn over the *salwar* by men and women.

some amount of negotiation with other forms of clothing would eventually give way to, – the very culture of adulthood among the urban Bengali middle class has changed considerably. Against this background, two patterns are distinctive among the clothes of middle class children in West Bengal, particularly girls. One is the almost complete disappearance of the sari in the childhood of girls well until adolescence, with the exception of special cultural rituals or programmes where the sari is worn as a novelty or for the fun of dressing up as grown-ups. The second is the cultural mix in the clothing culture of children, especially girls – where not only western attire, but clothes from other parts of India that are distinctively non-Bengali are now worn by children in Kolkata and Bandel in general. Though particular styles and materials, as well as places where they are bought, and the degree of choice allowed to a child in picking clothes vary across background, relative age, gender and economic and cultural capital, – the distinction between less Western and more traditional and its correspondence to upper and lower sections of the middle class are not as stark nor as straightforward as they used to be in the previous generations. And where some forms of traditional clothing, even if from a non-Bengali cultural background were worn by the children – especially for girls, – these were often paired with other kinds of attire or styled, almost to mellow or eradicate associations with adulthood. For boys, in all three generations, these changes are less distinctive, as the Western attire of shirt and trousers remained constant in all the generations and have a long tradition in Bengal among adults and children, although some respondents from the 1950s generation mentioned wearing the *dhuti*[67] on cultural occasions, and more often the traditional shirt – the *panjabi*.

The clothing norms, especially in the case of girls, have undergone a dramatic change in the three generations, with a lesser degree of change between the '80s generation and the contemporary generation of children.. The ease with which the certainty of the sari being unquestionably the only attire for Bengali girls above 12, declined in sixty years, till in the 1980s, it became the least likely attire of little girls from Bengali middle class families is one of many aspects of the transformations in children's lives in Bengal. In this transition, in the clothing norms and culture for girls from the urban Bengali middle class, the stages and the changing outlines of the cultural moratorium of childhood can be traced. The British Bengali frock in its changing stature from a symbol of western tastes and liberal attitudes to an epitome of everything 'uncool' reflects the stages in this process. As an 11 year old respondent, who attends an English medium missionary girls' school, in reply to a question of things she disliked wearing, said:

> "Well, now if someone gives me a frock or something like that to wear, *I don't like it.* It's just a little..uncool[68]. *I just don't like it*. But if I have to wear a *partywear frock*, then it's alright, at

67 The traditional garment worn by Bengali men, in the form of a cloth draped around the legs.

68 The exact phrase used by the respondent Mithoo, is *gaiya gaiya*, meaning rural or provincial in a

least, it will still do. But otherwise, if at home I have to wear a frock..then no, absolutely no!" (Interview with Mithoo, January 2010, italicized portions originally in English).

The accounts and the discussion about the different forms of clothes have the siginificant role of reflecting the transformation of sentiment of the Bengali middle class in the three generations. As mentioned before, the entry of girls into the space of 'protected childhood' signals a significant stage in the cultural moratorium of childhood. Not insignificant is the relation of this transformation in children's, especially girls' culture, to the development of the *Bildungsmoratorium*. Allowing girls from higher caste Hindu Bengali families in the nineteenth and early twentieth century an education, and exempting them from wearing the sari, at least till the age of 12, were two sides of the same coin which reflected the sentiments of a specific social section in Bengal (Karlekar 2007). From the 1950s onwards, the generations of respondents who were interviewed, reflect an increasing strengthening of the boundaries of this *Bildungsmoratorium.* However, the conflict between this sentiment of childhood and aspects of traditional Hindu Bengali caste society are apparent in many ways. This conflict occurred across differences in class background, cultural capital and generation. In signifying the transformation from an emerging cultural moratorium where girls were partially included to one where childhood is standardized among greater sections of society across class and gender, the frock is the most compelling icon of the two significant aspects of the moratorium of childhood in Bengal – standardization of a model of protected childhood and the accompanying distinctions of class and family backgrounds within this standard childhood.

8.2.2 From the Novelty of Pot Stirring to Other Errands: Children, Gender and Household Chores in the Older Generations

As with children's clothing, other practices within the household likewise bring to light the position of children in the family. The assignment of household work to children is one such practice. Like the practice of wearing frocks*/salwar kameez/*sari, the household chores reserved for children and their division within the family, is more telling for girls – drawing attention to predominant sentiments about childhood, particular the form of protection accorded to girls over three generations.

derogatory way. For want of an adequate translation I have translated the connotation intended by using 'uncool'.

In the interviews with the respondents, accounts about helping out at home as children give a picture of several aspects of the family as well as of societal practices. A noticeable pattern in the the accounts is the relation of gender to household work for children, as has been discussed in this section. At the same time, the accounts of some of the respondents, in narrating the kind of 'help' of children the family deemed necessary and the kind of 'help' that was taken for granted by some children, or not considered help, or greatly appreciated – reflect the economic and social standing of the families as well as identifying specific sentiments and values in the family that give an idea of the class background as well as the dominant values and practices in different groups within the middle class.

The question about helping with household chores was often met with ambiguous answers, not unusual among which was quantification by using the term 'a little'. More than a question of recollecting rightly, the answers seemed to hinge on perceptions of 'chores' or 'work' as signified by the Bengali word *kaj*. This was true for female and male respondents, and the accounts of some of the respondents, who were more vocal about 'helping' at home, offered a clearer picture about the circumstances in which children 'helped' and the extent to which this help was a part of everyday life in some families, or considered unnecessary.

Some of the more elaborate accounts of household chores are from women in the '50s generation. In both of the older cohorts, a greater number of women talked more about helping at home than men, although the accounts far from assert a greater involvement of girls in chores than men, as the interviews show. A standard response from women and men were, sometimes, particularly from families with higher economic capital, – that one did not 'need' to help as children. In many of the accounts, respondents from the older generations, refer to domestic helps in the family, which rendered the help of children – in these accounts – as unnecessary. However, the context in which children's work were 'not needed' is more layered than that of available manpower, and between children's place in domestic chores being 'unnecessary' and 'undesired', – a picture of the family emerges where aspects of economic standing (having several domestic helps), social arrangements (a large joint family where household chores were the mostly the realm of adult women) and significantly family values – where aspects of class, sentiments about childhood, and gender relations interweave in the narratives.

A particularly noticeable pattern among women of the two older generations, was a narrative style where less or absence of engagement in household chores was also accompanied by specific anecdotes about fanciful engagements in some chores on special occasions for 'fun'. Sometimes the respondents explained the background to clarify why they did not 'have' to help. The picture of the family is often reflected in these accounts.

Pranati Sengupta, 72 who grew up in a joint family in South Kolkata, says that she did not have to help as a child as there were many people at home to help, domestic hands, people who worked in her father and uncles' business. She talks about indulging in making snacks during the festival of *Durga Puja*, when on *Bijoya Doshomi* she and her sister learnt to make *nimki*, crisp fried pieces of dough.

> "I couldn't even make tea..I made tea for the first time after marriage..neither did I do any domestic chores before marriage..If I stirred the pot a bit, my grandmother would say *Shonamuni*[69] has been cooking" (Interview with Pranati Sengupta, February 2011).

The narrative brings out several dimensions of the family background. The abundance of people to help – the domestic helps, the employees of the family business, as well as members of the family paint the picture of the affluent, bustling family as the references to occasional cooking or ignorance about chores fit in with the picture of an indulgent childhood. The statement about not knowing as well as not having to do housework until after marriage is significant in a social context with a history of girls being trained in domestic responsibilities from a young age. In this context this account brings out the novelty or the luxury of contributing to the kitchen duties on a special occasion. The reference to 'stirring' the pot and being fondly praised for 'cooking' add to this image of indulgence and draw attention to the distinction between adult female responsibilities and the position of the child in Bengali middle class families. At the same time, the gender related distinction is apparent. Purabi talks about her siblings in this context, saying, "If we helped at all, *Bhai*[70] never helped in domestic chores" (Pranati Sengupta, February 2011).

This narrative style, especially about dabbling in cooking on occasions, or being pampered is found among other accounts by women from this cohort and the 1980s' cohort. The account of Mitali Dhar a 72 year old woman who grew up in north Kolkata, is similar. Minu's answer to the question about helping at home, tends towards this pattern where children, – even girls, living in a middle class joint family with many older women and domestic hands, were not asked to help, or kept away from the kitchen. She does not simply say that she didn't help at home, rather, she emphasizes that she was pampered, which implies her acknowledgment of an existing tradition where girls did help in the housework.

> "I didn't do a thing..I was brought up with a lot of pampering. I had just one thing.. *I love cooking very much*!" When she speaks of her enthusiasm about cooking when she was in her teens, she too indicates that to an extent, it was something that was indulged in, – where domestic chores became a novelty *because* they were occasional, as also their circumstances and nature separated it from 'work', and at the same time the child's contribution in an arena that was primarily 'grown up' won the child affectionate praise of the family. In Minu's account she did help in household work when she was 14 or 15 years old, –, she cooked for almost a month when her mother was

69 An affectionate name for girls, meaning 'golden girl'.

70 Younger brother.

unwell and her aunt was away. The slightly fanciful aspect of cooking is indicated in her narrative when she talks about things she cooked – delicacies and snacks of Bengali cuisine–"Then I made *aloor chop* and *motorshutir kochuri*[71]" (Interview with Mitali Dhar, February 2011).

This pattern, of children being kept away from domestic chores, although found among several respondents in the three generations, is far from being the only form of account about children's engagement in household chores. Some respondents from all three generations, typically speak about helping at home, and the accounts noticeably reflect the family backgrounds of the children – girls and boys – where family values as well as economic conditions determined the work assigned to children in the family.

Dipshikha Kundu, a 66 year old woman was brought up in a joint family with her parents, six siblings, cousins and the families of her father's brothers, in a house in North Kolkata. After her Secondary examination at the age of sixteen, she spent several years at home before her marriage at the age of 21 and spent most of this time helping with the housework. Her account of domestic chores unfolds even when she talks about her school career. She studied in Oriental Seminary, a girls' school all throughout.

"After that..I stayed home..Baba did not like it that is, that his daughter would go to school after growing up. After *Madhyamik*, after the school-final, I was home for some days, work..I did household work. We have a family deity..*Narayanthakur*.. mm so I did household work, then I got married. Rather, after marriage I went around to places (laughs)" (Interview with Dipshikha Kundu, January 2011).

The reference to the phase in which she stayed home – before her marriage, as well as other references about her father's disapproval of a 'grown up' daughter going out, and the family deity – all point to dominant traditional family values and involvement in forms of household work, – particularly religious duties such as seeing to the family deity – which conform to the traditional Hindu religious expectations from young women as a preparatory phase before they are married. Although this full fledged engagement with domestic chores was in her teens, she also talks about helping at home when she was younger.

H.S: When you were about Rwiti 's(her granddaughter)age, did you have to help at home? In household work?

D.K. : Yes. That I had to do.

H.S: What did you have to do ?

D.K.: I had to help in all kinds of ways..we had to..because Baba Ma wanted that the girls helped in in the housework.

H.S: And your brothers?

D.K.: No, no. My brothers did not help (Interview with Dipshikha Kundu, January 2011).

71 *Aloor chop* is a potato croquet and *Motorshutir Kochuri* is a fried bread filled with green peas. Both belong to the order of snacks or food for special occasions.

The relation of gender with household work is clear in this account and the assertion that the brothers did not help is not unexpected in this context. Similar distinctions among children and involvement with domestic chores exist even among families where even if girls 'dabbled' in occasional housework, brothers or cousins did not do even that.

However, the differences in practices related to household chores are not neatly defined by principles of gender roles, nor the traditionalism of family values alone. Men, although fewer respondents among the older generations talk about household work, are far from invisible in the accounts about household chores, sometimes in their own narratives, and sometimes in the accounts of respondents talking about their siblings. Neither are the principles hierarchically and clearly defined in terms of greater responsibilities in household chores for girls, because of their traditional position as future wives and women of the household, while boys helped a little or not at all. Specific family contexts as well as considerations of age and the hierarchy of siblings in the household, and also the class background of the families defined the degree to which children did or did not take part in domestic chores.

The account of Chandramallika Chakrabarty, a 72 year old woman who grew up in South Kolkata with her mother, elder brothers and elder sister, draws attention to all these aspects as well as a sentiment about 'protected childhood'.

H.S:Did you help at home in your childhood, when you were about, ten or twelve years old?

C.C: I did not. Nandudi (elder sister) did. Because I was small, I did not.

H.S: Hm.

C.C.: Right. So because I was the smallest I did not..and that..and got everyone's affection and pampering.

H.S: Hm.

C.C.: And..also, I did not have my father.

H.S: Hm.

C.C.: I don't know what a father is.

H.S: Did your brothers help in household work?

C.C.: Dada (eldest brother)? He certainly did, he certainly did. *And Dada was very very careful*, for Ma, for us, he was very (emphasis) *careful*. Only I was, probably a bit of a dodger. My mother could not impose on me in my childhood (Chandramallika Chakrabarty, Interview in February 2011, italicized portions originally in English).

The respondent's family in this context is shaped by the circumstances in which her father died when she was two years old, and her mother ran the family, helped by her eldest children. It is also significant that the respondent mentions that she did not know what a father was, in referring to a family context where she was the only one among her two brothers and sister to not help at all in

household chores. The protection or affection she refers to which forms the background in which she did not have to or 'dodged' chores, does not stem specifically from her being a girl. Rather, the emphasis on being *barir chhoto* or the youngest of the house, as well as losing her father at a younger age than her elder sister and brothers is a significant part of the context in which her staying away from domestic work is understood. Also, the suggestion held in the statement 'mother could not impose on me' of agency possibly mixed with permissiveness on the part of the adult, also points to the different contexts of children's position in the household.

In a different family circumstance a respondent who was the youngest in the family, and lost his mother at birth and was brought up mostly by his elder sisters, gives another account of a boy helping in household work. Timir Sengupta, from the same cohort, says he helped a little at home, though he was only given chores inside the house and was never sent on errands outside.

> "Just small things my sister wanted me to do..I wasn't *allowed* to go anywhere..maybe I straightened the bedsheets a little. 'Give me this, fetch that' – everything inside the house"(Interview with Timir Sengupta, February 2011, italicized portion originally in English).

The respondents, who explained their lack of engagement with domestic chores, usually employed one of three terms. *Chhoto* meaning small or child was used by respondents in a style which implied that the protection from household work was implied in the very status of being a child; *shokh* – a term which signifies fancy or luxury was also used by two respondents in the '50s generation to refer to their rare activities in the kitchen – emphasizing the voluntary as well as fun aspect of cooking as opposed to obligations; and *ador* meaning affection or *adore manush*- – being brought up with affection and protection. Respondents like Mitali Dhar and Pranati Sengupta used all three, emphasizing an indulgent household, which also departed from tradition, by not familiarising girls with traditional chores, and where children were separated from the realm of 'work' to the extent that on occasions they did help in the house, these became special and also acts of indulgence or luxury as the term *shokher ranna* or fanciful dabbling in cooking signifies.

That this separation of children from housework was not confined to girls, is reflected in the account of a male respondent, Parimal Das, 69. Parimal grew up in a joint family that owned a business in North Kolkata. He says that neither he nor his sister ever helped in household chores.

> „In those days..it was believed that the child, would not not be able to, or would make a mess, that is why children were avoided, they were given no work. Nevertheless, *Thakuma* (father's mother) would sometimes ask me to do something with her, read out or something, I would do that. And perhaps also some household chore..but it was nothing much. *Generally* children were not allowed to" (Interview with Parimal Das, January 2011, italicized word originally in English).

The narrative of Shubhash Kumar Mandal, 75 who grew up in an agriculture-based family in a village in the 24 Parganas, stands out in sharp contrast to most of the accounts in its emphasis on the involuntary aspect of work in one's childhood. The chores he mentions are not household chores but looking after some of the family's land and helping in cultivation.

> „When I used the money I earned from that to pay for school, then in class ten the fees was Rs.1.75..That is then I paid the school fees. Hm..in this way..that is..this is how in my *early life* I struggled and grew up“ (Interview with Shubhash Kumar Mandal, December 2010; italicized portion originally in English).

In the following generation, the accounts related to household work were similar to the accounts of the '50s generation, although the narratives were slightly differently phrased. Not many of the respondents, particularly male respondents talked at length about household chores, keeping to the ambiguous answer of 'a little' or ‘sometimes’, while women offered explanations. Some of these accounts have been mentioned in this section to give an overall picture of children's relation to household chores for this generation.
Shubha Thakur, like some of the women in the '50s generation, says that her help was not required.

> S.T: At a very young age, I didn't help at all, because we are a joint family, no one had to do much. Ma, Boroma (her aunt) did all the work. Thakuma helped.
>
> H.S: Yes.
>
> S.T: In our childhood we didn't do anything. After growing somewhat older we did..that is..what shall I say,..dusted the furniture a bit, arranged my own books. *Just* that. I never did anything like cooking or all that. It was never necessary“ (Interview with Shubha Thakur, December 2010, italicized portion originally in English)

Similarly, men and women from this generation, particularly those who grew up in joint families, said that there were enough people in the family to take care of chores. However, joint families were not always the contexts in which this assertion was made. Respondents, from small nuclear families, as well as joint families mentioned domestic helps to do the household chores. While in the '50s generation, the mothers and other adult women of the family of all the respondents were housewives, in the following generation, the mothers of three respondents worked as teachers or in Government service. These respondents, as well as some of the other respondents mentioned that they had domestic helps in the house to do most of the chores. The presence of domestic helps did not of course mean the women of the family did not help at all. Rather, the household chores were divided between the women and the domestic help. For example, Barnali Mukhopadhyay grew up in a small family in Bandel with her parents, with both her parents working outside home. When asked if she had to help at home, she says,

„No, not at all (laughs). Because Ma alone was equal to a hundred, and then we had someone at home, all the time. Which is why I never had to help with household chores“ (Interview with Barnali Mukhopadhyay, December 2010).

One male respondent in this generation talks about helping at home despite having adult members in the family to help. Sudhanya Sengupta, who grew up in a joint family in central Kolkata, says he did housework, ranging from making the beds to cleaning the bathroom and tidying his own writing table was part of his childhood, as his mother and aunts were busy in the kitchen. Growing up in a family with cousins, he says that the assignments of chores differentiated between the boys and the girls in that the 'heavy work' – he gives the example of *Saraswati Puja*, – was for the boys, while the girls had the responsibility for cutting fruits that were the offering in the *Puja*.

His is one of the two accounts where a respondent talked about helping with chores as a boy. In most of the other interviews, respondents either replied ambiguously about chores or said that they did not help while their mothers and aunts, and sometimes elder sisters took care of most chores. In another interview one respondent, Tathagata Kumar Upadhyay, 39 talks about having to help in household chores as well as looking after the stationary shop owned by his father after his father's death.

”I always helped at home, I even started cooking from class five..and helped in the business..working in the family business is also helping out at home, isn't it?” (Interview with Tathagata Kumar Upadhyay, January 2011).

The business in this context is the stationary shop which Tarun Kumar and his mother looked after after his father's death when he was 14. In this context as well, the relative age of the children is significant as in the case of some of the other respondents, where a hierarchy of age among the siblings dominates in families where children were required to help, or kept away from chores. Tarun Kumar, despite helping in household chores and at the shop, says that his younger brothers did not help because they were 'small'.

8.2.3 Boys and Household Chores in the Contemporary Generation

In the interviews with the contemporary generation of children, a lesser number of children had something to say about housework. Most of the children who helped, said they helped only on some occasions, such as during holidays or for a ritual rather than chores being an everyday feature of their lives. This could possibly be also attributed to the fact that the children spent the greater part of the day in school and in tuitions and other lessons, coming home mostly in the evenings before dinner time throughout a school term.

The chores mentioned by children, girls and boys were usually errands or occasionally arranging their own 'study-tables'. A significant trend was that a greater proportion of boys talked about helping in household chores, even if not every day. 9 of the 15 boys interviewed (2 of whom were from South Indian backgrounds), mentioned helping at home in chores, some which they did from time to time and had to be reminded of, and some that they said they liked doing. In comparison fewer girls – 6 out of 18, had anything to say about helping at home, with occasional or everyday chores.

The nature of the work assigned also seemed to be distinctly different among girls and boys. While boys mostly mentioned fetching things from grocers, some of the boys also mentioned helping out in addition with chores that were traditionally associated with the feminine domain in Bengali families. Helping in the kitchen, was one of the chores some of the boys mentioned, although most of the children were not allowed to light the gas. These limited the chores to some extent, nor were these everyday chores the children did. The pattern however is significant in itself because the kitchen was traditionally a feminine domain and in the context of Bengal, men from the Hindu Bengali middle class were largely invisible from the 'feminine' domains as with chores or responsibilities related to these areas – which were as a rule done by the women of the household. The men who were present in the kitchen and in other areas of household work were usually domestic helps, male servants who assisted the women of the household. The perceptions about gender, class and household chores will be discussed in the following section, but against this background, the very entry of 10-12 year old boys in a a territory that even among children was gendered, draws attention to the transformation of the middle class in urban Bengal.

Just as with some of the respondents in the '50s generation, stirring the pot or making a snack was a novel affair than an obligation for some girls, certain chores were similarly perceived by the children – particularly boys of the contemporary generation. An 11 year old boy explained that as he cannot light the gas, or is allowed to handle knives, his mother has to help him.

> "Yes..(when asked if he helps at home)..Like I help..when Ma says..will you make an omlette?..the onion is chopped by Ma..apart from that I make it..And I can make poached eggs. And then I help in..when Ma brings the suitcase down, I help her hold it." (Interview with Shubhro, December 2009)

Similarly in Bandel, while I was talking to his grandparents, one of the boys I interviewed went into the kitchen to make coffee. Making coffee or tea possibly were easier for children than other chores because it did not always involve lighting the gas, and could be done with minimum supervision.

Ishan, a 12 year old boy talked about making tea, something I heard his mother mention in another context to one of the other mothers. He says he makes tea for his parents when they are back from work. In the diary that some of the

children were asked to keep for a week, he is the only child to mention doing chores. The diary was recorded for a week when most of his school examinations were over and he had holidays in between. In the first entry he writes:

> „It was partly a relaxed morning with no pressure of much lessons as all the important exams were completed. I woke up too late in the morning at 8'o clock [sic]. After waking up, I first brought four bottles of water from the nearby place „ (diary entry by Ishan, 18th January, 2010, original in English).

The chore is mentioned three other days in the week, the reference being possibly of fetching water from a tube well as some buildings and neighbourhoods in Kolkata have limited water supply or because of high iron or salt content in water, procure drinking water from somewhere else.Carrying water was also mentioned by another boy, Bumba, who is 12 years old, who said that he carried water up the stairs to their house, because his father could not do it as he had a leg injury.

> In another entry, Ishan mentions helping with the household chores on the day of a special ritual, *Saraswati Puja*. „Today I woke up at 7'o clock in the morning and cleaned myself wearing a new dress for Saraswati Puja. Today I brought a bucket of water. Then I started making streamers to decorate my house and the Puja room. Then I helped my mother in arranging the books and the oblation beside the idol. Then I gave the anjali[72] at 11:30 in the afternoon“ (diary entry of Ishan, 20th January, 2010).

The chores outlined in this account are some of the chores children in Bengali middle and upper middle class families typically helped adults in, in rituals like the Saraswati Puja. Drawing patterns on the floor before the idol, making flower arrangements, arranging plates of fruits and sweets before the statue are usually done by the women of the household, and children sometimes help in some of these, particularly in fetching things needed for the rituals. One of the respondents from the '80s generation, Sudhanya Sengupta also mentioned helping on *Saraswati Puja*. This ritual which takes place in either January or February is particularly significant for schoolchildren, as discussed in one of the previous chapters. At the time of the first fieldphase, in December and January, some of the children mentioned *Saraswati Puja* as it was a school holiday, though a direct reference was not made to helping in the ritual apart from this account.

Two of the boys who said they helped were brothers from a Kannadiga family settled in Kolkata. Anand, 12 says he folds clothes while his mother washes the dishes and his brother Jai who is two years younger says that he dusts the chairs sometimes as their father insists the two boys help out with housework. Similar chores were also mentioned by other boys from Bengali families who sometimes said that they had to be asked or reminded to dust their tables but did not mind doing it.

72 Flowers offered to the deity.

For most children who had siblings, the chores assigned to brothers and sisters were often different, with age being a significant aspect in this division of chores. For example, Abhigyan, who is 11 years old, mentions a different set of chores for his sister who is 13, which he cannot do.

> A.S: Mmm..I sometimes fold clothes..and nothing else besides that.. Nothing else..Didi..Didi helps..she washes clothes sometimes, removes clothes which are drying.
>
> H.S: Okay.
>
> A.S: She removes clothes then sweeps sometimes.
>
> H.S: Hm.
>
> A.S: And..em..vaccuums..sometimes in the evenings, evenings, afternoons, she cleans with the vaccuum cleaner..The vaccum cleaner..I used it for only two days (Interview with Abhigyan Sarkar, Interview in December 2010).

While boys mentioned other chores which were not different from the older cohorts', such as fetching something from the neighbourhood or carrying something, the involvement of some children in chores in the kitchen or folding clothes – which in the previous generations essentially belonged to the feminine domain – made their very presence significant, however small or occasional their involvement. The assignment of chores, in the previous generations, even where they were considered to be more of a novelty, rarely transgressed the traditional gender-related roles for adults. In this sense, the accounts of the few children who helped in the kitchen or helped their mothers, reflect a reversal of traditional gender roles.

Among the girls, this reversal of roles was marked in the absence of typical 'feminine' household chores e.g. cooking, cleaning, sewing, and looking after younger children in the family. In case of some of the girls, a complete absence of participation in any household chore was marked, with the exception of running errands, fetching fizzy drinks or eggs from the grocer's nearby.

> In addition, many of the girlslike respondents from the older generations emphasize that they do not help at home except for occasional errands. Avinandita (11 years) is an example :"I do a little..tid bits..Ma..Ma says, will you fetch that plate from there. I fetch it.. Like that..meaning not cooking and stuff"(Interview with Avinandita, November 2009).

Sometimes girls mentioned that if there were guests, they offered trays with glasses of water to greet them, as the occasional help. However, the gender related assignment of chores has probably far from disappeared among some families. As in the accounts of Abhigyan, Taniya says she has to make tea sometimes, even for her elder brother who is 17 years old; while her cousin Abhishekh, who is a year older than her and lives in the same family, said he did not help with the chores, apart from running errands once in a while on his bicycle.

8.3 Gender, Class and Cultural Capital in Children's Involvement in Household Chores

The accounts from the three generations reflect different circumstances within the family in which the relation of children to household chores are contextualized. At the same time the narratives point to a compelling association between levels of cultural and economic capital and the practice of assigning domestic chores to children. The practices vary across and within gender, and as the accounts show, a generational shift is recognizable between the contemporary generation of children and the two older generations.

In the '50s cohort, it is significantly noticeable that the children who emphasized that they were never required to help in household chores were mostly from families with higher levels of cultural capital as well as economic capital to some extent. This was especially significant for the female respondents. While some women from this generation spoke about the novelty of cooking as children, respondents from the '80s generation sometimes emphasized that they never had to help in household chores until marriage. The two emphases draw attention to a context in which a break with tradition occurs by separating girls in the family from traditionally defined responsibilities. The separation of children, particularly girls from domestic chores encompasses two aspects which reflect on the class background of the family. Affording to keep children away from housework, was a significant aspect to some extent, particularly as respondents from joint families as well as nuclear families often mentioned having domestic help to assist the women of the household. Employing domestic helps have a long tradition in Bengal with middle and upper middle class families almost always having male as well as female help for cooking, cleaning, washing utensils, washing clothes etc. However in bigger families, having a domestic help was not enough and the women of the household usually had to help alongside the paid help, and the domain of household chores – run by women and domestic helps, was essentially the feminine domain. This draws attention to the other aspect of the practice of separating children from domestic chores. As mentioned before, girls have had a long tradition in helping in domestic chores as part of their socialisation and even in the early twentieth century, it was not unusual for girls to be married in their teens or even before, thus joining the ranks of the women of the household earlier than most of the women in the later generations, and evidently, all of the women respondents in this research. Against this background, the narratives about 'not having' to help, or not helping, point to more than a question of affording to keep girls away from responsibilities they would have to take up sooner or later. It points to the realm of sentiments, and values of a particular social section in which some form of 'time out' from adulthood was practised for children.

All the female respondents from the '50s generation, those who spoke of chores as a novelty or said they did not help – Pranati Sengupta, Mitali Dhar and Chandramallika Chakrabarty, are also among the respondents with the highest levels of cultural capital from their cohort. The institutional aspect of this form of cultural capital of their families is reflected in the educational qualifications of their parents, including their mothers. The mothers of Pranati Sengupta and Mitali Dhar had even studied till their post graduation – which in itself signifies embodied cultural capital, as only women from select family backgrounds studied beyond school in the previous generations, – far less in the 1920s or before, – in the generation of the mothers of these respondents. In this context, keeping children, especially girls away from chores and engaging them in school work and 'cultural lessons' draws attention to an embodied cultural capital of the family, particularly with regard to girls.

> In the '80s cohort, this pattern of the previous generation prevails, with even accounts from some respondents from lower middle class backgrounds talking about not having to help. For example, one respondent, Madhuri De who grew up in a family which runs a fish business says, „Sometimes if Ma asked me to help a bit I would. But because ours is a joint family, we didn't *have* (emphasis) to. My aunt and my mother would do, they had servants..they would do. And..I also had two elder sisters before me"(Interview with Madhuri De, January 2011).

Despite the silence or ambiguity of many male respondents from the older generations, the place of boys as against that of girls in the domain of household chores remained more or less the same across differences of cultural capital. At the same time, the accounts of two respondents – Shubhash Kumar Mandal, 74 and Tathagata Kumar Upadhyay, 39 – show the strong relation between class and the children's involvement in work. The backgrounds of a partially agriculture based family and a family depending on a stationary shop – form the contexts in which economic necessity requires boys in the family to work – in the family business rather than domestic chores. Although the respondents in the two cases were possibly older than 10 or 12 – at the time Shubhash Kumar says he paid for his school fees himself, and after the death of Tarun Kumar's father, work does not enter into any of the other narratives to this extent, except for Dipshikha Kundu, in whose family traditional beliefs were more significant than an economic necessity. In a significant break from the other accounts of different degrees of involvement in domestic chores, these two narrative in their very difference, highlight the degree to which children were separated from the area of chores and work in most Bengali middle class families.

The major aspect of difference is seen in the accounts of the contemporary generation of children, where chores done on an everyday basis are absent from the narratives of a greater majority of children. This general practice of not involving children in domestic chores was to a certain extent irrespective of levels of cultural capital of the parental generation. Some of the children were grandchildren or children of the older respondents – such as Shubhash Kumar Mandal,

or Prasenjit and Madhuri De. While in the previous generation, protection from domestic chores – traditionally sanctioned domestic chores – corresponded prominently with the class fraction of the middle class with high levels of cultural capital, reflected in the education of the women of the household, the family occupations, the interests and values of the family – in the contemporary generation this was a general pattern.
In addition, the reversal of gender roles to some extent among the contemporary generation is significant. Unlike the two older generations, boys were visible in the domain of 'feminine' chores in some families. Again these were children, from families, which at least since the parental generation have high levels of cultural capital. In girls, with a few exceptions, chores were largely absent and when present, these were usually gender neutral – like running errands and arranging their writing tables.

What is interesting here, is the meaning that the nature of chores have for the different class fractions in the three generations. The traditional orthodox assignment of gender-typical chores was cooking, cleaning etc. for girls, and boys were more less ‘allowed to be boys’ and not required to help much with domestic chores apart from running errands. In comparison, a section of the urban Bengali middle class with high levels of cultural capital negotiated with tradition, even if they did not reject it entirely, and kept its girls and boys away from household or any kind of work, letting them ‘stay children’. Also, this section was more likely to employ domestic helps for household work, so children’s help not only went against new sentiments about childhood, it was also unnecessary. However, in conformity with values in late colonial and early post-colonial Bengal, girls seemed to be assigned some chores, which had more social value than being actual help, like showing off the social skills of a well brought up daughter when there were visitors. Possibly this tradition has transmitted itself through the years and even in contemporary Kolkata, there is a fraction where children at least with respect to household chores, have the same status as they did in the 1950s. Significantly, the section with high cultural capital in the generation of parents believe in involving its boys, in housework, and by the same logic, keeping its girls out of it, with considerable pride.

Amidst these accounts about domestic chores, another strand remains partially hidden, that reasserts the relationship of chores to those of class. From the twentieth century, the practice of hiring domestic help became more widespread among the Bengali middle and upper middle classes, even among families with lesser means. The *Bhadralok* consciousness of being separate from the classes that worked as domestic helps, watchmen etc. – the lower classes was strong and the practice of employing 'servants' in the following generations continued the association, despite the presence of women of the family in this domain. In this pattern, therefore, where children from the three generations did not 'have to' or

'need to' work, reflects in a submerged way, aspects of class sanction where women by traditional sanction engaged in or supervised chores, where more importantly 'servants' – a class employed solely for its domestic services – worked for the family, giving the domestic domain its special character where children's entry, in succeeding generations were not desired, except on special occasions.
In the culture of childhood where children are separated and to some extent 'protected' from adult responsibilities as women and men, girls occupy a special place. The childhood of girls, or the moratorium of childhood for girls is perhaps most closely connected to the policies of female education. The notion of 'girlhoods' is as such closely related to social policy in many cultural contexts, whether it be the construction of the 'factory girl' who is an 'emotional worker' in the Philips' factories the Netherlands in the 1950s (van Drenth 1993), or the Bengali middle class girl child in colonial Bengal. Talking about the youth moratorium of girls Zinnecker (2003a) says, girls were denied the 'waiting status' in the model of youth moratorium for boys from bourgeois educated backgrounds. He says that the education of girls into feminine roles, that was the basic principal of girls' education, shows a 'projective gender ideology' at work that led to the heteronomy of the youth of girls[73]. What Zinnecker says for the western context, for the youth moratorium of girls, can also to some extent be seen in the emergence of the special place of girls fashioned after the *bhadramahila* in colonial Bengal. The education of the Bengali middle class woman, and by implication, the issue of school education for girls, became a space of struggle between the missionaries, reformers, colonial administrators. The girl, in this sense was a 'Chiffre' in early twentieth century Bengal. The historical research focusing on girls' education or about the controversy surrounding child marriage highlights this aspect and it shows, that the moratorium given to girls in colonial Bengal, and even to some extent in the years after Partition, was seen as a preparatory phase to make 'good' Bengali respectable women than as a separation from adult responsibilities. The present study, focuses on the contemporary generation of children and to some extent, the experiences of two older cohorts where both girls and boys from the urban Bengali middle class can be said to have a *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood in the sense of a 'time out'. At the same time, the accounts of the children and the older cohorts reflect, in some ways the curious history by which girls entered this moratorium in the first place, even if childhoods have changed significantly in the last few decades.

73 The original quotation is in German: „Mädchen wird darüber hinaus im Modell des weiblichen Jugendmoratoriums als eines "sozialen Wartestandes" die Herausbildung eines individuellen Ich-Ideals und Wertekanons verwehrt – dem idealisierten "Hochziel eines jeden anspruchsvollen Jugendmoratoriums für (bürgerlich gebildete) Jungen. In der "Erziehung des Mädchens zur idealen Weiblichkeit", die als Konzeption der historischen Mädchenbildung zugrunde liegt, sieht der Autor in erster Linie eine "projektive Geschlechterideologie" am Werk, die zur Fremdbestimmung weiblicher Jugend führe“ (Zinnecker 2003a, p.41).

The absence of traditional norms related to girls – modest traditional attire, familiarity with domestic duties – in the accounts about childhood therefore draw their very meaning from a context where traditional norms pervaded family practices. It is as Thorne (1999) says that the occasions where gender is less relevant or contested, are also part of the construction of gender relations. These in connection with the increased importance of 'studies' for children in the contemporary generation, as discussed in one of the chapters, give an image of the emerging nature of childhoods among the Bengali middle class. The emphasis on education and leisure, as also the protection of children from traditional gender roles are parts of the same moratorium of childhood in Bengal, in constant negotiation with aspects of Bengali Hindu traditions to carve out an '*Auszeit*' for children. In this context, the accounts about the childhoods of girls occupy a special place, with more (the frock) or less symbolic aspects of childhood practices showing their entry into the *Bildungsmoratorium* in Bengal. This *Bildungsmoratorium*, as the accounts of the different generations show, is a furrowed space, – across class, class fractions and gender. In the accounts of the contemporary generation of children, the conflict with traditional values are much less obvious than among the previous generations, in letting children be children – particularly in 'letting' girls be children. But the very diversity of practices within a standard childhood, bears the imprints of its history, like the scars of another standard of family life and social values that were surgically removed.

9. The Children From Memory

In a particular *Doraemon* story, the plot revolves round a figure of one's childhood memories which haunts one for the rest of one's adult years. Nobita's father recalls a girl he had once met as a child, who saved him from hunger by giving him a bar of chocolate (Fujio 1974). The Second World War forms the background of the story, with images of Japan being bombed – the sky thick with missiles, and billowing smoke, and of Japanese children working in the fields in the first three frames. The girl, in his father's memory, is like a lily, beautiful and fragile (Ibid, p.159) who couldn't be found afterwards. His curiosity aroused by his father's stories, Nobita uses Doraemon's time travel powers to travel to the day in 1945 to find out who she was and to take photographs of her to show his father. In a series of events in the *manga*, where the concept of time is not fixed or linear[74], it turns out that the girl that Nobita's father saw was Nobita himself. In his hunger and fatigue he mistook the little boy with long hair to be a girl – and being overwhelmed with gratitude and the sweetness of the chocolate, the girl was all the more beautiful, her skin whiter than lily. Her image instead of fading, perhaps grew stronger in these attributes as Nobita's father grew up and thought about this childhood specter.

Childhood is without question a domain of projected desires and nostalgic reminiscing. One need only to look at sources from Rousseau's *Emile* to autobiographical narratives to affirm this. But the construed memories or fantasies which are projected onto childhood images are not confined to philosophical treatises or works of literature or cinema. They are also part of personal reminisces, family stories that adults from different generations of the family recall, and that are handed down to generations of children. Accounts of past childhoods either in autobiographies or in personal recollections serve an important source of situating childhoods and children's lives in historical contexts, such as children of the Great Depression (Elder 1993) or children of the post-war genera-

74 The concept of time has been discussed in an article by Jefferson M. Peters (2002) where the Girl Like a White Lily is among the *Doraemon* stories that are analyzed. Peters offers an exciting, if brief analysis of the story, drawing attention to how memories are constructed.

H. Sen, *'Time-Out' in the Land of Apu,* DOI 10.1007/978-3-658-02223-5_9,
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tions in the countries affected by the second World War. The greatest significance of such 'nostalgic memorabilia' is that they allow children to be situated in 'time and place' (Elder 1993) serving as monuments of childhood. A thorny problem that however remains with reminiscences about childhood is that the degree of projection and imagination mingled with the accounts cannot be ascertained or separated from 'facts' of childhood.

Just as Nobita's father in his adult years was haunted by the image of the 'girl' as white as lily, accounts of past childhoods are similarly haunted by images that lend a particular colour to them. The act of recalling is also one of reconstructing the past and it is this aspect which is significant to the 'culture of childhood in a specific historical-social context. The way a society perceives the childhoods of its past is part of its social context. The perspectives of the older cohorts about their childhoods are discussed in this section not to uphold any thesis of 'the lost paradise of childhood' nor to refute it, but as part of a cultural trope. The significance of the accounts of the older cohorts – not just about their families and schools and practices during childhood – but how on a more abstract level they perceive their childhoods especially in comparison to contemporary childhoods in urban West Bengal, is twofold. First, in the absence of much historical research or any kind of documentation with the exception of autobiographies from a specific section of the Bengali intelligentsia, interviews with the older cohorts provide a rich source of information about the shifting boundaries of childhood as a *Bildungsmoratorium* across the generations in West Bengal.

Narratives about childhood are susceptible to romanticization. But the pattern in which childhoods are cast, are a reflection, as well as a part of the culture of childhood in any given historical social context. The nostalgic remembrances of 'carefree schooldays' is possible in a context where childhood has been scholarized over a period of time, with layers being added to the kind of 'schooled childhood'. The pattern of reminiscing about 'prep-school' children, especially in Britain during the Raj, where parents occupied in the colonies sent children back to England (Brendon 2009), the genre of children's fiction about truancy from school are examples of a trope – that of a scholarized childhood. Similarly, the debate about the 'end of childhood' (Postman 1994) or that of children growing up too fast (Elkind 1981) – that can be found in academic writing and in the public sphere cannot be seen as simply 'myths' or 'truths' about the 'garden of childhood' in the past, but must be understood within a cultural context where the image of the protected, 'unsullied' childhood is highly valued – even if in theory. It is in this cultural interpretation that the perceptions about childhoods then and now are of significance to this study.

The previous chapters offers a comparative perspective of several aspects of childhood across three cohorts. In the accounts of the respondents about the significance of school work, leisure activities and leisure culture of children and the

transformation of space, the cultural and historical contexts of childhood are explored within which those from middle class families lived their childhoods and continue to do so in West Bengal.This chapter explores how childhoods, particularly contemporary childhoods are perceived by the older cohorts. As many of the respondents have children and grandchildren – some of whom have also been interviewed in this study, the accounts also draw attention to perspectives of intergenerational shifts in childhood within a family.

The perceptions of the respondents regarding the end of their childhood has also been a central concern of this chapter. The previous chapters addressing methodological concerns as well as the empirical sections have noted that the concept of childhood among the two older cohorts is sometimes of an ambiguous nature, extending across different stages in the individual biography. While it has been attempted to make the understanding of childhood less ambiguous by asking the specific questions about their age at certain life course events etc., – the ambiguity itself has been taken at its very throat by exploring respondents' perspectives about when they believe their 'childhood' to have ended.

9.1 Past Childhoods

Childhood is such a subject, that talking about one's biographical experience of it often implies viewing it in relation to childhood in succeeding generations. In a narrative interview this reflects an attempt on the part of the respondent to situate her or his biography in a particular historical context. However, using the *Leitfaden*, most of the respondents were asked specifically about their views on their own experiences of childhood as well as how they perceived them in relation to contemporary childhoods in Bandel or Kolkata.

The two older cohorts, especially those with children and grandchildren were almost unanimous that their childhoods were very different from that of their own children or grandchildren. Respondents often used a combination of elements to articulate the difference. One was a generalized perspective of 'today's children' and how their own childhoods were different from that of the contemporary generation of children. In this context, some though not all the aspects of transformation referred to are at the level of social structure,spatial changes, increased presence of the electronic media – the changes of which form the background of the great divide between childhoods then and now. Perceptions were also based on the biographical experiences in the respondents' own childhoods and their contrast with that of their children or grandchildren. More than the in-

creasingly dangerous city or smaller families in contemporary Bengal, individual aspects such as a strict authoritarian parent in one's childhood, or being shyer as child than one's granddaughter or daughter were emphasized in explaining the differences. However, both the aspects – the general view of changing childhoods and the comparison of individual biographies with following generations of the family are closely related.

A common theme for both cohorts was the increasing significance or encroachment of schoolwork in children's lives in contemporary West Bengal. Studies or schoolwork as discussed in Chapter 5 occupy a dominant position in the accounts of all the three cohorts about their everyday lives as children. When the children themselves used the Bengali term '*porashuna*' or 'studies' to refer to an aspect of their everyday lives, the older generations used the term *'porashunar chaap*' or the pressure of studies to denote one of the most significant aspects separating their childhoods from that of the contemporary generation of children.

Shubhash Kumar Mandal, a 72 year old respondent like many other respondents articulates this contrast not in terms of the school, but in terms of 'studies' which in terms of time and space go beyond the boundaries of school. He says:

> "I'll tell you how it's different..just as now they..that is the way it is thought that it would be better if for each subject one or two tutors could be appointed separately..That is in our times these things were not there..*Mainly*, those who could afford that, *even for them* it was not usual" (Interview with Shubhash Kumar Mandal, December 2010, italicized portion originally in English).

The shifts in the mentality of the Bengali middle class have been discussed in the previous chapters, as perceived by the respondents in explaining practices and values prevailing in their childhoods. The respondents also spoke of a shift in the age at which school and education became dominant concerns for children. Though most of them emphasized the significance of education in their childhoods, those with children or grandchildren under 13 emphasized that the stress on education was experienced by them at a much later age. Though the system of schooling with an age gradation and an age-limit for the school leaving examination was introduced in colonial Bengal and was firmly established before the 1950s, the age requirements of schools, particularly at the primarily level were described by some respondents to be comparatively 'easygoing' in the 1950s, all the more by those who grew up in suburban or even rural parts of West Bengal. As the same respondents says:

> "Now children are admitted to school the minute they turn mm..four or five..two and a half years. And then, when when we were admitted to school, then we were already ten years old" (Interview with Shubhash Kumar Mandal, December 2010).

There was a hint of a negative perception of contemporary childhoods among the older cohorts – even respondents, who as parents of 10-12 year olds themselves, supervised and stressed the importance of 'studies'. The 'pressure' of studies was not considered a favourable development in most of the accounts. The older respondents often referred to its absence in their own childhoods – and if

children in the previous generations had less to do with schoolwork than their successive generations – this absence of '*porashunar chaap*' made their childhoods carefree and more of a 'childhood. As one of the interviews of a respondent in her forties, the mother of an 11 year old boy shows:

> S.T: Their childhoods..I think their *schedule* is a very *packed schedule*. We had ways out in life so to speak..not *packed* like this. This young age..our childhood was much better.
>
> H.S: Could you explain it a little?
>
> S.T.:..That is, there wasn't a rat race about so many things. There was not so much of a race to get everything, no race for good results. It was as if we lived more *loosely* (Interview with Shubha Thakur, December 2010; italicized portions originally in English).

Most of the respondents,refer to what they perceive as an excessive structuring of childhoods, of which the regulation of 'studies' is one part. This is articulated in several ways – referring to specific practices among children or to broader social changes which necesssitated some of the contemporary practices, rendering some of the older practices obsolete. The gradual replacement of 'play' by 'studies' or by other forms of leisure activities is one of the ways in which the transformation of childhoods is portrayed. Respondents who were parents of 10-12 year olds, however, asserted that although unsupervised 'play' was the hallmark of 'real' 'happy' childhoods, they also agreed that in contemporary Kolkata or Bandel, this was no longer possible. When a respondent, who grew up in the town of Chinsurah in the 1970s, was asked if she sees her daughter's childhood as different, she says:

> "Eh..different in one aspect I would say, that we played in the neighborhood. That environment now..we cannot let them out. Perhaps no mother can do that anymore. Outside the house, an environment of play, I mean with many other children.....Whatever they play is in the school, there is not much apart from it..Here it is different. And also not much of..what one says 'make believe play'.Playing with dolls, they don't do it as much as we did..They don't, at least in my daughter's case I did not see it. Only this little difference..But playing is still loved by children.. Sitting very quietly..when four or five children are together..they don't sit very quietly, they run" (Interview with Barnali Mukhopadhyay in December 2010).

Another respondent, the mother of two children who grew up in the 1970s, makes a contrasting argument. Usha Sarkar like Barnali, emphasizes the absence of play as marking contemporary childhood in contrast to her own. She refers to outdoor games and playing indoors, make believe games with dolls. But the word she chooses to stress on is 'freedom'. She says, "I grew up relying on myself..with freedom, I grew up freely". She says that her own children cannot climb trees or play outside, because they live in an apartment facing the street. But more significantly, she says that her children, are unused to 'freedom' and if asked to 'play' the way she had, would not 'know' how to do it, be it climbing trees or playing dolls and marrying dolls off or cooking.

The regulation or the disappearance of 'freedom' in children's lives was perceived by some respondents as consequences of excessive supervision of chil-

dren in contemporary Bengal. Reflecting on the difference between his childhood and his daughter's, one respondent says that "An unnecessary nagging has become part of children's lives now- – an anxiety that they might fall ill etc."(Interview with Sudhanya Sengupta in February 2011). Similar accounts are found among the 1950s cohort. The disapproval of one respondent who grew up in the 1950s in Kolkata is unmistakable. She says:

> "The other day I saw something on the TV..just two days ago, a mother saying she has no free time. Why? Because she has a two and a half year old daughter at home..the whole day is spent in that. Even I have children..when my children were small, going to school, I would sometimes sew..or..If this is how you want to bring up your children, really, what can one say!" (Interview with Minati Dhar, January 2011).

In the interviews, another aspect that the older cohorts sometimes emphasized, was the children's engagement with different elements of cultures that were not Bengali. This has been discussed in one of the previous chapters where the rift between contemporary children's culture and the Bengali language is perceived as characteristic of childhoods today. Parents or grandparents who mentioned this as a difference in childhoods across the generations, were usually mildly critical of this gradual fading of the Bengali culture from the lives of children when it came to their preference for English over Bengali books. However, the criticism was stronger when children preferred other forms of culture, especially Hindi film culture, or the contemporary cosmopolitan Indian television, especially reality shows and soap operas in Hindi. At the same time this aspect was less discussed by the respondents from the older cohorts but rather, mentioned by the children.

The 'unnecessary nagging' or the structured character of children's lives in contemporary West Bengal has been mentioned in the context of several aspects of societal shifts that affected one section of people. Spatial transformations, marked demographic changes, and changes in sentiment are some of the themes that were mentioned. The accounts of the cohort that grew up in the 1950s is in this context different to some extent from the cohort that grew up in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For the '50s cohort, the main locale of childhood was the joint family and to some extent the *para* or the neighbourhood.Some respondents of this cohort, especially women, said they did not go out to play much even if there was a *para*. For those who lived in a joint family, with a number of children living together, the respondents said they felt no need for outside playmates. "We had a sort of a club inside our house" says one respondent (Interview with Pranati Sengupta in February 2011). Playing alone or playing with children from the joint family was the dominant pattern among respondents, male and female, although male respondents talk about going 'out' to play more when they were older than 12 or 13.

Though some respondents from the 1980s cohort also grew up in joint families, having friends in the neighbourhood was the aspect of their childhood they

compared with the lives of their own children in the context of the diminishing importance of play. While demographic changes and changes in the family structure were the background in which the '50s's cohort situated the difference of their childhoods with that of children in contemporary West Bengal, the disappearance of the *para* and the emergence of the neighbourhood or street as a dangerous place for children to be without supervision were the background for the narratives of the respondents from the '70s's cohort.

The comparison of childhoods then and now were also sometimes related to particular biographical differences. For example, a respondent in her forties who had a schizophrenic parent talked about growing up faster than her own daughter. Another respondent who had no mother and was brought up by his sisters compares his son's childhood as being different largely owing to a different family circumstance which made possible the indulgence that respondents connect to *ajkalkar bachhara*, children today.

> "Sudhanya's (his son's) childhood is definitely different..but all children have childhoods that are different from mine I think". To him the most important difference is that his son had a mother. "When Mejdi was married then I felt a pain..Shanto has a mother..the indulgence Shanto gets is not something I ever had..I never asked for anything – couldn't even think of it"(Interview with Timir Sengupta in February 2011).

The various aspects of difference emphasized so far were mostly accounts where respondents talked about the changing conditions of childhood. The changing city, the education system, the competitiveness among children's performance were some of the focal points in which the more easygoing, 'free' childhood was replaced by a more supervised one in these accounts. However, in capturing the essence of difference, respondents also talked about the changed character of the children themselves, as significant in the change in childhoods.

Respondents used the pronoun 'they' in collective to refer to children, as well as in particular, especially when comparing their childhood to that of their children. A respondent who is the grandmother of an 11 year old, answers my question saying the contemporary nature of childhood is starkly different from that of her own, or even of her daughter's generation.

> N.H: I am telling you, they are very different. Especially now. This generation in particular, *at present*, is very different..that is from how..how we were.
>
> H.S: How?
>
> N.H: How..I will tell you. For example, *in general* I would say that if something happens to someone, we would be concerned..but they do not care about that, if something happens, never mind that.
>
> H.S: Hm.
>
> N.H: Things like this..Yes..Their – not so much the *generation* after us. Theirs (contemporary generation of children) is more like that. I know it is true for others as well, if I complain about it, that look how they are, then others also say, 'No, you think it's just in your family? They are all like that'. They are straightforward..for instance we didn't say unpleasant things, whatever the

situation, or said them in another way. But they have no qualms saying them to your face. That is, they are very *straightforward*. And in some ways it is good but in some ways it is not really necessary to be that *straight*, things could have been rephrased in a nicer manner. True, sometimes when someone was right or had unfairly scolded us, we would silently obey. We didn't protest, when someone elder to us said anything. But they (children today) are not prepared to listen, they ask 'why would someone say anything to us at all? If I haven't done anything, why should someone scold us?' We didn't have this trait in us..at least I'd say for me, I didn't have this. True, I have been scolded, even if I have not done anything wrong, I'd feel hurt, but that was it. They are not prepared to accept this. And whenever they want something, if they don't get it..our sorrows were not so big..Did we get everything we wanted? We didn't. There were many times when we were denied many things, we had those sorrows. Later, whenever I could, I have tried to make up for what I was denied, I'm talking about myself. But they are not like that, whenever they want something, you have to give it then, whether or not it is inconvenient..you have to get it fast. Nothing else matters. This is how they are. And if you tell everyone about it, everyone says the same" (Interview with Nalini Haldar, December 2010, italicized portions originally in English).

The account of Nalini Haldar sums up this perspective where childhood today is different because 'a new generation of children' have emerged with some 'intrinsic' traits which were unimaginable in the previous generations. However, many respondents, especially from the 1970s cohort do not necessarily emphasize this as a negative characteristic, although it is nevertheless considered to be a trait of children today. Some respondents from the 1970s' cohort even assert the positve character of such a gap of authority between adults and children, especially in comparison with their own childhoods where strict parents or prevailing norms often curbed childish desires. Shubhra Chatterjee, a 42 year old respondent who has a 12 year old son refers to her strict upbringing as well as the character of children of her son's generation to make the distinction between the childhoods.

S.C: It is completely different (her son's chidhood from hers).

H.S: How is it different?

S.C: Different in the sense that.. fear was a factor that kept us from expressing a desire on many occasions, but Bumba (son) can do that.

H.S: Hm.

S.C: Things like, 'Ma I like this, Baba I like this'. He can say that..and we reflect on what his opinions are. For example, 'He said this. Let us consider if it is right, good or bad'.

H.S: Hm.

S.C: This was not true of us. In our case whatever Baba would say was final, was final. Whether it was good or bad, they wouldn't stop to consider that. So I would say it is quite different (Interview with Shubhra Chatterjee, January 2011, Underlined words in English).

The increasing strength of children's voices, demands and opinions were mentioned by most respondents as characterizing a childhood that had not been experienced by the generation of grandparents or parents. But a few respondents also suggested an economic capacity of families to indulge in children's desires,

which were not possible in the previous generations with more children or in lower middle class families with constrained finances. For example, Tathagata Kumar Upadhyay, a 41 year old respondent speaks primarily of his father's inability to take the children on vacation, whereas his own daughter has the 'opportunity'. Indulgence, in this account in contrast to most of the others, is related to financial ability as much as changes in attitudes.

9.2 The Myth of the Golden Past

The issue of play is often used not just by the older cohorts but also the media to sometimes nostalgically contrast childhoods now and then, emphasizing that children do not play anymore or do not have the time to play. The way this aspect of the transformation of childhoods among the Bengali middle class is articulated comes close to the standpoint of the thesis of the 'hurried child' or that of 'disappearing childhood'. The public perception about the nature of contemporary Bengali childhoods reflected in the media in West Bengal, suggests a viewpoint that is in a way close to the 'hurried child' perspective in the United States, but has another complex layer to it, related to children's decreasing engagement with 'traditional' Bengali culture.

Childhood researchers in the Western context, notably in the United States in the 1980s, raised the discussion about 'hurried childhood' or disappearing childhood (Elkind 1981; Postman 1994) where 'free' and 'innocent' childhood is said to be gradually eroding in American society because of a number of factors. The competitiveness and increasing encroachment of education in children's lives, rising divorce rates, working mothers and the growing influence of the media in the United States were said to contribute to a situation where children, especially white middle class children, were forced to grow up faster, losing the innocence and privilege of protection from harsh adult realities that children from earlier times once enjoyed. An increased structuring of children's lives and the absence of unstructured unsupervised play are held to be one of the significant aspects that characterizes hurried childhoods (Lynott & Logue 1993,p.475).The 'hurried child' thesis has received its share of criticism. Some of the most significant criticisms directed against it being its limited historical perspective and its failure to determine who the hurried children are, in its deterministic view of contemporary childhood in American society which it condemns (Ibid). However, a significant aspect of the thesis, to which critics have drawn attention is the myth of the golden age of childhood.

"Although the hurried child writers argue that children today are dramatically different from their predecessors, the authors' efforts to place today's children in historical perspective are inadequate. They presume a "Golden Age of Childhood" in which children were innocent, carefree, and protected, despite a large literature on the history of childhood that presents a more complex, less idealized picture of earlier eras“ (Ibid:p.477).

The thesis that childhood in contemporary societies is disappearing hinges on this myth, as do a lot of romantic nostalgic perspectives which criticize different aspects of a decadent and unnatural present against an idealized past, however unclear this idea of the past may be. In the context of Bengal, there does not exist much social science literature parallel to the work surrounding the hurried child thesis, or on childhoods in general. Rather, the focus has been on children from a different social class, namely child workers and children from working class, lower middle class families (Balagopalan 2008, 2011; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase 2009). In one sense therefore there is no thesis of disappearing childhoods in contemporary urban India that one could dispute. However, public opinion as well as those reflected by the media suggest a perception of contemporary childhood that in some ways is comparable to that of Elkind's or Postman's.

The construction of a past of 'simple' 'unhurried' childhood in the context of urban West Bengal directs itself against three areas in modern Bengali childhoods – the excessive focus on 'tuition', the increasing influence of consumerist forces in the lives of children and indulgent parents and the spiralling up of children's demands, and the gradually replacement of Bengali culture by a new culture in children's lives, as reflected in reading preferences, influences of the school and the television.

Even if the respondents sometimes nostalgically spoke of their childhood, at times referring to the innocent joyous moments untouched by work and the pressures of everyday life, many of them, situate the transformation within other structural changes. The increased pressure on children, even if perceived as destroying the simplicity of the past childhoods, is articulated as a necessity of the current economic and education systems. The media however, portrays this transformation differently.

An article in a widely circulated English daily in Kolkata, compared childhood in the city 20 years ago, dividing their subject into themes like play, comics, television, lozenges. Titled 'The Missing Siren'[75], the article carries a picture that makes it point clear, partly. The picture shows a tug of war between several comic-book characters for children, in an attempt to pit the now against the then. On one side are figures of Bengali comic books, *Bantul di Great, Nante Fante* as

75 The siren here is the factory-siren that is not heard any more because of their shut-down during the last two decades. West Bengal, in the last few decades experienced a staggering industrial stagnation, largely owing to the mass-scale of trade unionism and the stance of the Communist government. The factory siren could be seen as marking the phase, although the time period the article pits against contemporary Kolkata – is the 1980s, which in Kolkata coincides with the time industrial stagnation had set in in the state.

well as the north Indian comic figure *Chacha Chowdhary* and on the other side are comic-book superheroes of Western, or one would assume non-Indian fame, for example Batman, Superman.The writers express their views on this nature of change in different aspects of children's lives in Kolkata. For example, with respect to the area of play they have to say:

> "Then: Circa 1987. Four in the afternoon. School bag tossed aside. A hurried lunch and a forced nap later, it's time to hit the neighbourhood park for a bout of *pakdan pakdai* with *para* friends. Or *chor police*. Or *rong milonti*. Or go-o-o-o-o statue. Or hopscotch. During winter, the afternoon nap is bypassed for extended playtime. And holidays are about games, games and more games. New games are invented frequently.
>
> Now: After coming back home, children can't wait to rush to Timbaktoo. To Space Jumble, Fast and Furious, Skee Ball, Ace Driver. Outdoor games, earlier an inescapable part of a child's growing-up years, do not figure much on their list of activities. At best, it may be a game of cricket once in a while. Does anyone play *kalagaach* anymore ? ('The Missing Siren', The Telegraph, Kolkata, November 4, 2007).

The tone of the article invokes a myth of a golden past that is similar to the arguments of theorists of the 'hurried child'. But apart from that, by enumerating these different cultural artefacts as well as cultural practices in the everyday lives of children, the article powerfully highlights another perception, related to changing Bengali middle class culture in twenty years. The 'then' and 'now' format of the article, its quick condemnation of the childhood of what is dubbed as 'Gen Y' might be simplistic. At the same time it strikes a chord with arguments made by others, in academia and the media in Bengal as well the perceptions of some of those who were interviewed, that Bengali culture has changed greatly, as the lifestyle of the urban middle classes in Bengal show.

The class connotations and the formation of identities of several sections in West Bengal in relation to the English language has been discussed before. The media focuses on one aspect of this language-identity history in West Bengal in its emphasis on changed childhoods, by discussing the consequences of the Left Front Government's policy in the 1980s in the government schools. The generation of children who are growing distant from their own cultural heritage are perceived as a product of the chain of implications following the banning of English in government schools and the consequent association between upper middle classes and middle classes with English medium private schooling. Another newspaper article sums it up thus „Bengali was socially downgraded. A hierarchy of languages grew in the state where English was established as the language of power and Bengali, a "subaltern" language"(Basu 2010)

The same article talks about children's familiarity with English literature and alienation from Bengali against this background, stating examples of children's reading preferences and contexualizing it within the transformation in the school system:

> „My daughter has read all of Maugham and Hardy already. She is an avid reader of English literature and tops her class in the subject," boasts a mother of a 12-year-old. Then she adds with an indulgent smile: "But I just can't get her to read Bangla books."
>
> The lady in question was speaking recently, but middle class and upper middle class Bengali mothers, and fathers, have been making this statement for decades now. It increased in frequency after the Left Front government banned English from junior school in 1982.
>
> Bengali is steadily losing ground to English. A generation of Bengalis from Calcutta, sent to English-medium schools following the government decision, has grown up without much Bengali. Much less Bengali, at least, than the English-medium educated Bengalis of previous generations possessed"(Ibid).

Some of the basic aspects of the media's portrayal about the childhoods of the past pivot around shifts in the middle class, the education system and in culture. The children's alienation from Bengali accompanied by preference for English language media and literature is situated undoubtedly within the middle classes in Bengal. The 'English-medium educated Bengalis of previous generations' were undoubtedly those from upper sections of the middle class, with greater cultural capital as well as to some extent greater economic capital. Among the contemporary generation, the familiarity with English than Bengali, loses much of its exclusive character, with greater number of private schools teaching English and with greater sections of the middle class affording and preferring such schools. But it is nevertheless not a discussion about the lower classes, nor even about the uppermost sections. But where the story about preference for an educational medium ends, that of familiarity of children with a culture that is not their 'own' begins and the intrinsic character of 'today's children' is woven into this narrative.

The media's discussion about transformation about childhoods in West Bengal strikes some resonance with the respondents' accounts. What makes the images of the past curious is the presence of some degree of emphasis on studies, – even tuitions, the absence of a flourishing culture of 'playing' outdoors, and the familiarity with aspects of western, paricularly English culture in childhoods two to six decades ago. These are all aspects that are portrayed as characterising childhoods now, although in heightened form. The perception of the older cohorts can be understood within this public discourse about changes in childhoods in West Bengal, and the mythical past of uncomplicated childhoods is not just confined to the reminiscing of the older generations but are also circulated within families where children hear of 'simpler' and 'better' childhoods of parents and grandparents, learning by contrast what makes their childhoods so regrettably hurried.

The aim of the section is not to uphold this 'myth' of the golden childhood as a completely fabricated story. Rather, the word 'myth' has been used because of the selective borrowing of aspects of childhood in the previous and the contemporary generations to emphasize the 'otherness' of contemporary childhood in West Bengal. However, in its very portrayal, in public opinion, as well as in the

specific narratives of the respondents, the story about changing childhoods is not easy to tell apart from the story of the changing culture of the Bengali middle class. The transformations within the lower classes – a large number of whose children go uneducated, as well as within the uppermost sections, particularly industrialists, businessmen – are not part of this narrative. The 'simple' childhood that is lost in the mists of the past remains the story of the school going, sometimes English-reading children from middle class backgrounds. The paradise is lost twice in this narrative, for the myth of the golden childhood is not simply about the loss of a certain style of childhood, it is a narrative about cultural loss.

9.3 The End of Childhood

Childhood as discussed in some of the previous chapters, is an expanse of individual biography in the accounts of the older cohorts. The focus of the study was particularly on children of the age group of 10-12 – the biggest section of respondents in the study. However, the comparative perspective with previous generations could not ensure that the narratives would be limiting to particular years- the ages of 10-12. Without any specifications of age, the term 'childhood' is an ambiguous one, as narratives sometimes trail off into different biographical phases. Follow up questions, sometimes about the exact age of the respondent at the time of a specific experience helped sharpen the accounts to some degree, but equally significant was the concern at which point of individual biographies the description of 'childhood' became inapplicable. The disambiguation of 'childhood' in the narrative interviews consists not in simply striving to capture age-based gradations, but in understanding the meaning of what is not childhood in the narratives. Respondents were asked to think back and say when they believed their childhoods to have ended.

The respondents chose one of three patterns when talking about the end of their childhoods. For both cohorts, a response among many women was connected to marriage, and with many men it was connected to the first job. But the implication of these events for the end of childhoods has been differently articulated by respondents from different backgrounds. The responses of two women from the '50s' cohort illustrate this.

Nalini Haldar, who was married at the age of 19 sees marriage as full of obligations and distinguishes it from a 'childhood' characterized by 'studies' and play. An excerpt of the interview has been included:

H.S: Ok. And what do you think, when had your childhood ended?

N.H: Childhood:.ended I'd say..mm..sometime after marriage I think. That my childhood perhaps ended. The reason being, in childhood one doesn't have, for example, any *bindings*.

H.S: Hm.

N.H: You do or don't do as you wish, you don't think about what will happen tomorrow, how you will arrange things, you don't have these worries. Simply studies, play and perhaps music or singing – depends on what one does.

H.S: Hm.

N.H: But not after marriage. Then you have wake up in the morning and do this and that, or plan about the future.. these things creep in.

H.S: Hm.

N.H: That is why one thinks that it ended after that (Interview with Nalini Haldar, December 2010, italicized portion originally in English).

Another woman from the same cohort also talks about her childhood as having ended with her marriage at the age of 21, but with another emphasis. Pranati Sengupta, who in her interview speaks of a highly pedagogized and protected childhood. But unlike referring to the responsibilities that came with marriage she talks about stepping into autonomy.

"My childhood existed until my marriage. As long as I was with Ma, Baba, Thakuma – I could never do things as I myself wished"(Interview with Pranati Sengupta, January 2011).

Similarly, several women from both the cohorts talked about their childhoods ending with marriage. The age of marriage of the women of the '50s' cohort was said to be around 18 or 19, early twenties being the highest. In the '70's cohort, most of the women were married around their mid-twenties, so the age at which childhood is said to have ended for respondents of the younger cohort was almost five years greater than that of the older cohort. However, one of the respondents from the '70s cohort was married after completing her high school exams – the single respondent from this cohort to marry after high school[76]. Madhuri De 41, said she believed her childhood ended after class seven (around the age of fourteen). But her marriage in itself with its responsibilities is not directly of significance.

M.D: My childhood ended right after class seven.

H.S: Why do you think so?

M.D: Simply because I got married.

H.S: But you said you married after class twelve.

76 The practice among women, of marrying after completing high school was also not high among the '50's cohort. Most of the women who married before graduation, in both cohorts, had usually started college when they were married.

M.D: Even then..From that time onwards my mind strayed in that direction that is..

H.S: Do you mean they were searching for bridegrooms?

M.D: No. The mind..that is..just from class eight I started seeing all my friends falling in love, having relationships, in this sense I suppose even I was inclined in that direction from then onwards (Interview with Madhuri De, January 2011).

The men from the two cohorts who identified the end of their childhood with getting their first job almost uniformly indicated a minimum age of 22. The men from both the cohorts, irrespective of salaried professions or family businesses had all completed their graduation at the very least. As such the phrase 'after my first job' appeared to be self-explanatory, though the implication of responsibilities – as some of the women said about marriage – was significant. For example, Shubhash Kumar Mandal, from the '50s' cohort responds in a format common to many other respondents.

"My childhood..when I started working at the court..From then onwards I..em..started becoming self-reliant" (Interview with Shubhash Kumar Mandal, December 2010).

The second pattern of response is closely related to the first. Respondents associated childhood with the protection and authority of elder generations and end of childhood sometimes was implied in the death of a parent. Tathagata Kumar Upadhyay says his childhood ended in the year 1984 at the age of fifteen after his father passed away leaving him and his mother to manage the grocery store and run the family. „My father expired and from then onwards..Afterwards when did one play as one had in childhood?"(Interview with Tathagata Kumar Upadhyay, January 2011). Similarly other respondents such as Baibhab Kumar Chatterjee emphasizes the removal of an authority figure as ending his childhood. He uses the metaphor of an umbrella for his father who passed away when he was in his early twenties. "There was an umbrella over my head that wasn't there anymore" (Interview with Baibhab Kumar Chatterjee, February 2011). He was already working at the time.

A third pattern of response was that some respondents said their childhood had 'somehow' not ended. Women and men from both cohorts talked about sometimes believing that they were still children in a way. Several reasons were provided by the respondents. A woman who grew up in the 1970s talks about a continuity of her childhood.

.„.I think my childhood is still within me. I thik I am quite happy among children..Even if there is no childishness, I think that my childhood has perhaps still not ended. Maybe inside we grew up very fast, because the family environment, my childhood were different. Despite that (emphasis) I think I still have my childhood" (Interview with Barnali Mukhopadhyay in December 2010).

Another respondent refers to the theme of authority to explain why he is convinced that his childhood hasn't ended.

> "When did my childhood end?..If I tell you you will not believe me..around two years ago my Chhotdi says to me – 'you'll get a slap from me' – they do not understand at all (laughs)..To my sisters it is still my childhood".(Interview with Timir Sengupta, February 2011)

This response of a 70 year old man to the question about the end of childhood, points to a pattern in which many respondents from the Bengali middle class associate being reprimanded or supervised by an older figure of authority with the status of childhood. A woman in her early forties says:

> "My childhood has not yet ended..my childishness is still there..I play with my son even now. I have never had to take responsibilty and do something as of now. That is..my parents were always there over my head[77] then and even now (reference to parents and in laws) That is whyI still don't think that I have grown up" (Interview with Shamayita Mandal, December 2010).

The 'childishness' or 'childlikeness' as implied by the Bengali word *chhelemanushi* has been used by some respondents, to express a carefree or 'funloving' side to them despite their biological age and their ascent to parenthood or grandparenthood, which to them is the proof of their childhoods.

9.4 The *Bildungsmoratorium* and Self-Perceptions of Childhood

Childhood as a biographical experience can be talked about only in retrospect. The process of looking back in itself and reconstructing one's lived experiences is sometimes reflective of the individuals' sentiments about not just biographical but also social pasts. Most of the respondents who talked about 'a sea of change ' from their own childhoods, thirty to sixty years ago also spoke of a strong yearning for the simplicity of their childhoods – not just of being a child, but of being children in times which are seen as 'simple'. As the girl from Nobita's father's past in *Doraemon* became more beautiful in his memory – as white as lily and with beautiful eyes – with the years, so do childhoods of the past acquire a dignity and beauty in the narratives. Rather than take it as an explanation of the suspect status of reminisces, this aspect of reconstructing childhoods has been included in this study as reflecting the imprint of the Bildungsmoratorium of middle class childhoods.

It is significant to note that in most of the narratives, the paradise that is lost both to the adults and to the contemporary generations of children was also pedagogized and to some extent protected from adult responsibilities. The two older cohorts speak of childhoods that were not unlike the contemporary lives of chil-

77 The Bengali phrase *mathar opor thaka* (having someone above one's head) is an idiomatic expression of having an authority figure, who is also protective.

dren from the same social section, situated within the family and the school. The transformation in the narratives point to structural shifts within the basic outline of a domesticated, scholarized childhood. Certain old spaces are seen as having disappeared in contemporary childhoods, such as the *para*, the family has shrunk for the contemporary generation of children from an extended family not necessarily confined to one home, to a smaller family joint or nuclear, with primary ties among close relatives. The emergence of the 'tuitions' as a space for scholarized childhood has developed over the generations – from the home tutor one had in the 1950s before school finals to institutes or specialized tuition teachers who children of various age groups go to in the hours outside school.

The discussion about cultural loss, the increasing alienation of children from their 'own' language, and their familiarity with other cultures – such as English literature, Japanese animés, Hindi film songs – point to the fact that individual narratives about the childhoods are not simply about 'childhoods' alone. Yet the blurring of these narratives about transformation of childhoods into those about transformation of societal structures, sentiments and values in West Bengal draws attention to the character of the subject of childhood in itself. Childhood as a biographical phase and a 'segment' of the social structure is hardly limited to education systems and playgrounds, nor can it be captured by boundaries of age alone. Though official definitions of childhood set age-limits – 18 in many societies including India, in many other ways more or less institutionalized, some boundaries are set on childhood, such as the requirements of education systems, as well as the existence of visible labels of 'childhood' on specific practices or cultural artifacts – 'children's books', 'children's media' which in the context of urban West Bengal is concentrated on cartoon shows. However both the lived experiences of 'children' and the emic view of members of a society about the meaning of childhood go beyond these definitions. The sentiments which characterized and to some extent fostered the pedagogized and 'protected' childhood in West Bengal at least since the early twentieth century take on a force of their own, which accounts for the association of a number of things to childhood – protection, authoritarianism of elders, learning, as well as sounds and sights of the city or town that are often looked back on as the sounds and sights of childhood.

The question of 'exactly' understanding the subject's perspective perhaps haunts all ethnographers or researchers using the interview method. In this study the narratives of the older cohorts were significant to understand the shifting boundaries of the *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood and to situate the contemporary culture of childhood within its historical background. However, as mentioned before in some of the previous chapters, ascertaining the respondents' meanings of childhood was sometimes difficult, especially as they mentioned biographical phases in the interviews which correspond to conventional under-

standings of adolescence or even young adulthood. The question was therefore approached the other way round. By asking respondents at which point they believed their childhoods to have ended, something akin to conceptually planting small flags on the borderline of the subjective meanings of childhood and 'non-childhood' could be achieved.

The accounts of the two cohorts show the close association between learning and perceptions of childhood, to the extent that the end of school life, and sometimes even college or university meant the end of childhood for many. This has also meant that the length of childhood varied across and within gender, class background and generation of the respondents. In the two older cohorts where women and men spoke of their childhoods ending with marriage or the first job, both the events are not just symbolic of traditional adult roles for women and men in Bengali Hindu society. The respondents themselves talk about stepping into these roles following the completion of education. Some women talked about breaking off their studies midway to get married – but this was at the graduation level, when the respondents had started college. However for the remaining women a minimum of high school was completed in the '50s' cohort and in the '80s' cohort most of the women had completed their graduation and sometimes even Masters' degree before they got married. For men from both generations, since a minimum of a college education was common to all the respondents before their first job, 21 was the age most respondents said their childhoods ended. Again, respondents who spent the greatest amount of time in educational institutes for higher education were often from families with higher cultural capital. While especially for women respondents from the '50s, marrying after a Masters Degree signified the family background – in its break with convention, and the importance it placed on education, high cultural capital reflected in pedagogized childhoods – emphasis on reading, music etc. clearly did not always translate into rejection of tradition, in the form of a delayed entry to adulthood.

It is also significant, that protection and the authority of an older person is as intrinsically tied to childhood as education. This explains some of the narratives about a childhood that has not yet ended, especially where respondents live with parents or in laws after marriage and a generational order of authority exists. The interweaving of education, absence of responsibilities or adult obligations, the absence of complete autonomy because of the presence of authoritarian figures from older generations within the family is the hallmark of the *Bildungsmoratorium* of not simply childhood but also of youth – a term markedly absent in the respondents' own accounts. An example of the depth of this association is reflected in one interview. In one of the families in Bandel where interviews with a child and his mother and grandmother were arranged, the great grandmother of the 10 year old boy was also interviewed. 84 year old Maduri Sarkar was the only person who was interviewed from the same age-group. The opportunity of having

another generation's account of childhood in West Bengal was too good to resist, even when she had grown up in rural Bengal. The interview also brought once again into focus the curious place of girls in the *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood in Bengal. Madhabi Sikdar talked about a strict upbringing in a conservative Bengali Hindu family in the 1930s, which arranged her marriage at the age of fourteen. In a format upturning that of the other accounts she says while narrating her biography,"My childhood actually began then..after my marriage"(Interview with Madhabi Sikdar, December 2010).Talking about her marriage to a supportive and culturally inclined husband, she associates childhood with the freedom of beginning a new life away from the discipline of her family. Moreover the support of an indulgent husband who encouraged her to learn music and read, things that were not allowed in her conservative family is also significant in this account. She perceives her life after marriage as her 'childhood' in that she was allowed to experiment with her interests and discover her talent in music – something her daughter, grand daughter and grandson have had the liberty of doing even as they went to school.

The different interpretations of childhood as also of the end of childhood show that hard clear boundaries of the *Bildungsmoratorium* cannot be possibly drawn just like the boundaries of childhood itself. Sexual reproduction, paid work, obligations are the core attributes of aduthood in many societies and marriage, paid employment are in this context symbolic of adult status. At the same time, as some of the accounts show the relationship between the end of childhood and sexual experience or marriage is far from being straightforward. Significantly enough, the reference to marriage came up only in the accounts of the women respondents, whereas for the male respondents the first job seen as a biographical event marking the entry into adulthood, preceded marriage in all the cases. Marriage has not automatically meant the end of childhood in the accounts of the women – the 'freedom' to do as one wanted without having to ask for the permission of parents was one aspect of the blurred status of marriage. Conversely, entering another household with older generations exercising authority [78] also bestowed upon the entrant – the young woman – the status she had in her parental home, that of someone with lesser autonomy. It is the different sides of this relationship to authority – freedom and again dependence as well as the 'protection' of being under someone else's authority that characterize these accounts about childhood.

The essence of 'childhood' suggested by the narratives in all these accounts is unmistakable. Freedom, learning, dependence, indulgence, partial autonomy, discipline, 'carefreeness' from not having to make significant decisions – are the key attributes in this universe of meanings about 'childhood' notwithstanding the

78 The practice of a woman moving into the family of her husband and in laws was common and continues even today in Bengal to a somewhat lesser extent.

paradoxes. At the same time school years, play, extra curricular lessons characterize the broader understanding of childhood. Both sets are part of the context of the increasing pedagogization of childhoods. While it might not be possible nor desirable to separate them out into cause and function, yet both are integral to the process of standardization of the *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood. However, the cultural moratorium of childhood is far from a uniform terrain as has been discussed in the previous chapters. The entry of different social sections, as well as the different points and character of the entry of girls and boys into this *Bildungsmoratorium* mean several connotations of childhood and adulthood existing simultaneously than a simple model of a scholarized, non working, asexual biographical phase.

What is of greatest significance is that respondents from the two cohorts often draw from the ideal of the pedagogized childhood that is dominant among the contemporary generation to interpret and give meaning to their own biographical experiences. Statements about childhood beginning after marriage or where respondents in their 70s believe their childhood has not ended, draw attention to the potency of the contemporary standard ideal of childhood. Even if practices such as delayed marriage of girls, or studying for a longer period of time have increased over the last two decades, when respondents from earlier generations narrate their biographies, the yardstick of what comprises childhood is one that is drawn predominantly from a model of childhood that has gained currency in contemporary West Bengal. Those who criticize the 'universalization' of the standard model speak of the symbolic violence done to childhood in other – particularly non western, non-industrialized cultural contexts. But the standard is not used by theorists or activists alone, even older generations borrow from it to give meaning to their own experiences. This is the hallmark of the *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood that has grown and undergone transformation within a particular social context. Like Nobita entering his father's past to create the memory of the girl as white as lily, the everyday lives of the present generation of children reach into the past of its preceding generations and unwittingly influence the way they reflect on their childhoods. Memories of childhood, are therefore not about a biographical section fixed as 'childhood', but are made, in constant interaction with perceptions about the following generations of children and their childhoods.

9.5 Excursus

The narratives which are at the centre of this book are from the context of urban Bengal, tracing the everyday lives of children from the 1950s to contemporary Kolkata and Bandel. Some interviews however, were carried out with respondents who grew up in the post war period in South Germany, a cohort that is comparable in age to its counterpart in West Bengal, who grew up immediately after Independence. This was done not from any sense of inadequate research on children's lives in Germany. On the contrary, the post war generation in Germany has attracted a considerable amount of interest in the social sciences, Zinnecker's own work occupying a significant place among them. Nevertheless, the resolve to explore childhoods in the German context through narrative interviews was pursued with a desire to understand the historical and social context in which the concepts of childhood and youth as *Bildungsmoratoria* were conceptualized on German soil. Doing the interviews first hand with respondents in the state of Baden-Württemberg and in West Bengal enabled a deeper understanding of the historical specificity of childhoods – particularly of scholarized and domesticated childhoods, that were also significant for understanding the context of Bengal.

The interviews were carried out using a similar *Leitfaden* as for the older cohorts in West Bengal, where respondents were asked to talk about their childhoods, followed by specific questions to clarify some statements. A total of 9 respondents, 5 of them female, were interviewed in the city of Freiburg and the town of Sigmaringen, in Baden-Württemberg. The respondents born between 1939-1946, spent their childhood in Baden-Württemberg with the exception of one (whose childhood was partly spent in the state of Bayern) in the post war period. Though the interviews covered a range of themes about the respondents' childhood, only some excerpts have been discussed in the context of the historical and cultural specificity of childhoods. In the following two sections the narrative styles, vocabulary and motifs the 1950s' cohort apply to talk about their own childhood in contrast to present childhoods, as well as the perceptions about the end of their childhoods have been discussed. The third section discusses the narratives and examines their significance for middle class childhoods in West Bengal.

The respondents when asked to describe their childhoods or their families, most noticeably began the narrative or emphasized their personal biographical experience in terms of their situation in a specific period. The political and economic situation of South west Germany is reflected in these narratives. A significant theme in which the distinctiveness of the childhoods and the period in which they were lived were emphasized, was that of food. The theme of food was introduced sometimes as a special childhood memory about particular kinds of food, or about family practices or experiences related to food.

Stefan Eggart, for example introduces his childhood by mentioning that his parents owned a small farm in St. Georgen, Freiburg, and owned pigs and hen and grew vegetables. He describes his childhood as belonging to 'difficult times' but having sufficient food. In narrating his childhood, the association with particular kinds of food such as lard[79],made by his mother and used as a bread spread, and potatoes – a common staple throughout Germany during and after the war – is significant. The availability of food also plays a role in how his childhood is seen in retrospect, as comparatively better in times that were not easy. He says:

> „My parents were not rich. They were never on vacation. But at the same time, they had..they were relatively better off after the war, when many people starved, because they had a small farm. They had their own potatoes, and own cereal,..they baked their own bread" (Interview with Stefan Eggart, March 2011).

The difficulty of procuring food, in contrast to this narrative is also a theme in some interviews. Isolde Dünzen, begins describing her childhood in Freiburg by referring to childhood memories of her mother spending a part of the day away, leaving her and the younger children in the care of the older children in the family. Food makes an indirect entry in her narrative, although its presence is unmistakable.

> „In any case, we did not have much to eat at home. And so my mother went foraging[80]..so she was off at six in the morning with her rucksack. She went to Kaiserstuhl, by train. So she could get more food. And we were six children, and the older children, the older siblings..they looked after us. And mother was off foraging in Kaiserstuhl. And she always asked the people there if she could get something to eat, for the children, because our father was in the war. He was not there, right?" (Interview with Isolde Dünzen, October 2010).

79 The actual term used is *Schmalz*.

80 The exact term used by the respondent is *Hamstergänge*, a colloquial version of *Hamsterfahrt* or *Hamstern* referring to a wartime practice in parts of Germany where many people travelled to work for or exchange their possessions for food that was unavailable in sufficient quantity in the normal market, such as potatoes, butter and bacon for the family, sometimes paying more than the usual price to hoarders. The term is borrowed from the hoarding of food by hamsters in their cheeks.

The reference to food is made in various contexts in the narratives. While talking about helping her neighbours look after their children, Isolde says that the pecuniary benefits of helping neighbours than at home was great because one could often satisfy a childish fancy for some kind of food, that one usually could not have.

> „And earlier..we had many neighbours back then. And I looked after their children, and one got ten pennies for that and then we headed for the bakery. All the children on the street would accompany. And then we..how do I say it, we bought sweet bread and divided it among us. Or I got an egg from the woman whose children I looked after..and I cooked it it on a pan and I ate it. Earlier it was like that. It wasn't like it is today, that one had everything (laughs). We were six children, right? And so it was then“ (Interview with Isolde Dünzen, October 2010).

Not having sufficient food for the family, was however, not the only context in which the general economic political conditions of post war Germany was talked about in the narratives. One respondent, Liselotte Eggart, talks about her family moving from Mainz to the black forest region because of the greater availability of food. Waldemar Gäckle, who grew up in Sigmaringen talks about special memories of one bar of chocolate per month, and how his mother saved sufficient rations for a cake for his sister's communion.

End of Childhood

The respondents were asked to reflect on when they perceived their childhoods as having ended. Most of the respondents talked about the end of a specific phase of their formal education as marking the end of their childhood. The system of formal education was a significant background in the narratives. All the respondents interviewed had attended at least eight years of basic schooling, the *Volksschule*, which most of them started at the age of six. With the exception of one respondent, Erika Baumann, who attended a *Gymnasium* or an academic secondary school, the other respondents attended different forms of *Kaufmännischeschule* or vocational schools, usually for two to three years. The reference to one of the various schools attended was made by most respondents, while talking about the perceived 'end' of a childhood.

Liselotte Eggart, situates the end of her childhood with the finishing of the Volksschule. She replies to the question saying:

> „(..)When we came out of school. When we had to start the apprenticeship and went to the *Gewerbeschule*[81]..for three years..my childhood was over then. It was all over then. We had to work from then..and..well..our childhood was over“ (Interview with Liselotte Eggart, March 2011).

81 The *Gewerbeschule* is one form of the various *Berufschule* poviding vocational education.

Similarly, Hubert Baumann, Stefan Eggart and Isolde Dünzen, locate the end of their childhood with starting the *Fachschule*, *Handelsschule* or the *Fortbildungsschule*, different forms of vocational training either in a special area, craft or a commercial school. As most of them had studied in the *Volksschule* for eight years, the age of the perceived end of childhood could be determined as fourteen or fifteen.

Clemens Dünzen, who also attended a commercial school for three years, says he perceives his childhood as having ended „at the latest at the age of seventeen or eighteen", when he finished his apprenticeship and had a job. But an apprenticeship or a job was not the only association with the end of childhood. The end of the primary school itself was perceived as marking an end to a biographical phase in some of the narratives. As Erika Burman, the only respondent who attended a *Gymnasium* says: „Childhood ended from the moment one started *Gymnasium*.. because one started studying quite a bit then" (Interview with Erika Burman, April 2011).

Specific biographical experiences, such as the death of a parent, as in the context of Stefan Eggart who lost his parents before he turned eighteen also form part of the narrative about the end of childhood. Some of the respondents also referred to the start of another biographical phase, adolescence or youth, *Jugendzeit* in association with the end of their childhoods. The demarcation, between childhood and youth is made in a combination of institutional references as well as personal experiences. However, the institutional reference is not just to the school system. Waldemar Gäckle, who grew up in Sigmaringen, completing his *Berufschule* at the age of eighteen, says:

> „Actually, actually (my childhood ended) at the time I came out of school. When I had a job. Where I had to prepare for a serious life. At that time.. From childhood to..to youth, the path, or the bridge was actually the Catholic Youth. The youth-group was certainly the passage from childhood to..to youth. I must say, it was also most certainly with the first love one had (laughs). Sixteen. The first love I had was at sixteen" (Interview with Waldemar Gäckle, October 2010).

Discussion

The excerpts from some of the interviews with respondents who grew up in Baden-Württemberg have been included to draw attention to the cultural and historical specificity, in the experience, as well as in the perceptions about childhood. The interviews have not so much been discussed for a comparative perspective between childhoods in Baden Württemberg and West Bengal, given the scope of the study and the comparatively fewer interviews from the German context. At the same time, the narratives of the cohort who grew up in the 1950s

draw attention to some lines of argument which have relevance for the main interests of the book.

While the reference to food in the above narratives are specific to post war Germany characterized by food shortage and strict rationing, in Bengal a few years earlier, the great famine of 1943-1944 had claimed more than a million lives. Some of the oldest respondents in the 1950s' cohort from West Bengal were five years old at that time, so a clear account of memory of the famine is not available. What is however of interest, is that food or food shortage does enter the narratives of some of the respondents from West Bengal, but in a different context and not with the same significance as for the respondents from Baden-Württemberg. Though the famine had occurred when most of the respondents were very young, the 1950s in Bengal were also the time of the influx of refugees from East Pakistan. In addition, many of the respondents of this cohort grew up in large families with medium incomes to feed them. But food has a different place in these accounts. Pranati Sengupta for example, who lived in a joint family talks about some measures to curtail expenses of food during her childhood. She says the family had sufficient food, but since many of the people who worked with her father and uncles ate with their family, potatoes would be boiled to feed the workers and domestic helps, if there was not sufficient rice. The famine is a part of her narrative, not as something that she experienced, but heard about.

> „The famine of '43 was a time when people in the streets would cry for some boiled starch..We used to hear about it, so I remember that because rice was short, potatoes were cooked in a huge pot..we would now and then take some sweet potatoes from there. Food was aplenty in our house..fish, mutton. Every Sunday was like a feast..our family was fond of eating. Even if we were not affluent, but we were not wanting“ (Interview with Pranati Sengupta, January 2011).

Similarly, in some of the other accounts, if food was talked about, whether in the context of the famine or in later years a general shortage because of the high price of rice, the famine or the shortage was almost always a 'story' that one had heard about. Parimal Das, also talks about hearing of people starving during the famine when he was a child. But his family's experience was different, particularly because his grandfather knew someone who owned a rice mill, so the family had rice. Referring to the rationing of food, prevalent at that time, he talks about a childhood 'favourite', dried potato crisps that were provided along with foodgrain.

Apart from these occasional references, food was not a significant part of the narratives, even from respondents who grew up in lower middle class families. Historians of the period of the Partition and in the years after the Partition, the '50s, point out that the '40s and '50s were particularly difficult times in Bengal, especially because of the famine of 1943, as well as a later 'cloth famine' and 'fish famine' in 1949 (Gupta 2009). Black marketing, food rationing as well as a

high rate of educated unemployment characterized West Bengal in the 1950s. However, different social sections were differently affected by the socio-economic situation. Gupta says:

> "The famine in reality wholly devastated 'the golden Bengal', and completely overshadowed all previous unrest and dislocation, panic and migration, stresses and strains. Most middle class bhadraloks (except the ones who could take some advantage of any disaster) were upset by the extent of the famine ravages, embarrassed at their own escape from these tragedies, and felt helpless at their inability to shelter the famine victims"(Gupta 2009,p.319).

A particularly telling line is that about the 'embarrassment' of the *bhadraloks* at their 'escape. Though as mentioned before, most of the respondents from West Bengal were born either after or a few years before the famine of 1943, their accounts about food stand out against a background of food shortage in West Bengal, where food-doles comparable to the *Hamsterfahrt* might well have existed but did not touch the middle or lower middle classes as they did in Germany.

What is of interest, are the form in which the respondents of the two cultural contexts chose to present their childhoods. It is not that education or strict parents, or financial constraints were exclusive features of one of the two cultural contexts. Liselotte Eggart for example, talks about reading in secret, an instance found among many interviews in the Bengali context. Yet the context she describes is wholly different. She, as well as Isolde Dünzen talk about reading *Bravo*, a magazine for young people started in the 1950s in Germany. Both respondents say that the magazine was something of a rage among young girls, but met with parental disapproval either because of their content – film related news – or because parents considered it a waste of money to buy a magazine like that. Similarly, when respondents were asked how they viewed their childhoods in comparison with the contemporary generation's, women and men, not unlike the Bengali counterparts talked about respect or fear for parents, or the financial constraints of their families as distinguishing features of their childhoods.

Though a direct comparison with the German context cannot be made, nor is it intended in this section, the narratives of childhood and the significance of the motifs in the two cultural contexts reflect on the specificity of the urban Bengali middle class, as well as on the extent of the intersection between history and biography in the two cultural contexts. Significant is the fact that, despite the presence of some common experiences, the respondents chose starkly different elements to present their childhoods. The war played a key role in the childhoods of the German respondents, irrespective to some degree of class background, whereas the political-economic situation of partitioned Bengal does not creep into the narratives of the middle class respondents to the same degree. The two different portrayals are two 'archetypal forms' Riessman (1993) talks about, with which childhoods of two cultural contexts are presented. For lack of a better word I use the term 'metaphor' to describe the narrative styles in which the war

ravaged social landscape of one context, and the education, salary and tradition centred community of another are presented as stories about childhoods.

In the context of the narratives about the perceived end of childhood, the responses by those who grew up in Baden-Württemberg in the 1950s are comparable as well as significantly divergent on one account. The association between education and childhood is strong in both cultural contexts. But the difference in the education systems has different implications for the perceived extent of childhood. While in West Bengal, most of the respondents from different sections of the middle class, especially men, studied at least until college, till the age of 19 or 20, the respondents from Baden-Württemberg who associate the start of *Handelsschule* as the end of their childhood, usually saw their childhood as ending at the age of fourteen or fifteen. More significantly, the end of childhood was connected to the start of adolescence or youth, a term, which despite its existence in the Bengali language, does not find place as such among the narratives.This aspect has been mentioned by Zinnecker himself in several contexts (Zinnecker 2003; Zinnecker & Stecher 1996), although the focus has been the start of youth. The starting of an apprenticeship or a *Lehre* was not the only aspect that signified stepping into adolescence. Zinnecker and Stecher (1996) refer to this particular significance of the education system in West Germany, and refer to the *Deutsche Shell-Jugendstudien* whose findings showed that the youth of more than 80% of respondents in West Germany in the 1950s started with the end of the *Volksschule*. A variety of other factors, not the least significant among them being the Church with its various youth associations, heightened the concept about a distinct youth. Therefore the period of childhood, significantly characterized by institutional factors, had a more determinate extent in the interviews with the respondents in Baden-Württemberg than in Bengal, where the ambiguity of the concepts of youth or adolescence makes childhood appear as extending into the early twenties of some respondents.

As has been mentioned before, the excerpts from the German context have not been used as a comparative study, but because the contrast brings out the specificity of Bengal's cultural and historical context. The distinction in the dominant motifs of childhood in the two contexts, the apparent insulation of the urban Bengali middle class from food shortage, as well as the perception of an extended childhood are not of interest as 'truths' in themselves, but in how they sharpen the edges of historical and cultural experience and serve as reminders before any conclusion about a homogenous contemporary 'middle class' childhood are drawn, that do not take into account the historical background of such a childhood.

10. Conclusion

Historical vignettes about 'inappropriate' humour surrounding the child Louis XIII in the French court by adults around him (Ariès 1973), or reminders about the one time economic value of children in the United States of America (Zelizer 1994) show how deep the normalized idea of protected childhood has sunk in many contemporary societies, particularly within a span of a century. The picture gleaned from historical literature on several aspects of society, as well as from autobiographies and fiction point to a comparable direction of transformation of childhoods in the Indian context, even if childhoods in India await their Ariès. While the 'standardized', 'protected' childhood has been said to have become more widespread in most western industrialized societies, giving an impression that there is only one way of 'doing childhood', the model in the Indian context is still confined to some sections of society, despite its spread through the social ranks. Nevertheless, the shift within a society where even until the first half of the twentieth century school education for girls was looked upon with hostility by sections of the Bengali middle class, children were often married at 12, and where the fate of child widows were a subject of raging debate, to a contemporary landscape of childhood which cannot be conceptualized without school, leisure and conservation of 'childhood' is a significant one. In this sense it parallels the transformation in the western context where a standard of childhood has become a blueprint of the everyday lives of thousands of children.

The mood of contemporary childhood among the urban Bengali middle class in Kolkata, as reflected in the narrative interviews, is in keeping with some of the basic features of pedagogized middle class childhoods in both western and some non-western societies. The story of the everyday lives of children from middle class families in West Bengal could, in its basic outline, be compared to the story of children's lives in many contemporary societies. The argument of the study has not been that West Bengal is unique and separate in its pattern of childhoods. Rather, in a research focusing on pedagogized childhood based on ideals distinguishig it from adulthood, Bengal is a case in point. The historical background of

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the state of West Bengal accounts for its specificity as a *Bildungsgesellschaft* with a section of a middle class, having a specific history with relation to children – in the context of a system of schooling that was novel to the Bengali soil and in the codes of conduct and practices surrounding the upbringing of girls and boys which emerged against the backdrop of colonial rule.

While childhood researchers have been struggling for the denaturalization of the standard idea of childhood, another concept, that of middle class childhoods is becoming increasingly naturalized. With gradually increasing research on children's lives – mostly from western contexts and some from non-western contexts, social science research appears to be taken with the idea of transnational middle classness, focusing on similarities between the section of educated service sector professionals in different cultural contexts who invest time and energy in their children's education within and outside school. Moreover, the theory that the uncertainty of employment opportunities and social mobility has instilled in the middle classes a 'fear of falling' (Ehrenreich 1997; Burzan 2010), has contributed significantly to this research focus on pedagogical strategies of the middle classes to ensure cultural reproduction. The objective of the study has not been to reject the 'fear of falling' explanation for the specificity of middle class childhoods. Yet at the same time a need was felt to take a step away from a viewpoint that is so intent on uncovering a global commonality with a burgeoning service sector and market economy across the world, that it overlooks historical difference at the cost of 'cultural' difference, replaces sentiment and ideology by a global thirst for *Bildungstiteln*, distinctions of taste and familial conflicts for an image of the near universal 'class' of media consuming children – to forge a *lingua franca* of middle class childhood.

Ironically enough, one of the main concerns at the beginning of the study was to counter the representation of 'other' childhoods in the South Asian context in the academic and public discourse. In this context, the emphasis on historical and cultural specificity of middle class Bengali childhoods might appear to be something of a paradox. The 'otherness' of childhood which this book set out to interrogate and address was that of an ambiguous construct – a politically relevant stereotype, of working children or poor children who often typify childhoods in India or Bangladesh and become the singular tropes available to contrast with the scholarized pedagogized childhoods of western societies. The focus on the social context – that of an educated middle class in a particular region with a specific history was therefore significant. The near universal image that this study challenges, is that of 'global middle class childhoods, characterized by heightened media consumption, children's increasing autonomy, and which is affected singularly by the competitive education market and the significance of *Bildungstiteln*. This study situates itself between difference and similarity and by using the concept of the *Bildungsmoratorium* it attempts to capture the historical spe-

cificity of childhood and of a middle class culture within a particular region in India, as well as bring it to a broader platform where it can be compared with other patterns of childhood in different historical and social contexts – without either losing its historical specificity to highlight global sameness, or by exoticising its 'otherness' to cut the blandness of perceived global homogeneity.

The distinctive cultural ethos of the Bengali middle class that marks the *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood over three generations, shows how education or 'studies' is a dominant aspect of the everyday lives of children from at least the 1950s. This dominance is not limited to school performance, but permeates other aspects of everyday life such as leisure practices, the emergence of specific spaces in the last few decades such as the tuition classes or the dance classes, as well as self-definitions or perceptions about other children – as reflected in the narratives about children who come 'first' in class, or 'being good in studies'. The culture of childhood that marks this *Bildungsmoratorium* cannot be summed up as the product of middle class fears. The explanation about the frenzy of a threatened middle class bolstering all their cultural and economic werewithal to secure the future of their children misses out more than what it captures. The narratives about pedagogized childhoods of respondents who grew up in the 1950s when the service sector in Bengal was far smaller than what it is today, the continuity in the narrative styles of the three generations which hints that some practices – such as watching Hindi films, playing 'too much', or reading too many 'outside books' are sometimes considered profaning for studies and profaning for a 'good' Bengali childhood, point to a realm that is both culturally specific as well as historically evolving. Explaining away the children's accounts as well as that of the older cohorts in terms of Ehrenreich's perspective perpetuates gross symbolic violence on the realm of sentiments in the formation of such childhoods and of a middle class culture. A confined realm of individual beliefs or feelings are not implied by the word 'sentiments' in this context. Rather, sentiments have also been viewed as a part of the social structure in this study, within which childhoods and children's lives are situated. At some level sentimental shifts and other structural shifts cannot be separated. The prevailing sentiments about physical culture in colonial Bengal among the Bengali *bhadralok*, and the contemporary landscape of middle class childhood in Bandel and Kolkata, where the 'downstairs' of apartment blocks, or the corridor within the house, or sport 'coaching' are the only spaces of play – cannot be read off as simple 'cause' 'effect' categories.

The resonance that has sometimes been found among descriptions of the *bhadralok* culture and the narrative interviews of the respondents about their childhood emphasize the specificity of regional history and cultural context within the national boundaries of India. However, while a comparative perspective of different middle class childhoods within India is at present missing, the existence

of some studies – historical as well as fictional, suggest some similarities in middle class values and as a consequence in the culture of childhoods – in Tamil Nadu in South India. Though a detailed picture is not available, both West Bengal and the state of Tamil Nadu despite many regional and cultural differences, have a shared colonial past of being special administrative units of colonial rule in the erstwhile Bengal and Madras Presidencies[82].

The colonial experiment in the area of education, the creation of a specific intermediate section of educated Indians to aid the colonial administration, the importance of education as a value in itself as a means for social mobility – form one of the major contexts within which such a middle class culture of childhood can be located. It is however, by no means the only significant context. The social reform movements in Bengal, the interplay between 'European' and 'indigenous' systems of thought that was the hallmark of nationalist sentiments, and the curious amalgam of Hindu caste practices such as *kulinism*[83] specific to Bengal and the 'enlightenment' influenced project of 'saving' girls and women (Kerkhoff 1995) account for the historical specificity of the domestic and public domains of Bengal. Glimpses of this past fraught with these contradictions can be identified even over half a century after Independence, in the everyday lives of a middle class who are far removed in socio-economic conditions than the *bhadralok* of colonial Bengal. To add to this layer are the circumstances which shaped the history of West Bengal after Independence – the industrial slump in the 1980s, the economic liberalization and the revival of service sector professionals, the long reign of a Left Government and its education policies that set the stage for generations of children growing up in West Bengal. The *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood in Bengal is therefore not something that emerged solely as a response to a burgeoning service sector and an uncertainty about maintenance of status, although both factors are significant in contemporary childhoods. From the trope of children reading 'outside books' in secret, or children making hour-long bus journeys after school to learn guitar or dancing, or parents grudgingly negotiating the consumption of 'Hindi film culture' by their children – the *Bildungsmoratorium* in Bengal bears many markers of its history – standing out in its cultural specificity, and again blending in with its counterparts in far off contexts

82 The third Presidency was the Bombay Presidency, which is in the region of the current state of Maharashtra. However, without sufficient knowledge or research on childhoods in this region, a comparative perspective cannot be drawn.

83 The practice of polygamy among the *kulin* Brahmins of Bengal.

like West Germany in the childhoods of the 'null zoff und voll busy'[84] generation (Zinnecker 2003b).

The experiences of older generations are significant in a study about a specific culture of childhood. Apart from tracing the historically evolving practices and values related to childhood, they draw attention to how certain childhood experiences of a generation become referents of a desirable or childhood or painful or unhappy ones which succeeding generations must on every account be protected from. The narratives about childhood, sometimes from three generations within the same family emphasize this clearly. The agency-guarding new paradigm of sociology has had to fight against the notion of childhood as a project of creating 'future adults'. At a theoretical level the criticism is valuable, but the fact remains that in the real lived worlds of children and their families, the 'project' aspect is sometimes strong. Parents, or other family members often see childhood of their children as a space for realizing unfulfilled dreams that were impossible to fulfill in their own childhoods. This reflects both the modern 'sentiment' about childhood being full of promise, that must be nurtured, as well the practice itself of 'investing' in childhoods. This on no account translates into subjugation of children to the projects of adults without any 'agency' on the part of children. One of the most surprising revelations during the course of the fieldwork was about the fluid character of the meaning of 'childhood'. In an interview in December 2010 in Bandel one of the respondents – an 84 year old woman who grew up in a conservative Bengali family in the 1930s, said she experienced 'real childhood' only after fourteen, when she was married and was encouraged to follow her interests in music by her husband. Her granddaughter, who grew up in the 1980s and is now herself the mother of a 12 year old, was also interviewed and she talked about how her grandmother's and mother's childhoods wishes influenced hers. Her grandmother especially, not having the opportunity to learn music or dance when she was of the same age felt it was something her daughter or granddaughter should not miss out on. Srilata Maity, the 41 year old granddaughter of Madhabi Sikdar talked about being 'dragged' to dance lessons – something she developed an 'allergy' towards. Her son, 12 year old Shubhojit who was also interviewed was not 'pressured' by his parents to 'learn' anything, but he said he was thinking of joining guitar lessons after the vacations.

The emphasis in the present study has not been on the generational order as such (Honig 2009a, 2009b; Zinnecker 1990, 2001) but the experience of childhoods of older cohorts have been significant. The importance of the generational experiences for the culture of childhood is not simply at the level of new pedago-

84 The phrase 'null zoff und voll busy' was used by Zinnecker, Behnken and Stecher in one of their research projects and literally translated means 'zero trouble and completely busy'.Contrasting childhoods in West Germany over three generations, the phrase was used to describe the generation of young people growing up in the new millennium, as opposed to their grandparental or the 'null Bock' (zero ambition), and the parental generations.

gical practices or an attempt to realize all unfulfilled childhood desires through the contemporary generation of children. The generational experience also consolidates and merges into the ideals of childhood, which might not be realized in detail, but casts its own long shadow on the lives of children in the form of a yardstick. Among the Bengali intelligentsia – a section that continues to be dominant in Bengal, the outcry against the 'profaning' market, vulgar media-culture exploiting the 'innocence' of childhood, takes on a Rousseauesque tone in its eulogy of the uncorrupted childhood. Apu becomes all the more emblematic of a paradise lost – not just in the distance of the contemporary urban middle classes from rural Bengal, but also in the loss of the age of 'classics' for example the works of Bandopadhyay and Ray, who epitomize the Bengali intellectual culture of the previous century. At the same time, younger voices of those who grew up in the last two decades speak amidst the slew of condemnations about generational experiences of childhood, torn between pedagogic and cultural ideals of their parental generation and their own desire to struggle free from this 'garden of childhood'.

Those who grew up in a Calcutta or Bandel that are coming to terms with the young sections of the middle class flirting with the despised 'Hindi romantic film' culture, reading Bengali or English books that were neither 'classics' nor 'British' – are yet to become parents themselves or have started entering the 'pedagogizing' generation. Women in their early 30s who resented being dragged to classical dance classes, men in their 30s who look back on dramatic family confrontations in their childhood when parents discovered their children's fascination for Hindi film actors – are a significant cohort. Though not a part of this book, this cohort is significant – as a generation that came of age in times of heightened cultural, pedagogical conflict, that looks back to see many talents untapped, many desires thwarted – and are themselves on the brink of raising a new generation of children. Here, a word of clarification is in order. Childhood researchers, especially in the German and the Scandinavian contexts, have been for some time emphasizing the importance of generational order, particularly in the tradition of Alanen. The understanding of 'generation' in this context is based on Mannheim's sociocultural understanding of generations as consisting of cohorts born at the same time and in the same parts of the world, and stresses shared experiences, values and attitudes (Mannheim 1976, Hengst 2009). The concept of generation in this book also follows the Mannheimian concept. One of the crucial concepts in Mannheim's conceptualization of generation is that of *Erlebnisschichtung* (Mannheim 1976) or the layering[85] or stratification of experiences. To be born in a specific society in a certain period, constitutes for Mannheim a char-

85 Hengst in *Collective Identities* uses the term 'layering (Hengst 2009, p.205). I prefer the translation than the term 'stratification' which has been used in some other English translations of *Erlebnisschichtung*.

acteristic *Erlebnisschichtung*. This emphasis on distinct identities based on experience and period of birth is also being questioned by some contemporary researchers. Hengst, (2009) talking about contemporary societies influenced by media-culture, argues that such a perspective of distinct age and experience based groups becomes less applicable everyday (Thorne 2009). The question of generational order as such has not been taken up in this book. At the same time, the concept of generation is significant to it, in the sense that the experiences of past childhoods are seen as contributing to the culture of childhood of a specific social section. In this sense what has been argued for through the discussion of the narrative interviews comes close to a layering of experience of childhood of a community, of a social section over time. Central also is the understanding that experiences of past childhoods – especially among cohorts who have themselves become parents or grandparents, dialectically interact with the experience of later childhoods, making up the culture of childhood as it is in contemporary societies. This has been differently emphasized in other contexts by some scholars. Kruse (2011), for example discusses how some consequences and developments are lived in a certain way that is influenced by earlier experiences and says that though the sequence of generations differ in their *Erlebnisschichtung*, culture does not develop simply with the addition of content, rather it does so dialectically. The memories of child brides from Bengali middle class families, of girls who were taught to be useful at home, and trained as useful and 'cultured' companions for their future husbands, the memories of boys being favoured over girls in the family, the memories of excessive regulation of a conservative family, of music lessons and schoolwork reaching into the narrowest chink of 'free time', of books being read in secret – are not necessarily lived nor experienced by older generations to have an influence on the lives of following generations of children. They exist, unspoken but not inactive, in the collective memory of a community or a social section, hidden one layer behind another in the experiences of childhood.

It is this aspect of the generational that has been emphasized in the present study as a crucial aspect in the culture of childhood, not just in the pedagogic principles adopted by one generation for its children, but in the unintended consequences that shaped the lives of children, producing tropes which merge as a page in the book of generational experiences of childhood, recorded and handed down in public discourse and as family stories. Just as the cultural past of Bengal played a significant role in the childhoods in the 1950s and 1980s – deliberately taking a stance against a traditional past where girls and boys were socialized into the gender roles as adults, where girls were married as early as 9 and education was for boys only, contemporary childhoods likewise are also a constant dialogue with the past.

The children's culture – reflected in their engagement with the electronic media, their preferences in books, comics and in their cultural inclinations – is sometimes a force of its own. In the accounts of the three generations about their leisure activities and preferences, the first cultural 'break' is noticed among the current generation of children. Despite continuities in the field of other leisure activities, the contemporary generation of children notwithstanding parental disapproval, and cultural capital of families, routinely watch Japanese animès dubbed in Hindi. While television was a nascent media for the parental generation, in other areas – especially books or comics – the '70s and early '80s cohort was close to the '50s cohort in its adherence to strictly Bengali or British influenced books and comics. It might be argued that the '50s and '80s in Bengal, were not periods which knew *manga* or animès, nor the extent of the influence of television. But keeping aside the influence of non-Indian cultures, the accounts of the two older cohorts point to an aspect found even among the description of the colonial *bhadralok* – the hostility towards other non-Bengali, especially north Indian cultures. The difference between the accounts of the previous generations and the contemporary generation of children might be accounted for by the global reach of media, the 'foreign' media that flowed into the Indian landscape after the liberalization, not just from the United States of America, but also from countries like Japan and Korea. The answer might be partly situated in these processes and partly in the narrow choice of leisure activities for children who cannot play outside, nor have time or playmates at home after their extra-curricular classes and tuitions. Whatever it is, the children's near unanimous 'choice' of shows like *Doraemon* and *Kiterescu* and their equal familiarity with the Hindi language, chop-sticks, Japanese ways of school life, time travel and insolence of fictitious children – can be read as signs of how. through the culture of childhood, the urban middle class in West Bengal is coming out of the spell of a culture that was partly colonially induced and in some ways belligerantly Bengali, that held previous generations in its thrall.

At different points of the study the question about the 'boundaries' of childhood has drawn attention to a certain ambiguity of the subject itself. Similar to the theoretical debate which criticizes the perception of children and adults as binaries, such distinctions at the empirical level are of use only to some extent. One of the reasons for this is the fuzziness of youth and adolescence – categories which if considered from the point of their biographical characteristics rather than age limits, form part of an indistinguishable continnum with childhood and adulthood, distinct only at the extremes. The blurring also stems from the fact as the historian Cunningham points out, that the century of the child 'has lived up to its billing in ways not anticipated at its outset' (Cunningham 1995, p.189). The statements about the rights of children seep into questions of autonomy as well

as of the 'right to be children' within a context where 'protection' of children is the dominant ideal.

It is true that in India, or in West Bengal, the century of the child has been far different from that in west Europe and the United States. In Bengal too, the pedagogic ideal of childhood in Bengal is its own Frankenstein. Childhood as a 'paradise' and vulnerability of childhood to all kinds of threats are both perspectives which are possible because of the 'invention' of childhood and the principles upholding the importance of preserving it from the sullying contact with adulthood. The contemporary generation of 10-12 year olds in West Bengal are inheritors of this legacy of 'protected' childhood – in a world far removed from Phulmoni, or child widows like Haimabati. The strength of the past is supreme, especially in the collective memories of a society about past atrocities of a conservative culture towards its children, which become tropes of what the contemporary generations of children must at no cost experience or even know of. But the pull of the present takes childhood in another direction, where stories about the spiralling demands of children, the shallow addictive consumerism and the loss of indigenous culture among children spur debates about the corruption of the 'simplicity' of childhood, ironically enough in a time when childhood in Bengal is more pedagogized than ever before. It is therefore not surprising, that at a time when this cultural heritage of the *bhadralok* is perceived by a section of the middle class to be rapidly eroding in the face of postliberalization shifts in India's socio-economic landscape Bengalis, who grew up in central or north Calcutta in the 1950s would choose to reinvent their childhood images after Apu. Fumbling for the source of a nostalgia, a wistful sigh for a past one cannot return to, the urban Bengali middle class finds a befitting metaphor in the image of a rural boy from a respectable family who leaves the countryside of Bengal forever. It turns to its predecessors for a language to articulate the sense of loss, where both childhoods and the cultural transformation of Bengal find expression in the haunting childhood image of Apu leaving his village, with the ghost of a child left behind watching the family leave and the rural landscape being cut through by the shriek of the train's whistle.

The slipperiness of childhood as an age specific biographical phase is also reflected in the accounts about the end of their childhoods. Because of its association with learning and indulgence, childhood has acquired something of a metaphorical connotation among middle class Bengalis as any kind of 'time out' from responsibilities, with 'educaton' and 'culture' being the main preoccupations during this phase. In a time when the culture of youth in West Bengal increasingly takes on the form of the *Bildungsmoratorium* as Zinnecker described in the context of West Germany since the 1980s (Zinnecker 2003a), this realization is more significant than before where some amount of 'time out' from traditional obligations and a culture of exploring and learning new things is visibly extending into

the biographies of the urban middle class, well into adulthood. The 'extended childhoods' or the childhood even after marriage or parenthood might be signs of an unfurling cultural moratorium of adulthood. Though the scope of the study has limited itself to the *Bildungsmoratorium* of childhood, the structural and sentimental shifts in contemporary West Bengal that affect not just children but the youth and adults, are equally important to understand the culture of childhood. A significant realization in this context is that the culture of childhood of the middle classes in West Bengal is not an 'adult free' world of children – either as the 'secret world' of the Opies' studies or the autonomous culture of Hardman's anthropological hopes. The world of children as narrated by the children themselves, is peopled with children, adults, institutions as well as memories of past childhoods. Moreover, to reiterate a point made above, the generational experiences contribute significanly to the culture of childhood, particularly with the ascent of one generation which grew up in a culture of protected childhood with all its privileges, stereotypes, joys, grudges and prejudices into adulthood. Childhood is both 'done' as well as lived, and children as well as other actors who are not children – friends or siblings who are adolescent, grandparents, parents, teachers – are all actors who make up the culture of childhood. It is therefore likely that 'childhood' as a concept or a perceived biographical phase spills over any 'bright line of age'[86] and would not permit its taping down to the playground or the school.

86 The term 'bright line of age has been used by Bluebond-Langner and Korbin in *Challenges and Opportunities in the Anthropology of Childhoods: An Introduction to "Children, Childhoods, and Childhood Studies"* (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin 2007,p.242).

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Appendix

Respondents from the Cohort born between 1997-2000

Name*	Year of Birth	Gender	School	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Educational Qualifications	Interviewed On
Mridula Banerjee	1997	Female	Bengali Medium Private Girls'	Father: Catering business Mother: Housewife	Father: B.Com Mother: B.A.	December 2009
Avinandi-ta Ganguly	1998	Female	English Medium Private	Father: Engineer Mother: Housewife	Father: B.E Mother: B.A	December 2009
Shubhro Banerjee	1998	Male	English Medium Central Government	Father: Customs officer Mother: Housewife	Not Known	December 2009
Bumba Bhattacha-rya	1997	Male	English Medium Private	Father: Customs Officer Mother: Teacher (Kindergarten)	Father: B.Com Mother: B.Sc.	December 2009

* The names of all respondents have been changed.

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Name	Year of Birth	Gender	School	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Educational Qualifications	Interviewed On
Paromita Dutta	1998	Female	English Medium Private	Father: Railways Mother: Housewife	Father: B.Com Mother: High School	December 2009
Darpan Dewanji	1997	Male	English Medium Central Government	Father: Policeman Mother: Housewife	Not Known	December 2009
Shubhojit Ghosh	1999	Male	English Medium Central Government Coeducational	Father: Business Mother: Housewife	Not Known	December 2009
Dhriti Dhar	2000	Female	Bengali Medium Private Girls'	Father:Fish dealer, Business Mother: Housewife	Father: B.Com Mother: High School	December 2009
Rupam Ghosh	2000	Male	English Medium Private Boys'	Father: Service Mother: School Teacher	Not Known	December 2009
Taniya Sen	1998	Female	Bengali Medium (State) Government for Girls	Father: Business Mother: Housewife	Father: B.Com Mother: High School	December 2009
Priyanka Mandal	1998	Female	Bengali Medium (State) Government for Girls	Father: Service Mother: Housewife	Not Known	December 2009

Name	Year of Birth	Gender	School	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Educational Qualifications	Interviewed On
Abhishekh Sen	1997	Male	Bengali Medium (State) Govt. for Boys	Father: Business Mother:Housewife	Not Known	December 2009
S. Anand	1997	Male	English Medium Central Govt. Coeducational	Father: Scientist Mother: Housewife	Father: Msc. Mother: B.A., M.B.A.	December 2009
S. Jai	1999	Male	English Medium Central Govt. Coeducational	Father: Scientist Mother: Housewife	Father: M.Sc. Mother: B.A., M.B.A.	December 2009
Ishan Dutta	1998	Male	English Medium Private	Father: Service Mother: Service	Father: Not Known; Mother: M.A.	January 2010
Mithoo Saha	1998	Female	English Medium Private Missionary Girls'	Father: Engineer Mother: (deceased)	Father: B.E.; Mother: Not Known	January 2010
Tiya Agarwal	1998	Female	English Medium Private Girls'	Father:Business; Mother: Housewife	Not Known	February 2010
Akansha Singh	1998	Female	English Medium Private Girls'	Father: Business Mother: Runs two Shops	Not Known	February 2010

Name	Year of Birth	Gender	School	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Educational Qualifications	Interviewed On
Shaswati Das	1998	Female	English Medium Private Girls'	Father: Engineer Mother: Housewife	Not Known	February 2010
Prakriti De	1998	Female	English Medium Private Girls'	Father: Business Mother: Teacher	Not Known	February 2010
Shreya Mukhop-adhyay	1998	Female	Private Girls'	Father: Doctor Mother: Service	Not Known	February 2010
Abhigyan Majumdar	1999	Male	English Medium Boys' Missionary	Father: Professor;Mother:Professor	Father: PhD Mother. PhD	December 2010
Parikshit Thakurta	2000	Male	English Medium Boys' Missionary	Father:Service (Railways) Mother: Housewife	Father: Not Known Mother: M.Sc.	December 2010
Arunima Majumdar	1997	Female	English Medium Girls' Missionary	Father:Professor; Mother:Professor	Father: PhD Mother. PhD	December 2010
Barnali Debroy	2000	Female	English Medium Girls' Missionary	Father: Service (Bank); Mother: Housewife	Not known	December 2010

Name	Year of Birth	Gender	School	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Educational Qualifications	Interviewed On
Titiksha Sengupta	1999	Female	English-Medium ,Girls' Missionary	Father: Service Mother: Housewife	Not known	December 2010
Abhijit Maity	1999	Male	English Medium Boys' Missionary	Father: Runs a Gift Shop Mother:Runs a Gift Shop	Father: Not known Mother: B.A.	December 2010
Shubham Mandal	1999	Male	English Medium Missionary Boys'	Father: Engineer Mother: Housewife	Father: B.E. Mother: B.A.	December 2010
Dipanwita Mukhop-adhyay	1999	Female	English Medium Missionary Girls'	Father: Service Mother: Housewife	Father: Not known Mother: M.A.	December 2010
Akansha Ray	1998	Female	English Medium Missionary Girls'	Father: Constructor Mother: Housewife	Father: B.E Mother: High School	December 2010
Aishika Kundu	2000	Female	English Medium Private Girls'	Father: Service Mother: Lecturer	Father: Unknown Mother: M.A.	January 2011
Riju Dutta	2000	Male	English Medium Private	Father: Engineer Mother: Housewife	Father: B.E. Mother: Unkn-own	January 2010

Respondents from the Cohort Born between 1958-1974 (Parental Cohort)

Name	Gender	Year of Birth	School Attended	Parents' Occupa-tion	Parents' Educatio-nal Qualifica-tions	Interviewed on
Usha Sarkar	Female	1964	Missionary School	Father: Administrative (clerical) post; Mother: Housewife	Father: M.A. Mother: High School	December 2010
Shubha Thakur	Female	1969	English Medium Missionary Girls' School	Father: Lecturer, thereafter worked in a pharmac-eutical company as chemist. Mother: Housewife	Father: M.Sc. Mother: BA	December 2010
N.D. John	Male	1958	(Medium not known) Coeducational	Father:Farmer, Grocer Mother: Housewife	Not known	December 2010
Srilata Maity	Female	1969	English Medium Missionary Girls' School	Father: Corporate post in a British Company Mother: Housewife	Father: MA Mother: B.A.	December 2010
Torun Kumar Mandal	Male	1965	Bengali Medium Government School for Boys	Father: Deed Writer Mother: Housewife	Father: BL, Mother: High School	December 2010

Name	Gender	Year of Birth	School Attended	Parents' Occupa-tion	Parents' Educatio-nal Qualifica-tions	Interviewed on
Sham-ayita Mandal	Female	1969	English Medium Girls' School	Father: Administr ative post. Mother: Housewife	Not Known	December 2010
Barnali Mukho padh-yay	Female	1974	English Medium Girls' Missionary School	Father: Professor Mother: Teacher	Father: M.Sc. Mother: BA	December 2010
Aruni-ma Ghosh	Female	1974	English Medium Girls' Missionary School	Not known (deceased in the responden t's childhood)	Not known	December 2010
Shaheli Kundu	Female	1972	English Medium Girls' School	Father: Professor Mother: Lecturer	Father: M.Sc. Mother: M.A.	January 2011
Madh-uri De	Female	1970	Bengali Medium Girls' School	Father: Fish Dealer Mother: Housewife	Not known	January 2011
Pariks-hit De	Male	1965	Bengali Medium School for Boys	Father: Fish Dealer Mother: Housewife	Not known	January 2011
Tatha-gata Kumar Upad-hyay	Male	1971	Bengali Medium, Governmen t School for Boys	Father: Grocer Mother: Housewife	Father: High School Mother: Not known	January 2011

Name	Gender	Year of Birth	School Attended	Parents' Occupa-tion	Parents' Educatio-nal Qualifica-tions	Interviewed on
Shub-hra Chatte-rjee	Male	1969	Bengali Medium Governmen t School	Father: Gazetted Officer Mother: Housewife	Father: BA Mother: High School	January 2011
Sudha-nya Sengu-pta	Male	1969	Bengali Medium Governmen t School for Boys	Father: ran a printing press Mother: Housewife	Father: MA Mother: BA	January 2011
Ketaki Sengu-pta	Female	1974	Bengali Medium Governmen t School for Girls	Father: Customs Officer;M o-ther: Forest Departme nt Officer	Father: MA Mother: MA	January 2011
Mita Dutta	Female	1970	Bengali Medium Governmen t School for Girls	Parents deceased in early childhood	Not Known	February 2011
Prasa-nta Dutta	Male	1965	Bengali Medium Governmen t School for Boys	Father: Railway Officer Mother: Housewife	Father: M.A. Mother: School	February 2011
Baibh-ab Kumar Chatte-rjee	Male	1959	Bengali Medium Boys' School	Father: Small business, local politician Mother: Housewife	Not known	February 2011
Suman Ghosh	Male	1969	Bengali Medium Boys' School	Father: Teacher Mother: Housewife	Not Known	February 2011

Respondents From the Cohort Born Between 1938-1948

Name	Gender	Year of Birth	School Attended	Parents' Occupa-tion	Parents' Educational Qualificati-ons	Interviewed On
Nalini Haldar	Female	1946	Bengali Medium Governme nt School for Girls	Father: Manger-ial position, Mother: Housewi fe	Father: Unknown Mother: Completed Secondary School	December 2010
Shubh-ash Kumar Mandal	Male	1941	Bengali Medium Governme nt School for Boys	Father: Cultivate d land, Owned a small business Mother: Housewi fe	Not known	December 2010
Sudhir Dutta	Male	1946	Private English Medium Boys' School	Father: Military Mother: Housewi fe	Father: Unknown Mother: Education till Class Six	January 2011
Dipshi-kha Kundu	Female	1944	English Medium Private Coeducati onal School	Father: Lawyer Mother: Housewi fe	Not known	January 2011
Birendra Ghosh	Male	1948	Bengali Medium Govt.Sch-ool for Boys	Father: Small Business Mother: Housew-ife	Not Known	January 2011

Name	Gender	Year of Birth	School Attended	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Educational Qualifications	Interviewed On
Parimal Das	Male	1942	Bengali Medium Private School for Boys	Father: Worked in a newspaper, started small business Mother: Housewife	Father: BA Mother: Till Class Eight	January 2011
Keshab Chakrabarty	Male	1942	English Medium Private Boys' School, Bengali Medium Private Coeducational	Father: Teacher in vocational training, wood technology Mother: Housewife	Father: BSc., Technical Diploma Mother: BA	February 2011
Timir Sengupta	Male	1941	Private Bengali Medium Boys' School	Father: School Principal Uncle: Professor;Mother:(deceased)	Father: M.A. Mother: Not known	February 2011
Chandramallika Chakrabarty	Female	1938	Private Bengali Medium Girls' School	Father: Professor Mother: Housewife	Father: PhD Mother: Secondary School	February 2011
Mitali Dhar	Female	1947	Bengali Medium Private Girls' School	Father: Policeman Mother: Housewife	Father: B.A. Mother: pre-University	February 2011

Name	Gender	Year of Birth	School Attended	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Educational Qualifications	Interviewed On
Pranati Sengupta	Female	1939	Bengali Medium Private Girls' School	Father: Small business Mother: Housewife	Father: M.A. Mother: M.A.	February 2011

Respondent from 1930s Cohort

Name	Gender	Year of Birth	School Attended	Parents' Occupation
Madhabi Sikdar	Female	1926	Bengali Medium Girls' School	Father: Administrative post Mother: Housewife

Glossary

Bengali

Ador - Affection, indulgence

Adore manush - Brought up with indulgence, pampered

Baba - Father

Chhelebela - Childhood, Boyhood

Didi- Elder sister

Jethu- Uncle (Father's elder brother)

Jethima- Aunt

Khela, Kheladhula- Play, Sport

Lakshmi- Goddess of wealth

Ma- Mother

Maath (*khelar maath*)- An open space, intentionally or unintentionally a play-ground

Para- Neighbourhood

Pora/ Porashuna- Studies, Schoolwork

Pujo- Durgapuja, the festival of Durga in autumn, schools are on holiday at this time

Saraswati- Goddess of Learning and Music

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German

Aufschub- Delay, Suspension

Auszeit- Time Out, Delay

Bildung- Learning, Education (approximate translation)

Berufschule-Vocational school

Erziehungswissenschaft- Science of Education

Gewerbeschule- Vocational school

Hamstergänge- derived from 'Hamsterfahrt', referring to the practice of asking for food often in exchange of work or goods from hoarders. Typical during the war and in the post war years.

Handelschule- Commercial School. Usually started after completing eight years of basic schooling.

Schmalz- Lard