
FAMILY FEELINGS AND ME: LOOKING AT EMOTIONS AS SOCIAL RESOURCES IN CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING OF FAMILY RELATIONS

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Abstract: In India, Childhood as a concept has been operationalised more to understand cultural processes, social structures, community characters at large and less to understand Children's immediate everyday life affairs in their own narratives. Child, until recent times, had remained buried under the overwhelming frames of 'Familial Body' and Familialism. Given this background, our current situation which sees a proliferation of child specific and children friendly institutions like, gives us a very interesting area of research pertaining to the changing nature of social relations that the child finds himself and herself in. Conducting an in-depth study on children family life, in an urban neighbourhood of India, I find an intricate dynamics of 'Family Feeling' sustained through individual motivations and differing demands. In the present paper I would focus on 'Emotions' and sentiments as social resources to describe how children access and use it in their day to day lives to build an understanding of family relations as well as advance their own cause.

Keywords: Childhood, Emotion Felt And Displayed, Family Life, Individual Space.

Childhood Studies: Background in the Western Countries: Historically in the west there tended to be three dominant cultural images of the child: the innocent child, the evil child and the miniature adult that underlined early scholarship and policy measures (Sorin 2005). But it was psychology that childhood studies. Psychological model brought 'development' as a key concept to study childhood framing it as a biological, universal phenomenon which every individual experienced in a passing phase (Jenks 1996). This generalization of childhood as a biological reality was challenged by cultural anthropology which claimed that societies varied in their cultural notion of childhood and hence *childhood was a cultural category* (Mead and Wolfenstein 1955). This made childhood symptomatic in understanding of larger cultural processes which facilitated only indirect and secondary approach of studying children lives (Alanen 1988) focusing on social units like family, school and policies with a concern to 'manage childhood' (Jenks 1996).

In 1980's the scenario altered influenced by Constructivist and Interpretative discourses. This acknowledged child as an active participant in various social processes who both affects and is affected by culture (Alanen 1988, James & James 2001). Scholars thus recommended that, 'children should be seen as competent, knowledgeable informants who can be involved in social research in order to learn more about the world' (Uprichard 2010, p9). James and Prout (2005) encourage for adapting a potential framework called, 'Emergent Paradigm' of childhood studies which sees childhood as a social construct made simultaneously by actions of the society at large and children themselves in everyday and professional realms. It also advocated ethnography as one of the suitable methods to study children (p8).

In practicing the new paradigm of childhood, scholars have however rightly alerted that it is important to maintain the distinction between 'child voice' as an actor as different from 'child voice' as an activist. Exploration of children representations in academics should not be appropriated by reform and political

agendas exclusively (Sanahan 2007). My own research is necessarily placed in the new paradigm of childhood studies: with a focus on children participation in the construction of their everyday family life

Childhood Studies: Background in India: Bhadra (2014) writes, 'Unfortunately, the institutionalization of sociology of childhood and youth is still in its' nascent stage...(p xix)' To begin with, most of the studies on childhood in India were carried out by western researchers under commissioned international projects (Kumar 1993). To facilitate cross cultural comparisons among multiple childhoods, these studies created a conceptual misrepresentation of childhood in developing countries. The indigenous childhood cultures were either shown as backward, problematic or non-existing (Balagopalan 2011) creating a situation for introducing reforms as per foreign standards. This led to a preoccupation with childhood studies in extreme conditions like child labour, child trafficking, etc.

In studying the everyday life of children the Indian childhood studies (and for that matter the life of individual) remain dominated by the 'Relational Self' of the 'Familial Body' Frame (Kakar 1978, Kumar 1993, Cohen 1998). This frame assumes an identification of 'self understanding' with the 'understanding of family' where the child is seen as a subordinate. Since 1980s, various childhood studies in India have tried to unpack the nature of Relational Self. Misri (1985) talks of two ways process integration and individuation of child through various in Indian family traditions. Kumar (1993), in speaking of the adult child proximity in Indian joint family context, writes, 'In a social order in which 'who is in authority' is never in question, children's status is strangely undifferentiated from members twenty or thirty years older than them (p70).' Such studies challenge the modern authority and autonomy nexus in reviewing adult child relationship pointing to multiple dimensions like, traditional role-status complex, cultural ethos, individual qualities etc (Sarangapani 2003, pp256-258).

Teresa Robinson (2014) in her study with middle class Pune, found a discernible Youth subculture, as separate form adult. However on further probing she found that the youth continued to privilege the relationships of family ties and old friendships. She writes, '...(T)hey realized themselves not only by reinforcing or subverting, but also by performing, inhabiting, experiencing, aspiring to, and reaching for social roles and expectations (Robinson 2014, p261).'

Given that my field work was conducted with school going children in their home setting, I was too intrigued by the coexistence of individual and familial orientations. I decided to explore the nature of interactions between child and his/her family, the family ethos and individual narratives in search of an explanation. For the purpose of this paper, I would focus on one aspect of my field finding, which is the use of 'Emotions as Social Resources' in children understanding and managing of family resources.

Emotions as Social Resources: Looking at Emotions came to me as an emic requirement. 'Family Feelings' constituted a central reference in the narratives of children in imagining their own present and future. I would but look at the varying application of emotion in different situations at home by children. Yin Li (2015), in her fine essay pointedly asks, 'What is affect? Is it a concept, a theory, a methodology, or a paradigm? (p18). Study of Emotions could throw us in the jungle of 'materialism and idealism, positivism and interpretivism, universalism and relativism, individual and culture, and romanticism and rationalism (Lutz & White 1986, p 406).' The Affect Control Theory defines emotions as, 'culturally given labels that we assign to experiences in the context of a social interaction that is self-referential (Robinson, Smith-Lovin, & Wisecup, 2006 p183). Taking a cue from symbolic interactionist works on emotions which, '...indicates that emotions are not merely natural impulse. Rather they are shaped both by culture (e.g. feeling rules) and our human capacity to react to and make sense of our own feeling (Fields, Copp, & Kleinman 2006, p156)', I would like to explore how children feel and chose to display various emotions which creates and recreates the familial as well as individual space in their home setting.

Fieldwork: For this paper I would be using a section of my PhD field work data which was conducted in an ethnographic mode in an urban neighbourhood of Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha. Given my intention to study school going aged children in an informal, normal, day to day setting, I accessed

the children in their homes. I spent long hours observing children and the families' daily routine, participating in various events and day to day activities, carrying out multiple conversations with children and parents and collecting their accounts on various aspects of family life and relations. For this paper I would rely on data collected on 4 children (3 boys and 1 girl) who were in 9th and 10th standards when I was conducting my field work. All the children belong to middle class families with parents educated upto graduation. 2 boys Luv, Kush, are twins and studied in private Odiya medium school. Atman and Samiksha, who belong to separate families, studied in private English medium schools.

Family Feeling: Family as the Ultimate Space: Children perceived of family necessarily as a space of 'togetherness' and 'happiness'. The 'togetherness' was characterised by a greater sense of awareness of each other among the members, a shared mind (sometimes altruistic), a family feeling and attachment or affection. I would like to quote what Kush told me on what family means to him-

Family is all members of house taken together. (Ghara ra sabu sadasya ekathi). Attachment, affection is important. There is a feeling. You can share everything. What you cannot tell anyone else, you can tell family. Sharing, help and cooperation (Mili-missi).....mutual understanding (paraspara bujhamana). (Standard 10)

Children viewed family as something embodied in them (family members). The bond of family was also experienced as something innate, spontaneous, natural and permanent. Atman explained to me-

'There is family feeling, they are indescribable expressions. Simple antenna types that connect with each other. It is like an inner voice that tells you to go and help them, obey them... Parents have feelings. Their feelings are important. It comes natural not to hurt them' (Standard 10)

In simpler words, Samiksha resonated the same, when she said, 'How to live without family....Family is where you have been since your childhood, where you grow up... (standard 9) Similarly, Luv declared his total reliance on family by saying that, 'In studies, job and other matters in life, whatever needs to be done, first baba (father) will be consulted. Atleast I will...Ultimately you want to know what your parents think about it. (Standard 10)

Not only, children lives were enmeshed in the family network but also, children were highly receptive to this situation. Family was an inevitable and most significant entity of their life. The quality of relationship was of great importance to children. Belongingness, Affection, care and dependability were seen as essence of family life. Family for them was one, inseparable body with feelings of it's own overarching the individual. Family Feelings were highly regarded by children. My observations of children day to day life corroborated with what children had voiced.

Samiksha had a close bond with all her relatives. She assisted her parents in various household chores and helped out her younger brother; though it was never demanded of her. Once when I asked Samiksha, how come she kept inviting cousins repeatedly when she knew she had a hectic study schedule, she replied, 'how long can you stay alone?' A similar environment prevailed in Luv, Kush's house. Both the boys held their relative with great regards. Their mother one's remarked me, 'We are so close in our family (relatives) that my children cannot say who is my real sister and who is my cousin.' Within the family too, spending time together was given much importance like having meals together, sharing about the day's work and seeking everyone's opinions. At Atman's family did not have any routine family time, given everyone's hectic schedule and differing timings. His relatives though visited often, stayed for a shortwhile. Atman had thus taken initiatives to start family whatsapp group to bring everyone together. And he made sure to attend every wedding invitations, feasts or trips in his family even when his parents are worried about his exams and health.

Familial Integration and conviviality are defining features of Indian society. However, in the recent trend of modern market ethos of specialized services, individual choices and Victorian adult child separation (Banerjee 2015), it becomes interesting to see how children orient and participate in the familial spaces. In the new modes of family life, what do children family life look like? My field presented an interesting situation where I found an intricate dynamics of 'Family Feeling' sustained through individual motivations and differing demands (Robinson). Clearly the role of Emotions in holding the family integrity in the eyes of children was paramount.

I would now look at how children negotiated their own assertive spaces within the family and under what conditions they prevailed or yield with a focus on the role Emotions felt and displayed.

Children's Me Moments: Samiksha: Understanding and Empathy

Samiksha narrated an event. *She once wanted to enroll for school Guide. Her father did not permit. She was so disappointed that she cried the whole night. Her grandfather could not see her unhappy and spoke to her father. Her father reluctantly gave permission. Later but Samiksha regretted the discussion. Her parents had to assist and accompany her in many tasks, pay extra money and she found the classes very mechanical. Thus, she voluntarily withdrew her name.* On another occasion Samiksha had told me, ‘

Luv, Kush: Trust

Emotional propriety was integral to Luv, Kush's family etiquettes. *Luv told me how once in a game he openly quarreled with a girl who cheated. His mother had noticed it and when he returned back, his mother punished him. His mother added her version to the story saying that her son had no excuse for losing temper, creating a scene when he could have peacefully resolved it.* I asked both the brothers, what made them obey their parents when they disagreed with their views. *Kush explained that he had the 'trust' that his parents have good reasons and intentions behind what they suggest, which he had found to be true on reflection. Luv shared that, he felt bad when he was scolded without fault and expected an explanation. But he promptly added that if his actions caused too much stress to his family, then he would yield. Because family also has sentiment and that cannot be broken (Paribara ra bi gote mana achi. Seta bhangi habani).*

Atman: Strategising

Atman did not bother himself with his parents expressed emotions. He guiltlessly disobeyed his parents distressing them. *On one occasion Atman staged an emotional act. He declared not to touch food till his mother ordered the mobile phone he wanted. His mother and grandmother pleaded with him, cautioned him. But he did not buzz. At last his mother ordered the phone and immediately Atman happily clapped hands with all and went for breakfast.* I asked Atman about his insensitive behavior. *He showed me his mobile which was battered. He pointed out that for 2 years he had been asking for a phone. And few days back he had given ultimatum but to no effect. He urgently needed a phone.* On another occasion Atman explained to me that, *there were real fears and problems which were different from apprehensions. He liked to ignore the apprehensions.* Atman did stand for his family in times of need, like looking after his father's office work in his absence.

As we can see different emotional paradigms were operational simultaneously in a given family (Erickson & Cottingham 2014). Majorly speaking, it was important for the families and children that mutuality, care and feelings be upheld. Individual assertions were seen as distressing. However, more than emotional etiquettes, it was important how others perceived of what one felt. Thus, emotional expressions and displays took prominence in various interactions, especially negotiations. Thus, a mopping and pining child was given her way as it was not good to make the child deeply sorrowful. And children voluntarily relinquished when they realized that their action was causing 'real' stress to their parents.

I found that both in compliance and in defiance children disposed a sense of individual appraisal and expression of the situation, but at large they remained extremely family bonded. Teresa Robinson finds in her study on young adults of middle-class Pune, 'And though they longed for more autonomy (within family), they continued to value caring and mutual involvement (Robinson 2010, p118).' Family as a

bounded unit gave them the material and immaterial resources and security to explore, pamper or pet their individuality; and that, affection played a huge role in the operation and maintenance of this dynamics in the child's life.

Conclusion: Children experienced family as one body and ultimate. Quality of relations; happiness, togetherness, trust, mutuality; were paramount to children. Family was as much a space of individual assertion and gratification as of collectivity. The ability of family to garner individuality and come to terms with it mutually over time is what made it a collective space. Emotions played a great role in facilitating the family interactions. Not only as 'feeling rules' and 'emotion competence' (Erickson & Cottingham 2014) but also as emotions felt, expressed and displayed as a mode of communication between the individual and the collective. Children not only perceived the need to make efforts to keep the collective space of family as a bonded unit but also actively engaged and partook in the emotional context of the family affecting the continuity, spirit and recasting of the collective space in their own many ways on almost a daily basis.

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