

EDUCATIONAL REGIMES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

EDITED BY

RADHIKA CHOPRA AND PATRICIA JEFFERY

IN COLLABORATION WITH

HELMUT REIFELD



SAGE PUBLICATIONS
NEW DELHI THOUSAND OAKS LONDON

Copyright © Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2005

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

First published in 2005 by

Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd

B-42, Panchsheel Enclave

New Delhi 110 017

www.indiasage.com

Sage Publications Inc.

2455 Teller Road

Thousand Oaks, California 91320



Sage Publications Ltd

1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road

London EC1Y 1SP

Published by Tejeshwar Singh for Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, phototypeset 10/12 Aldine-401BT by C&M Digital Pvt Ltd, Chennai and printed at Chaman Enterprises, New Delhi.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Educational regimes in contemporary India / edited by Radhika Chopra and Patricia Jeffery.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Education—India. 2. Education and state—India. I. Chopra, Radhika.

II. Jeffery, Patricia, 1947—

LA1151.E367 370'.954—dc22 2005 2005001290

ISBN: 0-7619-3348-4 (HB)
0-7619-3349-2 (PB)

81-7829-485-0 (India-HB)
81-7829-486-9 (India-PB)

Sage Production Team: Malathi Ramamoorthy, Shweta Vachani, Radha Dev Raj and Santosh Rawat

CONTENTS

List of Tables	7
List of Figures	8
Preface	9
Patricia Jeffery: Introduction: Hearts, Minds and Pockets	13
PART 1: CHANGING CONTEXTS OF EDUCATION AND THE STATE	39
1. Roger Jeffery, Patricia Jeffery and Craig Jeffery: Social Inequalities and the Privatisation of Secondary Schooling in North India	41
2. Ramya Subrahmanian: Education Exclusion and the Developmental State	62
3. Sarada Balagopalan: An Ideal School and the Schooled Ideal: Education at the Margins	83
4. Anne Vaugier-Chatterjee: Plural Society and Schooling: Urdu-medium Schools in Delhi	99
PART 2: TEACHING AND LEARNING REGIMES	119
5. David MacDougall: Doon School Aesthetics	121
6. Véronique Bénéti: Serving the Nation: Gender and Family Values in Military Schools	141
7. Marcike Jule Winkelmann: Everyday Life in a Girls' <i>Madrasah</i> in Delhi	160
8. Elspeth Page: Negotiation and Compromise: Gender and Government Elementary Education	178
9. Rumman Hameed: Learning Processes within the <i>Ustād-Shāgird</i> Relationship	197

and orderly township. Elsewhere the perimeter wall abuts onto what still look like rural villages, whilst at other points the plant and the township are surrounded by a sea of unregulated urban sprawl that envelops old villages like Girvi and Patipar in which much of my fieldwork was done.

When construction started, Girvi had a multi-caste population of around 1,000 and Patipar of around 500. Caste notwithstanding, the socialisation of most village children was in most ways similar. Patipar had its own primary school (that also served 11 other villages), but many of its children did not attend it; and only a handful were studying in the one middle school within walking distance, some five miles away in Durg. About 30 Girvi children walked three or four miles to another primary school, but few went on to the more distant Durg Middle School. From the age of about 10, even those who went to school worked in the fields. In previous generations, almost all village boys were destined to become marginal subsistence farmers. Even amongst the lowest castes few households were landless. So great, however, was the concentration of land in the hands of the often absentee *mālguzār* (the village's erstwhile revenue collector) that—in a region where years of dearth, drought and famine were a regular occurrence—only a very small minority had holdings large enough to guarantee their subsistence throughout the year (Parry 1999b). The majority relied on a supplementary income from casual labour (often for the *mālguzār* or for government relief programmes).

Most families who lived in these villages in the 1950s are still there; fortunate households have a BSP income. To construct the complex, land was compulsorily purchased from 96 villages, and a BSP job was guaranteed to one able-bodied representative of each household whose fields were acquired. While one brother wound up with privileged plant employment, others were often condemned to informal sector work. Consequently, members of these two class fractions commonly have close genealogical ties.

Initially, however, the local Chhattisgarhis were reluctant recruits to the industrial labour force (Parry 1999a; forthcoming). As a result, BSP was largely built and manned by migrant labour from other Indian states. Many stayed on, brought their families to join them and were provided with company quarters in the township. Others constructed homes outside it—large numbers latterly in one of the many new colonies, the ambience of which is predominantly middle class.

13

CHANGING CHILDHOODS IN INDUSTRIAL CHHATTISGARH

JONATHAN PARRY

My fieldwork in Chhattisgarh has focused on the rapid industrialisation of a previously 'backward' rural area.¹ Though I paid specific attention to children only as an afterthought, what I was alert to throughout is the way in which middle-aged adults talk about their own childhood, about children today and about how childhood has changed in the interim. A former—and from *this* perspective fairly undifferentiated—peasantry has been significantly proletarianised. But the new working class is deeply divided between—at the extremes—an aristocracy of organised public sector labour and workers in the informal economy. Though there is a significant social space in between, I focus here on these poles to highlight the way in which childhood has acquired a very different tenor and trajectory in different 'fractions' of the working class. This differentiation is predictable, but some of its manifestations less so.

Until the mid-1950s, Bhilai was another small village in the backwater district of Durg. It now gives its name to a large company township, the site of one of the biggest steel plants in Asia. The Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP), a public sector undertaking constructed with Soviet aid and technology, produced its first steel in 1959 and had nearly 65,000 workers on its direct pay-roll by the mid-1980s. Though the economic wind has shifted since, that figure still stands at nearly 40,000; and the plant workforce remains a local aristocracy of labour enjoying pay, perks and benefits far superior to those enjoyed by workers in any of the hundreds of smaller-scale private sector factories that have grown up around it. Immediately fringing its perimeter walls is its spacious

Some settled in ex-villages like Girvi and Patipar, where their now sometimes quite substantial *pakkā* mansions are scattered amongst the old mud-brick village houses and the shanties of the 'multiplier' work-force of coolies, rickshaw-*vālās*, scavengers and other representatives of the urban underclass. Both neighbourhoods currently have a regionally heterogeneous population of approximately three thousand squeezed within the now invisible boundaries of the village *abādī* (settlement area).

The distinction between 'the sons-of-the-Chhattisgarh-soil' (on whom this chapter focuses) and the 'outsiders' is still significantly freighted, even though today most 'outsiders' are Bihari-born. So, too, is that between the *mul-miāsīs* of the village (its 'native inhabitants') and Chhattisgarhi settlers from elsewhere. Socially and spatially, villages in this region are, moreover, sharply divided between the 'Untouchable' Satnamis and the so-called 'Hindu' castes (almost all others in the old village hierarchy). In places like Girvi and Patipar, the Satnami *Pārā* (quarter) is still clearly distinguished from the rest of the 'village', its 'Hindu' *Pārā*. Though gone are the days when this part of the village was visibly poorer, by no means gone are the barriers to social interaction; and though there is no no-man's land to mark the physical boundary all know where it is. In Girvi, unemployed youths from the Hindu *Pārā* sit—like underemployed frontier police—at the border-crossing on the main street playing chess, cards or carom. Though their Satnami equivalents pass without let, it would be unthinkable for them to join the game, and their sisters endure jibes about the 'goods' (*māl*) available on the other side. Though such 'evening' might seem a comparatively trivial pursuit, it has a threatening edge. I heard about the rape of several pre-pubescent girls.

HUNGER AND HEALTH

In pre-BSP days, crop failure was frequent. Many men of the senior generation bear names—like Ankala, Ankalah and Anka—that mark their birth in a famine year (*akāl*). As the poorest, the Satnamis suffered worst, and whole families left as migrant labourers for the Assam tea-gardens, the Bihar coal-fields, the Bengal jute mills and the Jamshedpur steel town. Hunger is for many an enduring childhood memory. Bhushan,² a Girvi Satnami with a BSP job who was born in the early

1950s, speaks feelingly of those impoverished times, principally as an indictment of a present lack of neighbourly concern. There was often no food in the house, but never did he or his siblings sleep hungry. The neighbours would see no smoke from their hearth and would call them over to eat, or at least to drink *māḍ* (the water in which rice has been boiled). Mangal scoffs. What he remembers is how people would close their doors at night lest the neighbours see them cooking and importune them for something to quieten the children's whimpering. Mangal's lack of nostalgia is more characteristic. Older informants rarely represent their childhood days as the best of their life; the peasant past is seldom golden. Bhilai has illuminated the darkness of centuries with the torch of Nehruvian progress. The world they grew up in was 'illiterate', 'ignorant' and 'uncivilised'.

In the industrial area today an able-bodied worker (of either sex) can generally fill the children's bellies from casual labour. New agricultural inputs in the surrounding countryside have brought crop yields three to five times greater than in pre-BSP days. Not only are children better fed, but—partly for that reason—more likely to survive into adulthood. Epidemic disease is less threatening too. Smallpox has been eradicated. Cholera outbreaks are quickly contained. As many informants see it, this last has as much to do with the aversion of witches to urban living as it has with modern medicine. Witchcraft is a preoccupation and epidemic cholera widely attributed to it. Witches need secret spaces to congregate. That explains their retreat from towns and hence the decline of cholera. Since small children are their favoured victims, it also explains as much about the decline in infant morbidity as the Sector 9 hospital in which most BSP babies are now born.

Though child mortality has fallen sharply, this is significantly more true of the township than of the slum-like *bastīs* that surround it (cf. Crook and Malaker 1992). Wherever they live, however, the children of BSP workers are entitled to free treatment in one of the best hospitals in central India. Mangal has a son—the child of one of his secondary and therefore technically 'bigamous' unions—who was born with a hole in his heart. At that time the plant's policy was less rigid, and many workers had children by two or three 'wives' on their medical cards. BSP paid for the boy to have a series of operations at a large south Indian mission hospital, and granted Mangal a year's paid leave to look after him. He is now a strapping young man. Non-BSP workers are charged—at increasingly commercial rates—for treatment in the BSP hospital. In the past (and with the collusion of its staff) some found a

BSP friend or kinsman to get their child admitted as one of his own, but economic liberalisation has forced BSP management to consider its welfare costs and cut down on such 'abuses'. Now only the offspring of a BSP worker's primary marriage can be sure of free treatment. The rest pay. But hardly any working class family—save one with a BSP income—can afford to do so. The alternative is the government hospital in Durg, by comparison little better than a charnel-house.

In sum, children today are far less likely to go hungry or suffer the malign attention of witches than in previous generations. They are far more likely to survive into adulthood, but their chances of doing so if they get seriously ill are greatly improved if they come from a BSP household. Time budget evidence showing the number of days when the children were sick suggests the same disparity for less threatening conditions.

THE CHANGING HOUSEHOLD CONTEXT³

The composition of the households in which the two kinds of children grow up is also increasingly different. Regardless of caste, many born in pre-BSP days were married as very young children. After marriage (*shādī*), the child-bride would remain in her natal home until at least puberty. She was then given over to her husband at the ritual of *gaunā* (Chhattisgarhi, *pathaunī*) and their union consummated. Child marriage was intended to ensure that a girl's *shādī* was celebrated before she became sexually active; and *shādī* is said to 'lift the weight of virginity' from her parents who are answerable for it until then. In the interval up to *gaunā* there was, however, considerable scope for secret liaisons. These were almost expected and it was common for a spouse to abscond before *gaunā*.

Divorce and remarriage are tolerated in almost all castes, and were frequent. The primary marriages of around 60 per cent of my Samami informants aged 45 or over had been terminated by divorce. The comparative figure for the 'Hindu' castes is about one-third. In theory, children are the product of their father's seed, which gives him the right to keep them when the marriage ends. In practice, small children would often accompany their mother to her parents. When she remarried, as she almost invariably would, they might either be left with them or go with their mother to be brought up in the house of a stepfather. While

girls were often written-off by their own fathers, boys were likely to return eventually for their inheritance. But much depended on individual circumstance, and children often lost contact with one parent.

In the industrial area today, the marriage of pre-pubescent children is all but extinct. Most boys are between 20 and 30 when they marry; most girls between 14 and 25. A boy who aspires to a BSP job, and a girl who aspires to a groom who has one, will be near the top of the age range. Ambitious parents wait years to see if the boy is selected. Such boys, moreover, want 'educated' girls—not least to help their subsequent children with schoolwork. 'Educated' girls are older. The lower down the working class hierarchy one descends, the lower the age of marriage. Near the bottom of the hierarchy, a girl's first menstruation concentrates the parental mind.

The ideological stress in the past was on the sexual purity of the bride at the time of *shādī*, and her subsequent affairs were regarded with resignation. Now *shādī* and *gaunā* are usually combined. Husbands expect virgins to join them; parents bear 'the weight of virginity' for longer and find it increasingly heavy. It is one thing to guarantee the chastity of a toddler; another that of a young woman of 25. This was brought home to me when Bhushan daughter's engagement nearly foundered. The prospective groom's uncle proposed a medical test of virginity. 'When', as he put it, 'the *arhar* [*dāl*] grows big, the cow will sometimes mount the embankment. The girl has been big for some time'.

Amongst this labour aristocracy, a new pattern of conjugality is emerging. Wives are unlikely to work outside the home (at least in manual jobs). Women have lost much of their autonomy and the marriages of the younger generation of BSP workers are more stable. The divorce rate has more than halved. In the past many marriages broke down within one or two years if the wife did not conceive, or bore a girl. Infidelity was often condoned, and a man's 'ritual friend' (*mīlān*) might have licensed sexual access to his wife. 'If', as the Samamis would rhetorically ask, 'my cow wanders and comes home again, will I not let her into the stall?' (Russell 1916: 422). Young BSP couples today may consciously delay starting a family, and failure to conceive immediately is unlikely to precipitate divorce. When they get the opportunity, many move into a company quarter in the township, where they are thrown on each other's society and develop a new sense of intimacy that is hard to nurture in the more oppressive atmosphere of the parental home in Girvi or Paripar. But even amongst those who

remain there, the emotional and psychological investment in the conjugal bond is much heavier, and the attitude to adultery far less relaxed. The decline in divorce means that children in this stratum are increasingly unlikely to be brought up by a step-parent and with step- and half-siblings; and by comparison with their informal sector peers less likely—as we shall see—to have close kin of different caste. Given their desperation to reproduce their privilege through education and their commitment to 'modern' values, such families tend to be limited in size. Children now require unprecedented investments of time and money—and smaller numbers of them allow a concentration of resources. As a result, BSP children probably have fewer *full*-siblings as well, but will more rarely experience their death.

In the lower echelons of the working class, by contrast, divorce is almost as frequent as formerly. With regard to remarriage there has, however, been a significant shift. While primary marriages are arranged and caste endogamous, secondary unions are a matter of individual choice. As the saying goes, 'the virgin daughter belongs to the caste *pañchāyat* [and must do as she is told]; the deserted (or deserting) daughter follows her own disposition'. Ideally, that will be for a man of her own caste, but even in the past there were not infrequent cases in which it was not. In that event, the couple were boycotted, but—provided the difference in caste status was not too wide—the couple and their children would eventually be accepted into the caste of the husband after appropriate penance. In the industrial area today, however, the caste *pañchāyats* are increasingly impotent, and a growing number of secondary marriages cross caste boundaries. I estimate that 1.5 or 1.6 of them do so, with the result that 10 to 15 per cent of all households have a present or previous member who has contracted a union outside their own caste. The corollary is that children in this 'class fraction' are more likely to lose contact with one of their parents as a result of divorce; and more likely to grow up with half- and step-siblings in the house of a stepfather—who, however well-disposed, will rarely treat them with the indulgence he shows to his own. Though the dogma is that it is the seed that counts, it is often the 'milk' relationship that matters in the politics of sibling rivalry. Even if they have different fathers, the children of one mother (*dudh bhāī/bahin*) tend to stick together against the children of another. The ideological pre-eminence of the seed is, however, manifest in the matter of caste affiliation. Given that, and the incidence of secondary unions that now cross caste boundaries, an increasing number of children have maternal half-siblings and cousins

who belong to different castes than their own. When the caste *pañchāyats* could effectively sanction contact between them, that probably posed no significant threat to the separation of castes and thus to their reproduction. But that is no longer the case today.

Household composition is, of course, also affected by more immediate constraints. Amongst those reliant on informal sector employment, many women have labouring jobs, and most contractors object to their children on site. Out of their paltry earnings, some of the female construction workers with whom I spent time paid a neighbour to mind them. Elder children (especially but not exclusively girls) drop out of school, or are never sent, in order to look after the younger ones; and from a very young age a significant number are left alone. Dukhalin's 4-year-old roams all day. Jamuna Bai was reduced to tethering her toddler with roped together saris. What else could she do? There is a canal close by. Others solved the problem by taking in a female rural relative (often a child herself); but many more were billeting at least some of their children on kin in the countryside. As a result, sibling groups are often split up and many children see their parents only a couple of times a year.

THE GAMES CHILDREN PLAY

The impact of the more straight-laced sexual mores of the new aristocracy of labour on their offspring is hard to assess. Judging by gossip, it is less than they would like. Romances are common; and the private upstairs cubicles of the *dosā-iddi* 'hotel' I frequent in a crowded part of town are often occupied by canoodling college student couples. A supervisory job on a construction site has for some young men the allure of potential adventure with one of the *rejās* (female labourers). Much as their parents may try to restrict their contacts, in Girvi and Paripar the younger children of BSP families are inevitably exposed to the more knowing children of their less genteel neighbours. My limited evidence suggests that from well before puberty many of these are sexually aware, and even experienced. In the cramped conditions in which they live they inevitably see, and sometimes spy on, the adults. A couple of shocked 'outsider' adults told me about surprising children of 10 or 11 in *flagrante delicto*.

But my most telling evidence comes from a group of neighbourhood children—mediated by a young married woman who was briefly my

research assistant and who established with them a remarkable rapport. I had heard banter about 'husband-wife' couples amongst them, but had not understood it. One day, however, we discussed the games they enjoy and went through the gamut from cricket and kites to the earth-enware bullocks on wheels that the Potters make for the *Polā* festival, and the *guddā-guddī* (male and female dolls) whose marriages the girls celebrate. Then, with much giggling, they said they also play a 'secret game' of which they would not speak 'because you would not like it'. Later, Santoshi and Anita (sisters aged around 11 and 9) explained it to my assistant—but never a word should she breathe to their mother. The game is *shāṛīrik sambandh* ('bodily relations'), and it was clear they meant intercourse. Nearly all neighbourhood children play it, they claimed; and the partnerships they form are stable and recognised. Santoshi's 'husband' is Roshan, and when they are alone Anita refers to him as 'sister's husband'. Anita's 'husband' is the younger brother of a boy who had formerly partnered their elder sister, Rekha. Though the 'husbands' of all three sisters were Satnamis like themselves, the 'wife' of their brother Mahesh was Uma, a girl of Ravat (Herdsmen) caste. This last relationship had recently been terminated, as had Rekha's. Both girls had started to menstruate.

Since the adults are often out all day, and the children not in school, the opportunities for secret games are less limited than the crowded conditions of the *basī* might suggest. It is, however, unlikely that parents are oblivious to them. Anita once told tales to her *dādī* (father's mother) about what, through a crack in the window, she had seen Santoshi and Roshan doing together. *Dādī* had gone to the boy's house (where he was home alone) and threatened to break his bones if he did that again. Once their mother caught Rekha's 'husband' lying on top of her, beat her badly and warned that she would get pregnant if she behaved like that when she started to menstruate.

The children are clear that at that point their 'play' must stop or a baby might start. After her first period, Uma's demeanour was transformed. A bright, vivacious and somewhat mischievous girl, it was only a few days before that her mother had been complaining about her playing cards with the boys and losing the money provided for cooking oil. She had earned it herself as a part-time domestic, Uma protested. Wasn't she entitled to some entertainment? And why is it wrong for girls, but not boys, to play cards? But now she was visibly downcast. 'My childhood is finished', she explained, and she could no longer 'play' with boys. 'Why not?' I blunderingly asked, having failed

to catch on. 'I do not know the reason', she lied. 'But mother told me not to.' Uma's mother was at work when she started to menstruate, but Uma knew from a friend what would happen and that she should not do *pījā* during her periods because 'her head would be dirty'. She sat calmly with Mariam, the Tamil 'press-vālā's wife next door; and when she got home that evening it was in Mariam's presence that her mother told her 'everything' (which was, I infer, little that she did not know already). Mariam was impressed. Had her own mother been so open, she would have known better than to 'play' with Harish who had made her pregnant (and to whom she was now stormily married).

Over the following month, Uma started to preen her appearance, bought new bangles and earrings and put on make-up. She stayed, rather restlessly, with the women, who teased her when anybody remarked on her 'style' or asked why she wasn't running around with the other children. Mahesh was sullen for a time; and when Uma was given a 'love letter' by another Satnami boy she passed it on to her mother. Since neither can read, Harish helped. Her outraged mother then stormed off to confront the boy's mother, who provocatively laughed it off with the suggestion that if her son liked Uma (a Ravat, remember), they ought to arrange their marriage. Uma's mother subsequently complained to a classificatory brother, a vegetable-vendor in the market, who sent three burly sons to rough the boy up. But her mother took much of her fury out on Uma who was told that she must have a husband within the year.

Her mother's own experience with husbands was dispiriting. 'The caste of women has no value or respect', says Uma, echoing her mother's words. 'Women endure the misery, and when a child is born the man makes another wife'. Her father had abandoned them when her younger sister was born, and they live with their maternal grandfather who works on the trucks that ferry sand and gravel to building sites. Though now Uma's mother sweeps and washes for BSP households, after her husband left her, she also worked on the trucks and took a driver as her lover. Three boys were born. The driver then disappeared. Neither of the girls went to school because they had to look after their obstreperously demanding half-brothers whom Uma transparently resents. And now she had started to menstruate, her mother was saying that it was no longer proper for Uma to do domestic service, and that she herself must return to better paid work on the trucks. 'Trucks and pregnancy go together in Uma's mind, and she anxiously foresaw another child to blight their lives. 'Playing' with boys had

become risky; marriage to a husband of whom she could expect little was imminent, and her mother seemed blind to the occupational hazards of shovelling sand. It is not surprising that Uma was now subdued.

CHILDHOOD AS A TICKING CLOCK

Many older informants have no accurate idea of their age. From their names—Somvaru, Mangtu, Buddhuru (Monday's child, Tuesday's child, Wednesday's child)—they often know on which day of the week they were born, but not the month or the year. If they go to school, children today know their ages; and for those who aspire to BSP employment a good deal hangs on it. Date of birth, as certified by your school certificates, now determines the point at which you can join the queue—10 to 12 years long for the lowliest post of plant attendant—for an interview 'call'. It determines how long you must wait before being finally forced to recognise that now you will never get one (your 30th birthday if you are a 'general caste' candidate; 32nd if you belong to the Other Backward Classes, and thirty-fifth if you are of Scheduled Caste or Tribe). And if you are fortunate enough to be selected, from your very first day in the plant you will instantly recall the precise date of your retirement at the age of 58. Chronological time now punctuates the life cycle with a precision and inflexibility unknown to previous generations; and childhood is increasingly governed by parental anxieties about the ticking of the clock. An exam failed is a year lost; a year lost feels like watching some of your son's small fist of lottery tickets for the prize of a permanent job in the plant blow away on the wind. Not surprisingly, some fathers find ways of tampering with the record so that their boy 'loses' a couple of years and can better compete at school.

This new preoccupation with age is associated with what, in Girvi and Patripur, is a new ritual—the child's birthday party. Most birthdays still go unmarked; and in Patripur it was Visvanath—a BSP timekeeper appropriately—who pioneered the form. It was his son's ninth birthday, and its celebration was orchestrated by a friend of his eldest daughter—a Sector-*vālī* sophisticate who lives on the right side of the railway tracks in the township. There were streamers and balloons, and a cake with candles. The birthday boy was given a *tikā* of turmeric rice, did *ārātī* to the cake with an *agarbattī* that was then stuck in one corner

of it and subsequently used to burst balloons. After cutting the cake the child fed morsels into the mouths of senior members of the family, who in turn fed him. The evening ended with a *Ramāyana* recitation. The ritual has taken root and I have subsequently seen identical celebrations in other BSP households.

UNCOOKED BONES AND HARDENED HANDS

In this 'creamy layer' of working class society, the domestic labour of children is—in relation to the exploitative possibilities—generally underutilised. Unless, that is, they are country bumpkins billeted on urban relatives to study in town—in which case they are liable to suffer the common fate of 'poor relations' and be treated as domestic drudges. Much of course depends on household composition and gender. Predictably, girls do more than boys, who are socialised early to regard housework as a female activity. One 10-year-old Patripur boy is tormented by his peers who call him a eunuch (*napunsak*) because he sweeps and washes dishes. In many families, however, even girls get off lightly. Mothers and daughters-in-law do the chores, though the latter may mutter about pampered husband's sisters. Urmila's first year of marriage was hard. At home she had never learned to cook or had to work in what were left of Somvaru's fields on the edge of the town. One year, when I had just got back to Bhilai and went to call, I found Somvaru alone with a younger daughter. He suggested she make us tea. Kavita told him to make it himself. She had homework to do.

In the peasant past of these neighbourhoods, and in rural Chhattisgarh today, children were and are productively engaged from an early age. Of BSP households that is no longer true. Many villagers invested their compensation money for requisitioned fields in land further out. When I began my research, Girvi was still on the edge of the town and land was still cultivated on one side of the settlement. But even *unemployed* youngsters from BSP households refuse to so much as supervise day-labourers who work their fields, let alone do so themselves (Parry 1999a). Agriculture is seen as much harder labour than a factory job, and as emblematic of the boorishly rustic world of their 'thumb-impression' elders. The latter growl about effete modern youth who care more for the creases in their trousers than for grains in the household's storage bins; but patriarchal authority often

seems circumscribed. In the world of modern urban employment, sons are less dependent on their patrimony to reproduce their own labour; and unmarried girls in BSP households hardly ever work in the fields. Even with boys, many fathers make a virtue of necessity by appealing to the widespread notion that, until the bones have 'cooked' and hardened, carrying heavy loads would stunt their growth.

Lower down the working class ladder, children do a significant share of domestic chores and often care for younger siblings. Some work in extra-domestic settings. With the exception of a few small workshops, like the paintbrush 'factory' in which Komal passed his childhood, child labour in manufacturing industry is negligible. Though I would sometimes see children in the plant, these were babes-in-arms brought by their breast-feeding contract labourer mothers, and girls of seven and upwards employed (for about Rs 60 per month, food twice a day and a new set of clothes once a year) to mind them while their mothers worked. On the private sector industrial estate, children are all but invisible. Bhilai's major industries—re-rolling mills, heavy engineering and the like—have little use for their labour.⁴ 'Nimble finger' enterprises—like carpet weaving—hardly exist; and most work available is too heavy or skilled for children. Nor are they seen as strong enough for day-labouring jobs for which there is consistent demand—construction site work, or loading and unloading trucks.

Some girls, however, do putting-out work making *bidis* or *agarbatti*; more are domestic servants. Boys wash-up in 'hotels', tea-shops and liquor stalls; work as 'helpers' in garages, or in scooter and cycle repair shops, shine shoes and hawk goods. Children of both sexes work as scavengers, scouring waste ground and rubbish dumps for plastic, polystyrene, glass and other products for re-cycling. Often to their humiliation, some must combine work with school. Sunita squirms at being called 'the bag girl' by her classmates because she sells in the market the shopping bags that her mother sews from cement sacks. Many BSP workers run moonlighting enterprises that employ informal sector workers and sometimes children. Komal's paintbrush 'factory' is one example. While much has been made of the fact that households from different working class fractions are often united by kinship and neighbourhood ties (e.g. Holmström 1984: chapter 6), less note is taken of the fact that they are frequently opposed as employers and workers.

On impressionistic evidence, I had earlier supposed that by Indian standards the incidence of child labour in Bhilai is quite low. A rapid survey in 2003 of Patripār's Oriyā *Pārā* (inhabited largely by visibly

impoverished rickshaw-*vāle*) yielded 39 children in the 5–14 age group: 31 were in school; one boy worked in a cycle repair shop; six girls were domestics, and one girl was neither in school nor working. But this sample is very small, and the credibility of more ambitious surveys—like those conducted by the National Child Labour Eradication Programme—is questionable.

This programme is run by the Government of India (GOI) in cooperation with UNESCO and the ILO, whose objective is to persuade developing countries to ratify and implement ILO conventions on child labour. It targets children with 'hazardous occupations' in areas of high prevalence. The carrot is financial support for palliative programmes; the stick is the threat of some Western nations to impose trade sanctions on countries that flout the conventions (Castle et al. 2002). The GOI has responded by setting up schools in several states for child labourers at special risk. Preliminary surveys identify such children, and funds are allocated to provide them with a midday meal and a stipend of Rs 100 per month. The aim is to bring them up to primary school leaving standard in three years and then filter them into mainstream education.

I know of nine such schools in, and around, Bhilai. Each of the four I visited has an official enrolment of 50–70 children. Actual attendance reflects the fact that stipends and staff salaries run months in arrears. The teachers—whose positions are temporary and who were mostly hired for the survey—insist that only the tip of the iceberg is touched. When I enquired what jobs their pupils had done, the best drilled were asked to stand up in class and tell me. Very few met the bureaucratic definition of 'hazardous work', the teachers admitted—crass though that is when it excludes scavenging along the GE road. And when I later conducted a small survey of my own, it was clear that many of them had never been child labourers at all. Of the 43 children interviewed (drawn from two different schools), 17 said so plainly and at least another five gave such unconvincing accounts of the work they had done that I can only suppose that they were loyally sticking to the script devised for the records. Only seven were never in school before. Most had been in the state government system; the commonest explanation for dropping out was that they were the children of newly arrived migrants, or had returned to Bhilai after an extended absence to find their names deleted from the register. Others cited their dislike of their former school, the cost of uniforms, books and fees, terrible teaching and their fear of beatings. But there was also one neighbourhood

group who said that they had left their last school when a teacher from this one promised free meals and a stipend. Most of these pupils were indeed from impoverished homes, and the schools do serve a function—though the objective of returning children to a system that had already failed them dismally is ironical, and that function is not the one intended. But then global forces often conjure creative local responses. The children are probably better off in school (even if some would have been there anyway), and their teachers (often members of BSP households who would be otherwise unemployed) are certainly better off with a job.

The incidence of child labour at the bottom of the working class ladder thus remains hard to assess. But even in this stratum it is striking how much latitude many teenage boys who have dropped out of school are given to mooch and loaf. Though they are likely to enter the labour market sooner than their BSP peers, their transition to the adult world of work is still often gradual.

CHILDHOOD AS A 'CAREER'

Not that children are considered as lilies of the field who neither toil nor spin—not by BSP parents at least. To be arrayed like Solomon, they must think to the future. Homework must come before play. Though some parents deplore the educational treadmill, they are nonetheless chained to it. It is often as though their child's life chances hang by the slenderest thread, if not on tomorrow's test, then at least on the yearly exams. And most hope to crow over young Sanjay's score in maths—Sanjay's more than Priya's, though the girls are not immune. A BSP groom will certainly demand that his bride be 'educated' up to a standard not far short of his own. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that in get-ahead BSP households in the township, childhood is not just a preparation for a career—it is a career in itself. Even time out from textbooks is no longer 'play', but a purposeful and disciplined activity—a 'hobby' (like stamp-collecting), or a competitive sport supervised by BSP's Sports and Recreation Department.

Though my evidence is impressionistic, parental ambition in the aristocracy of labour seems responsible for significant violence against children. Many workers taken on in the early days had little or no schooling. Out of their depth with their children's homework, some

'encourage' them with it by beatings that border on brutal. One boy I know is chastised if he slips to third place in his class. 'Spare the rod and spoil the child' is folk wisdom; and even if parents are irresponsibly indulgent, many teachers are not. The staff at Patipar's middle and high school unanimously admit to beating their own offspring. They 'have to'. Teachers who beat other people's children as well are one common reason that children drop out of school (and are occasionally seriously injured or killed⁵). Domestic violence is also associated with chronic alcoholism—in its most virulent form a BSP problem. Though you do not have to work for BSP to get aggressively drunk, it is only a BSP worker who can afford to remain in that state for a fortnight; and only in the public sector that he can get away with the prolonged periods of absenteeism that these binges entail (Parry 1999a). In Bilai it is the children of this stratum who appear most susceptible to violent abuse.

Many not at all prosperous households devote enormous resources to their children's education. In the general vicinity of Patipar there must be a dozen private 'English-medium' nursery and primary schools. Their names—'Little Flower', 'Yellow Daffodil', 'Angels' Playground'—are probably as much English as most pupils will learn in them. But of that very few of the parents can judge; and what they think they are laying is the ground on which their child might one day stand as a god-like plant engineer. The future, many now know, lies with computers, and computers speak English. Some computer courses offer English tuition for free; but it is obviously better if the foundations are laid early. Boys get priority. Parents who struggle to send a son to a private school often have daughters in a state one. And if he is going to keep up, they must pay for extra tuition. Then there are the books, bag, uniform, even socks that are marked with the school logo, and of which it is the sole supplier. Next year the logo changes. I know several cases in which a child had to drop out—and was then de-schooled for months—because these expenses could not be sustained. To the extent that such investments bear fruit, they contribute to the growing generation gap and encourage youngsters to disdain their parents as 'illiterate yokels' (*anparh gavār*).

BSP runs its own school system, which has significantly higher standards than that of the state government and of much private education.⁶ Some BSP schools are English-medium, and several Hindi-medium ones are earmarked as centres of excellence and follow the prestigious Central Board (as opposed to State Board) curriculum.

Places in these are a patronage source for the union bosses, but there are also fierce entrance tests. Children rising five are expected to have learnt the answers to 800 possible questions, of which 40 will be asked. 'What is Colgate?' 'What is the only part of the body which is white?' Some parents take time off work to drill their children for these tests; some send them to a coaching centre.

From the best of these BSP schools the results are impressive, and 28 of their students in 2002-03 won places in the high-achiever's heaven of an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). They are, that is to say, a significant avenue for social mobility: 75 per cent of the students in the most prestigious English-medium school in the system are the children of BSP employees; and currently 77 per cent of these BSP pupils are the children of employees in *worker* grades. The highly able present principal is himself the son of a man who was a worker for most of his career, and is a product of the school. A Coke Oven worker friend has a boy who played chess in Spain for the Indian youth team and is now at an IIT. But to put this in perspective, a child who is going to do reasonably well in this élite tier will require extra tuition that will cost per month more than twice the earnings of a female construction-site worker. Whilst those with BSP fathers may attend a BSP School, the vast majority of children from Girvi and Patripur study in their government neighbourhood one, where their prospects are dismal. Of those who reach class 8 or class 10 (with the help of tuition) most fail their exams, and a large proportion drop out earlier.

But schooling is not the only reason why young couples from Girvi and Patripur often move into a BSP quarter in the township when they get the chance. It is as much a matter of the ambience in which their children will grow up, of the company they will keep, and of the *dādāgiri* ('gangsterism'), *lāphūgūri* ('trouble-making'), *chākubāji* ('knifings'), *juābāji* ('gambling'), *randībāji* ('prostitution') and *dāmbāji* ('drinking') to which they will inevitably be exposed in such *bastis*. Parents who are condemned to live in these *bastis* try to confine their children as much as possible to home—though this is hard to enforce on the elder boys—which is one reason they are so tolerant of television. 'English-medium children', their mothers complain, should have 'English-medium' playmates, but with all these 'labour class' children in the neighbourhood it is difficult to maintain one's 'standard'. Significantly, several such mothers are of Scheduled Caste; and significantly I have never heard an upper-caste woman from the 'labour

class' object to her children associating with theirs. As a consequence of such concerns, in get-ahead segments of the labour aristocracy the physical space that children inhabit is more circumscribed than that of other neighbourhood children, who have more license to play in the streets and roam.

So long has the queue of job-seekers now become that in 1997, BSP were still interviewing 'general caste' candidates for the lowest manual grades who had registered with the Employment Exchange in 1984 when they had just passed their class 8 exams, the minimum qualification at that time. Of the 54 pupils from Girvi's middle school who sat this exam in 1984, nine passed. Ten years later, three of the 45 boys were in regular salaried employment (*naukari*)—one in BSP, one as a land records clerk (*patwari*) and one as an army clerk.⁷ Of the others, 27 had intermittent informal sector work (*kām*, not *naukari*). One had committed suicide, two were notional students and the remaining 12 had yet to dip even a toe into the employment market and were *khālī*—without any occupation at all. Most of these latter had BSP fathers to keep them.

The odds on making it into a secure job in the plant, or even a regular job in a private sector factory, are continually lengthening as BSP downsizes its labour force in response to new economic stringencies, and recruitment dries to a trickle. Recently, the number of new recruits each year from Girvi or Patripur could be counted on the fingers of one hand. The situation is exacerbated by inflation of the qualifications required to compete. Though the minimum is now the successful completion of the class 10 exams, the largest number of recruits over the past few years have been technician-cum-operative trainees, for whom the preferred qualification is a certificate from a recognised Industrial Training Institute (ITI). In the past, almost all of these institutes were government-run and admission to them was on the strict basis of the number of marks obtained in the class 10 examinations. But in the 1990s, there has been a phenomenal mushrooming of accredited private ITIs to which admission is on the strict basis of the ability to pay a large 'donation'. The technical training they provide is rudimentary, and is often irrelevant to the job assigned: the young man who trained for two years as a turner winding up as a gas man in the Coke Ovens. But the real significance of the certificate is not that it certifies skill, but only a certain level of family financial standing—a level that no working class household, except one which already enjoys a BSP salary, is likely to attain.

Combined with other trends (Parry 2000), the result is that it is now increasingly difficult for the 'parvenu' son of a peasant or private sector industrial worker to infiltrate the aristocracy of labour. The citadel walls surrounding public sector employment are being reinforced. As a consequence, the children of families lower down the industrial hierarchy see their chances of social mobility through the education system dwindle, and see less and less point in staying in school. In short, and to put it very crudely, working class lives are increasingly divided between, on the one hand, those who must endure a childhood of gradgrind drudgery in the (increasingly forlorn) hope of enjoying a relatively leisurely and remunerative working life; and—on the other hand—those who enjoy an academically relatively unpressured childhood in the realistic expectation that, however hard they strive, the best they can anyway hope for as adults is a life of unremunerative and fairly unremitting toil. Though the gradgrind drudgery is reminiscent of Field's account of the Japanese educational system, I doubt that many seriously suppose that it 'will produce adults tolerant of joyless, repetitive tasks—in other words, disciplined workers' (Field 1995: 54). In Bhilai, a major reason for enduring it is a job that is unexacting.

CHILDHOOD EXTENDED

Although Uma announced that her childhood had ended on the day that she started to menstruate, when I asked my informants in the abstract about the point at which children become adults, they said much as I would—that it depends, that some never do. But what can be safely (if tautologously) asserted is that progress towards adulthood involves assuming adult roles and responsibilities, and that in contemporary industrial Chhattisgarh (as in many other societies) the most crucial of these are marriage, parenthood and a serious engagement in work.

From this perspective, the childhoods of most children today are not only very different from the childhoods of those who grew up in pre-BSP times, but they also last longer. And that is especially so of the labour aristocracy who both marry and join the workforce later than others. A major reason for this last disparity is that unemployment in India is a status that the truly disadvantaged can least afford, and their sons are much sooner condemned to accept whatever work they can get as day labourers, rag-pickers, rickshaw-wāle and the like

(Holmström 1976: 51). Mangalu's son, Rajiv, baldly told me that he saw no point in working while his father still had a BSP job, and that his turn would come when Mangalu retired. That was in 1994. In 2003, when his father had just had a cancer operation and had taken voluntary retirement, and when Rajiv himself had reached 30, we resumed the conversation. During the past nine years, he had had a total of two months employment (as a contract labourer in the plant), but was still in no hurry. Mangalu would shortly receive a provident fund pay-out amounting to several lakh rupees.

As we have seen, it is a long wait for a BSP interview call. Some improve the shining hour by continuing their education, and may wind up with a BSc or an MA—in which case they will probably aspire to work with a computer in a comfortable office and will disdain the 'nut-bolt' work to which they are actually assigned if they are lucky enough to get selected. But the vast majority have time on their hands. Acres of it are consumed by cards; many play *sattā* (a numbers racket) with passionate addiction. Some occasionally rent penny romances from the shops, or go to a movie when they have money. But more prefer to spend it on drink; and from their father's pay-pocket, the proceeds of petty larceny, a small deal here and there, and a day or two's work, there is generally enough to indulge. The consequences are sometimes more serious than some rowdiness and the occasional brawl. Two Girvi lads who had bought what they believed was 'Bagpiper' whisky at an unbelievable price were dead within hours from what proved to be a poisonous illicit brew, and a third was gravely ill in the Sector 9 hospital. On another occasion, another group from Girvi had gone to buy drink at the civic centre and sat in a quiet open space nearby to consume it. There was a quarrel, and one of them crushed in the skull of another with a boulder.

This is just one of several recent neighbourhood murders, and the perpetrators of most of the violence are young un- and under-employed men—many from BSP households. In Patipar, much of it has recently revolved around two street corner gangs of mixed caste, regional ethnicity and communal identity. Their rivalry came to a head in 1999 in a pitched battle fought with knives, swords and stones in which one of the Dada Chauk lads was hacked to death. But in the lanes I know best, the conflict has been between local Satnami youths and a coalition of boys from migrant families—mainly ('Untouchable') Maharashtrian Mahars and northerner Brahmans. It began with the suicide of an unmarried Mahar girl who was allegedly carrying a

Satnami child, was exacerbated by the elopement of a Sikh girl from the neighbourhood with another Satnami, and culminated in a series of skirmishes between the two factions in which one of the Brahmans was stabbed. In Girvi it is Satnamis versus their peers from the 'Hindu' *Pārā*, and the trouble again supposedly stems from advances to young 'Hindu' women by Satnamis (a reversal of the 'traditional' pattern). Skirmishing broke out when a Kurmi girl was discovered with letters from a Satnami admirer. A few years before, her father's brother's daughter had committed suicide when her affair with a Satnami became public; and the elder brother of the letter-writer had notoriously eloped with, and married, a Coppersmith (Tāmrakar) girl from the 'village'.

Even more striking than the violence that young men direct at each other is the violence that they (and their sisters) inflict on themselves. I know of a combined total of around 50 suicides from these neighbourhoods since BSP started, the overwhelming majority of them concentrated in the last decade. Most involved males, many of them aged between 15 and 30 and from BSP households. The ostensible reasons are largely predictable: failed exams, the exposure of shameful sexual entanglements across the 'Hindu'/Satnami divide, thwarted romances and despondency over employment and marriage prospects.

The bleakness is not, however, unmitigated. Young men also co-operate. In Girvi, a group of predominantly unemployed Satnami youngsters organise and fund-raise for the celebration of their Guru's *jayantī* on 18 December. A comparable group from the 'Hindu' *Pārā* would plan and orchestrate the 'village's' annual fair (until this was recently suspended on account of the violence it provoked). In Patipar, my friend Krishna—an Izhava migrant from Kerala—established in the late 1980s a local branch of the Youth Federation of India (affiliated to the CPI). About 30 neighbourhood lads belonging to different castes and of different regional origins joined; and they had their own uniform, played chess and provided a much-needed audience for Party dignitaries. Though it had an after-life in a blood donor group Krishna organised, its effective existence was ephemeral. The solidarity of its members could not withstand the differentiation that their eventual employment brought about. Some got BSP jobs, while others wound up as scooter mechanics or house painters. More recently, however, a similar group from the next generation has formed around the leadership of a Brahman 'journalist' with Congress Party ambitions, a scion of the family of the old village 'Maharaj'. In early 2000, they were planning to clean out and beautify the old village tank.

CASTE, CLASS AND CHILDHOOD

That childhood has changed in significant ways in the years since BSP started should be clear. More importantly, what I have endeavoured to document here is the way in which the experience of childhood has become increasingly differentiated. Fathers who belong to the aristocracy of BSP labour live in hope that their sons will somehow reproduce their position in the employment hierarchy, and realise with increasing urgency that to do so they must get the right qualifications. The lives of their children are subordinated to that 'educational' end. And now children from the bottom of the working class ladder have sooner rather than later begun to realise that *naukarī* is beyond their reach, come to terms with reproducing their parents' status, and trade an inevitably harsh future for as hedonistic a present as is possible in the circumstances. There are, of course, gradations between these poles, but in the current economic climate and with the inflation of paper qualifications, they are ever more sharply defined.

What I want to emphasise in conclusion, however, is that— notwithstanding the deep and antagonistic divide between 'Hindus' and Satnamis—the most powerful influence on the kind of childhood one has is class (or class 'fraction') rather than caste. It is true that even in the neighbourhoods studied the Satnamis are still subject to real discrimination—although this is certainly much less oppressive than it was in the past, and school is a relatively caste-free zone. But, as a result of job reservations and as I have documented in detail elsewhere (Parry 1999b), many Satnami families have done well out of steel plant employment, and their children have aspirations and expectations that are not discernibly different from their 'Hindu' counterparts. In terms of childhood experience, the children of Satnami BSP workers have much more in common with the children of other labour aristocrats than either category has with those who grow up in contract labourer households.

Notes

1. This has extended over approximately 22 months between September 1993 and December 2003. I gratefully acknowledge support from the Nuffield Foundation, Economic and Social Research Council and London School of Economics. I am deeply indebted to Ajay T.G. for research assistance, and to Shobha Rani Tale for recent help

with children. André Bételle, Peggy Froerer, Chris Fuller and Patricia Jeffery made helpful comments on an earlier draft.

2. I use pseudonyms throughout.

3. This section summarises a number of points elaborated in Parry 2001. For a detailed case history, see Parry 2004.

4. A newspaper report from 1981 alleges, however, that contractors were employing children in the BSP Nandini mines (*Deshbandhu*, 24/9/81).

5. See, for example, *Hindustan* for 24 December 2003, 2 January 2004 and 3 January 2004.

6. In 2002–03, it had 53 schools with a total enrolment of 43,612 pupils. Twelve of these schools (accounting for 26.7 per cent of the total enrolment) are English-medium.

7. The nine girls were all married shortly after leaving school and none had had paid employment.

SISTERS AND BROTHERS: SCHOOLING, FAMILY AND MIGRATION

RADHIKA CHOPRA

Studies of education and schooling consider the family pivotal in decisions taken about schooling choices for different family members. Increasingly, it is recognised that sisters and brothers will not have the same kinds of schooling (Seymour 2002; Sharma and Retherford 1993). This differentiation appears in some form across all social and income categories. Families with higher incomes are able to provide better education for longer time spans to all their children, but whether they actually do so is neither necessary nor obvious. Differences exist between sisters and brothers in the kind of schooling their parents think appropriate and this has as much to do with the cultural location of the family (urban professional or agrarian landowning, for example) as it has with income brackets. The number of daughters and sons in the family also influences decisions about different children's schooling. Although schooling generates class distinctions, to think of schooling only in terms of class differentiation among siblings would be too limited a view. There is no denying that sons are more advantaged than daughters in parental provisioning. But families orient the transition from childhood to adulthood of all children and schooling is only one aspect. Along with gender, other factors like age, birth order influence decision-making. For example, younger and elder children are differently treated within the family, making age, as well as gender, significant for the kind of education children ultimately receive.

Since differentiation has a social, demographic aspect (age, order of birth, gender) apart from an economic or income aspect, we need to uncover the social reasoning of schooling choices. People evaluate