ECONOMIC&PoliticalWEEKLY

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Source: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 41, No. 38 (Sep. 23-29, 2006), pp. 4030-4034
Published by: Economic and Political Weekly
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4418723
Accessed: 30/04/2013 08:35

Childhood in a Globalising World

The acceptance of childhood as a protected and privileged period of life was simultaneous to the rise of the modern welfare state, and predates by several decades the discourse of globalisation. However, the ubiquitous tools of globalisation, such as the internet and tourism have currently induced a weakening of the welfare state and a dissolution of earlier existing "protective" barriers wherein the teacher and the learning system mediated between the child and the outer world. The more far-reaching effects of globalisation such as the implicit changes seen in work-patterns, child-rearing practices and the very notion of family itself, and in turn, the very impact of such changes on childhood, have yet to be systematically studied.

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The kinds of issues with which the term "globalisation" permits us to engage are hardly new. Some of them are, in fact, quite familiar and have received copious attention in the different social sciences. Contact between geographically distant societies and cultures through the ages, for instance, has been a major theme in history. Conquests and subjugation, colonisation and extraction of resources comprise the subject matter of a vast body of research and theory-building in economics and political economy, social anthropology and comparative studies cutting across disciplines. It is difficult to separate these phenomena from the ones currently addressed as "globalisation". Indeed, the global predisposition of capitalist extraction of natural resources has received so sustained an articulation from scholars for so long [e g, Baran 1957; Galeano 1998] that the processes we currently notice when we discuss globalisation can hardly deserve to be called incipient. Neither the economic and political, nor the technological and cultural features of the content of globalisation are new. Yet, if the term persists, and even appeals to some, it must be because it draws attention to a sense of break in contemporary world history

which occurred in 1989 when the USSR collapsed. The socio-cultural and not just the economic and military, implications of this event have proved predictably vast and are still unfolding. Similarly, the mid-1990s mark the opening and the expansion of the internet for civilian use (i e, as opposed to the use of the technology on which the internet is based, by the armed forces which had existed for quite some time). Moreover, modern telecommunications have shaped social history for more than a century. Hence, the internet cannot be described as a break, yet it does mark a radical increase in the speed, quantum and nature of long-distance communications. Its social and cultural implications are complex and generative.

The collapse of the USSR and the East Bloc, on the one hand, and, on the other, the availability of the internet for civilian use, together provide the context in which the relations between institutionalised structures of the state and the market are changing all over the world. The change is mediated by entrenched or historically shaped relations of power. This is why the so-called underdeveloped countries have been pushed to structurally adjust their national economies to be in tune with the demands of global markets. Though these markets are described as "global", they are

mainly located in the hyper-consumer societies of the fully developed world. Negotiations over new institutional structures like the WTO are taking place in a disturbed or charged environment, which is characteristic of debates on globalisation ever since they began in the early 1980s. The contribution made by the invasion of Iraq by an alliance of nations led by the US and UK, and the threat to Iran have made a significant contribution to the charged atmosphere in which globalisation is discussed, obviously not dispassionately or without stakes as one would desire in the case of a normal academic discussion. It is also difficult to deny that the invasion of Iraq is contributing to globalisation. Unlike the invasion of Vietnam by the US, the Iraq war has a national collective behind it and its consequences are shaping the politics and economy of many countries, including those directly involved in it. Seen in these terms, globalisation requires us to perceive the geography of war differently. We no more need a worldwide war to influence the whole world.

Children and Childhood

This brief background is useful to begin an inquiry into the relations between globalisation and childhood, inasmuch as this background indicates the emergency or mid-storm character of this or, for that matter, any inquiry into the socio-cultural aspects of globalisation. It is highly likely that quite a few points in our inquiry will make us wonder whether they are relevant or directly related to globalisation. For a process which is far from mature or complete, the parameters of inquiry into its effects cannot be firmly drawn. Similarly, if the process has a threat component, starting with the threat of its irreversibility – which the ideologues of globalisation never fail to underline – it can hardly be referred to with the unemotional objectivity associated with the social sciences, especially when the topic is a highly vulnerable category called childhood. While children do influence adult relationships and the social ethos, the agency we can attribute to them in any sociodrama is hardly of an active or independent kind.

At no point in human history has it been possible to bring up children without worrying about them, at least during infancy, though it can be argued that any social study of the worry associated with adult response to children will need to take a gender-conscious view. Indeed, the gendered study of globalisation constitutes a growing body of literature, which draws attention, among other things, to the importance of perspective as a methodological factor in the social study of our times. It can be argued therefore, that those who continue to discuss globalisation in the old paradigm of social sciences, which bans perspective and emotion, cannot be expected to generate insights of any great significance on topics like childhood, even if they happen to be scholars of the relatively more precise social science of economics. At best, they can tell us, if they choose to do so which most currently read economists do not, how changes in international and sub-national economic relations, especially as manifested in the context of work and wages, access to natural resources and human relations, are effecting children. Information of this kind seldom generates more than a sensation, mainly because we do not know how to assimilate it in any manner different from how we would respond to any news about oppression or violence suffered by any vulnerable community. To treat information about children's experience of war between nations or ethnic groups or through displacement caused by corporate incursion into new natural habitats, with mindful understanding, requires that we examine such information with the help of a concept seldom invoked in globalisation debates, namely the concept of "childhood". This exercise would be particularly useful to examine the implications of globalisation for education, which is beyond doubt the greatest modern preoccupation relating to childhood.

Childhood in Modern History

Children have been regarded during most of human history, and are still regarded in many parts of the world, as smaller versions of adults, with no special needs or characteristics. How we think about children today has a lot to do with the European Enlightenment, the industrial revolution and colonisation of the southern hemisphere by European powers. Although a global history of childhood has yet to be attempted, the limited knowledge we have

of the rise of new educational ideas and children's literature in Europe suggests that individualism and other democratic values, on one hand, and the advent of an urban leisure class are related to the normative ideas widely associated with childhood to this day. The United Nations charter of children's rights, for instance, would be inconceivable in the absence of the prolonged battles that generations of progressive educators and reformist thinkers engaged with in the context of schooling and law over the 19th and 20th centuries. Equally fundamental is the contribution made by scientific discoveries and inventions which enabled European societies to control infant mortality, improve public hygiene and sanitation and eradicate certain common illnesses [Aries 1962].

This cycle of change in survival rates is still unfolding in the former colonies, although the precise stories of change differ enormously across developing countries and within them, between cities and villages. In a nutshell, the very fact we think of childhood as a stage of life that has its own specific demands has its grounding in the ideas derived from the scientific and industrial advancements associated with modernity. The fact that the effects of these advancements are far from evenly distributed means that the pre-modern idea of childhood as an uncertain, highly vulnerable and rather short stage of the early part of human life is not obsolete. This caution need not be read merely in the context of the developing countries where modern science and technology are neither in a developed state nor are they spontaneously deployed for achieving developmental goals like greater social prosperity and cultural growth. Several tools of the Enlightenment were of a mental kind, and the advancement and application of such tools have played a significant role in enabling the modern idea of childhood to crystallise in the developed world. Certainty and predictability of life are, for instance, central features of the child's nature as the great critic of children's literature, Paul Hazard pointed out. These mental attributes of a desirable childhood are ostensibly threatened by the rise of terrorism and its ideological discourse in countries which gathered together to make the invasion of Iraq a success.

The history of childhood as a modern concept is also embedded in the narrative of the modern, welfare state, childhood as a protected and prolonged period of life owes its recognition to popular struggles

for welfare waged by the working classes in the context of the sweeping changes brought into their lives by the industrial revolution during the 18th and the 19th centuries. The battle of ideas which led to the gradual acknowledgement of the need for public institutions to protect and serve children must be seen in this background even though the appreciation of children's psychological needs arose in the context of a bourgeois style of life. While institutionalised care for health and education expanded at a painfully slow pace, pedagogues and teachers, writers and illustrators, storytellers and toy makers constructed rather speedily a new culture in which the child's special claim to adult sensitivity was foregrounded. Europe's history since the 17th century provides a view of the constellation of factors which explain the rise of childhood as a social construct and which the non-European world continues to use to this day as a point of reference for judging its own progress, or "development" as it is now called. The key ingredients of this history are improvements in health and public hygiene, emergence of a middle class with its concern for privacy and family, and specification of sexual innocence as the hallmark of childhood.

Long before the discourse of globalisation arose, this construction of childhood had become global. While the great majority of real children in the world lived in conditions of poverty and oppression, toiling for survival and dying due to common diseases, the mid-19th century prototype of childhood as a protected socio-psychological category continued to serve as an undisputed norm and educational ideal throughout the world. The destruction caused by the two world wars emanating from Europe accentuated the European ideal, leading to the recognition of childhood as a matter of global anxiety in the UN charter. Past the 20th century's post-war mid-point, as the colonised nations acquired freedom and embraced democracy, at least temporarily, the global ideal of childhood retained political and legal currency even though newly independent nations could achieve very limited success in controlling child mortality and universal access to schooling.

Current Context

In the context of trends that have unfolded since the early 1980s, we can analyse the impact of the factors related

to globalisation on childhood with the help of three broad categories: knowledge, culture and the economy. The first of these areas has to do with learning which is so closely linked to the modern notion of childhood that it is hard to think of childhood in any way that does not focus on learning. Indeed, the evolution of the idea of childhood as a special and prolonged part of life has run parallel to the evolution of the idea of learning as we interpret it today. Experience and activity are now regarded as two critical dimensions of learning during childhood, and in this particular sense, the idea of learning owes to the intellectual tradition which began with Rousseau in the 18th century and includes the influential works of Froebel, Pestalozzi, Montessori, Piaget and Dewey. This heritage of thought can be historically contextualised in the socio-cultural and economic demands that the industrial revolution triggered, and also in the intellectual shift associated with the Enlightenment and the reformation [Brooks 1969] has correctly summarised this complex heritage of modern childhood in terms of innocence with regard to the knowledge of sexual good and evil. The maintenance of innocence in this sense depended on bounding off the world of children from the adult world by means of institutions that were designed to look after children. The gradual emergence of universal schooling as a means to ensure that children spent a substantial part of their day in an institution where trained adults looked after them was one aspect of the separation of the child's world from that of adult; the other aspect was the rise of the nuclear family and the recognition of privacy as a factor of organisation of residential space.

Within the bounded world in which children were supposed to develop their potential for learning, trained teachers organised meaningful experiences in the form of activities with which the child could engage. They regulated the pace and nature of the child's interaction with the world outside the immediate home environment. As a modern institution, the school placed the child in a professionally managed world which offered meaningful experiences and filtered out or countered experiences which were not conducive to the child's development. Teachers received specialised training to ensure that they appreciated the child's need for a pedagogically and morally sound curriculum. In this role, the teacher was assisted by other specialists who designed the curriculum in a manner that would ensure the child's encounter with knowledge was in keeping with the child's capacity to cope with knowledge and to internalise it. In what is known as the progressive movement in educational theory, the immediate milieu of the child had a special status as a resource for learning. Dewey treated the milieu as one of the four commonplaces of curriculum, emphasising the role it would play in socialising the child into a structure of activities and relationships characteristic of a community.

If we place this thumb-nail sketch of the educational ideal coterminous with the modern concept of childhood, against current developments, we notice that the institutions responsible for regulating the child's encounter with the world are finding it difficult to function in that regulating capacity. If we look at the family, the neighbourhood or the community and the school, we can recognise a certain level of exhaustion in these institutions in terms of their ability and energy to act as mediating agencies between the child and the adult world. Invasion of the physical and intellectual space occupied by children had begun with earlier technologies of electronic dissemination; the internet has presented an unprecedentedly difficult challenge to the adult's ability to protect the child from an unrestricted range of knowledge.. Regulation of the knowledge of sexual good and evil was a major concern of modern pedagogy. It is no more possible to regulate such knowledge; more significantly it is becoming increasingly hard to protect children from sexual vulnerability and abuse.

Children and Tourism

The social contours of the child's defenselessness are different in the developed and developing countries, but the phenomenon exists and is expanding in both settings. Whereas sexual abuse of children in the developed world is linked to the decline of the nuclear family as a normative institution and factors like alcoholism, domestic violence and the spread of drugs, in many developing countries on the other hand, the spread of sexual abuse during childhood is associated with the rapid growth of tourism as an industry. Sheshadri and Suresh (2004) have studied the link between tourism and child abuse with the help of data on livelihood, family and community in coastal India. This study also attempts to indicate the larger picture of cultural and power relations between points of tourist "departure" and "destinations" which are situated, respectively, in the rich or developed and the so-called developing countries. A significant aspect of globalisation is the transcendence of space. The phenomenal growth of the tourist industry over the recent years is related to what Wackerman (1997) has called "the relativisation of distance as a limiting factor". Expansion of the recreational sector is an aspect of the cultural ideology of globalisation which treats the inclusion of more and more "destinations" in developing countries as a sign of their growth. When we study the internal dynamics of these destinations in terms of termination of traditional occupations and the transfer of the local habitat to tourism corporations, we get a deeper picture which foregrounds the impact on children as marginalised players in the new economy of tourism.

It would hardly be correct to view the exploitation and abuse of children in the tourist industry as a consequence of poverty alone. For the packaging of travel under the tourist industry, poverty is a relative condition which results from the development of a site into a destination. For redesigning a coastal area into a beach or a forest into a golf course, it is necessary to uproot communities and to destroy their traditional occupations. These processes inevitably make children vulnerable to being inducted into the tourist industry, initially in roles such as room service and trinket sellers, and eventually into prostitution. Studies of highly developed, successful destinations like Bangkok and Goa provide evidence for the view that the commodification and expansion of recreational travel under the auspices of globalisation has influenced children in a negative manner. Trafficking of children has also grown on a scale that the discourse of child rights has failed to cope with.

Schooling, Identity and Conflict

The school's role as a buffer between the world of adult preoccupations and concerns and the world of childhood is also witnessing new forms of strain. The distinction between knowledge and information is one major categorical distinction to identify the special responsibility of the school as compared to what the technologies of communication do. The

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distinction is dependent on the school's capacity to provide an ethos where children can draw upon designed curricula and the teacher's trained intellectual resource to make sense of experience by constructing knowledge. Globalisation has accentuated the competitive character of modern education and compelled all national systems of education to focus attention on the measurable outcomes of teaching, making earlier norms and priorities, which draw attention to the quality of children's experience of learning, irrelevant and unpopular. The shift of policy emphasis away from experience to outcome-driven instruction has blurred the distinction between information and knowledge. This has a serious implication for teaching as a professional activity. It is now easy to reduce a teacher into becoming a ubiquitous knowledge worker who is carrying out a given set of instructions rather than applying his or her own mind. Teachers also become casualised and replaceable by information machines which attract customers with self-teaching packages. The loss of distinction between information and knowledge also implies a significant cultural change, in that the kinds of knowledge which were passed on from generation to generation by the community in tacit ways are now forced to adopt an explicit or informative character in order to survive. The opportunity to socialise the young into a way of life gets transformed into the desperation to document and community life comes under one threat or another, ranging from the surrender or penetration by alien symbolic forms and values.

The metamorphosis of cultural knowledge, from tacit to explicit, means that a certain kind of coarsening takes place in the child's interface with culture. When each and every little aspect of a culture has to be explicitly transmitted to children, when it has to be consciously documented in one medium or the other, then something vital in adult-child relations is destroyed. Sometimes it expresses itself as a loss of subtlety in the adult's conduct in relation to the child; at other times it expresses itself in terms of the loss of adult authority. By pitting the adult as parent against a vast and varied army of anchors, jockies and stars, the new global media hit at the adult-child bond in the nuclear family, already weakened by isolation from a community it might have been a part of, at least notionally. The transmission of community memory to the young is

intercepted so sharply in certain cases that identity assumes the status of an end by itself, rather than a means of creating motivation for cultural ideals. Situations prone to serving as arenas of conflict over issues of identity, interpretation of sacred texts and the role of religion in politics, emerge. While globalisation literally suggests the widening of consciousness, it implies a great deal of localisation of consciousness, resulting from the reaction by residual communities to forces that speak and act with institutionalised global authority, and partly as a response to the uncertainty and the confusion that the fear of a loss of identity imply. The erosion of occupational identities as a result of techno-economic processes has also given religion an increased identity-defining role [Huws 2006].

Effect of Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism is a manifestation of this development. It is growing in many different contexts around the world today, not just in societies which were designated as poorly developed or illiterate but also in highly developed societies [Marty and Appleby 1993]. There is a link between the manner in which fundamentalism operates as an ideology and what is happening to cultural transmission in adult-child relationships. An extreme level of definiteness and unsubtlety characterise both, preoccupied as both forms of transmission are with a sense of doom. The urgency that parents feel in terms of the need to transmit the most important values and norms of culture to the child at as early a stage as possible, and to socialise the child according to explicit and specific ways is rooted in the fear that even a slight delay might mean the child will go too far away into a world which is going the wrong way. So, parents attempt to imprint the child, as it were, before the child gets lost in the global dark. The same urgency and fear are to be found in the fundamentalist's approach towards culture and religion. The approach is inspired by the metaphor of a final battle between good and evil. There is copious use of the imagery of death in the sociodrama that fundamentalist ideologies invoke in order to mobilise support and gain legitimacy, either as ideologies of the state, as in the case of US, or of an organisation committed to violence and terror. The treatment of a committed, explicitly articulated identity as a goal of education goes well with

fundamentalist ideologies which regard education of the young as a matter of crucial, futuristic concern. Systems of education are responding in several countries to the demand made on them for acting as a binding force for the consolidation of collective identity.

A great number of skirmishes are taking place in several societies as to what kind of identity education should promote and how it should accommodate the interests of different groups. Globalisation-related developments in the economy of both developed and developing countries have heightened the role of identity, leading to frequent eruptions of strife and armed conflicts. Children constitute a seemingly marginal arena in identity conflicts, but if we notice the importance attached to education in the politics of identity, we can appreciate the significance of childhood in both symbolic and real battles emanating from identity conflicts.

In countries where ethnic or subnational identities have sharpened to the point of sustained armed conflicts, children are actively recruited for war, and their education is turned into training in the use of arms. In countries like Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sri Lanka, children are actively indoctrinated into allegiance for the group which imposes on them the role of an armed soldier. The income generated from natural resources is channelised into the purchase of arms by the different sides engaged in armed conflict, including the state. In nearly all such cases, the state's vulnerability to arms suppliers of developed countries has been preceded by a sustained process of weakening of the state by means of structural adjustment of the economy under the International Monetary Fund's guidance. This guidance has been propagated under the rhetoric of capacity building for coping with globalisation.

The impact of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) on the debt-ridden nations of Africa was highlighted by UNICEF's 1989 *State of the World's Children* report. The conditions described in this report have worsened over the recent years, resulting in the exacerbation of violent conflicts in which children are now directly involved as soldiers. Use of children in domestic conflicts, political or ethnic, is taking place in several other parts of the world. The arms used in conflicts in countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal, for instance, reach the hands of children through the global arms trade

which has grown in its scale and capacity to reach far-flung corners as a direct consequence of the softening of national borders and the greater corporate power to penetrate them.

Implicit Effects

There are several indirect implications of globalisation for childhood which are more complex and difficult to study than the ones we have discussed above. These are related to the changes that the globalisation-oriented economic policies of various countries, both developed and developing, are bringing about in work patterns and employment opportunities, and in the context of agriculture and other primary forms of production. Shifting of a vast sector of service jobs to distant locations and the dispersal of different stages of production across the globe are relatively visible faces of the change that transnational corporates have been able to engineer in a short time span. Relatively less visible is this change pertaining to the effects of the new work patterns on the family. Huws (2003) is among the few scholars who have devoted attention to such effects. Her studies show that we can expect to see changes of a fundamental nature in relations within the family, child-rearing and socialisation. Her inquiry also hints at the nature of value-shifts that might occur in the wake of work-related changes. We extend this line of inquiry to cover agriculture and analyse changes which are unfolding in rural settings. Advancements in biotechnology are being utilised by agribusiness companies to render vast sections of the peasantry financially helpless. Many African and Latin American societies have over the last few decades witnessed the devastating effects of fluctuation in the demand for the cash crops they depended on. With the entry of genetically modified seeds, the condition of the peasantry is likely to get worse as we have already begun to see in India where more than 40,000 farmers have committed suicide in the face of debt incurred in order to afford the expenditure involved in growing genetically modified cotton [Dandekar et al 2005]

Inquiry into the implications of such unprecedented social phenomena for social institutions like the family has not even begun. The only certainty that scholars have indicated is that migration to cities will speed up and the capacity in the system of education to cope with hunger and inequality will face challenges on an unimaginable scale. The pressure of devastated agri-economies and natural habitats can also be expected to mount in the developed countries, as indeed is already happening, on account of immigration. The holding capacity of their systems of education is being tested by the presence of children from a vast range of cultural backgrounds, the paucity of teachers and the changes that teaching as a profession is going through under the pressure of management culture. In many third world countries, the state has come under intense ideological pressure to withdraw from welfare activities like childcare and education. Privatisation is one consequence of this development, the other is what Nieuwenhuya (1998) has called the rise of a global charity market which operates through non-government organisations. These developments suggest that the spread of Europe's norm of bourgeois childhood to the once colonised world is serving mainly as an inspiring illusion.

A broad conclusion towards which our analysis points us is that as a construct childhood and the welfare state are interrelated. Globalisation of the economy requires the dropping of national barriers, implying a weakened state. It means a larger space and greater freedom for the market to operate in areas traditionally associated with the state, namely health and education. In most developing societies, globalisation of the economy has brought with it the withdrawal of the state from welfare, negatively affecting women and children. This process has occurred in the developed countries too, affecting immigrant communities in particular, and the working classes in general. The working classes and the nature of work itself are also being affected in inscrutable ways by rapid technological change euphemistically referred to as the rise of a "knowledge economy". Childhood as a category represents a cultural frontier where the project of modernisation has come under threat from globalisation. The number of symptoms and factors to be studied for an organised inquiry into this ironical phenomenon is quite large, some of which have been indicated in this paper. The phenomenon is ironical because on the face of it globalisation appears to symbolise the epitome of modernisation. 𝗘𝗣𝗪

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