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Whose values? Young people's aspirations and experiences of schooling in Andhra Pradesh, India.

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Abstract

Increasing rates of school enrolment have changed childhoods in the global South, so that it is now the norm for children to attend at least some years of primary school. This paper explores the extent to which valuing of children as educational projects and outcomes may be displacing previous valuations of children as contributors to the domestic economy. The paper draws on qualitative interview data from Young Lives, a longitudinal study of children growing up in four developing countries, using a case study approach to explore the experiences of four children in rural Andhra Pradesh, India. The paper suggests that children are balancing expectations for the future with responsibilities to their families in the present, and concludes that the over-valuing of formal qualifications and the under-valuing of forms of work such as agriculture risk being internalised by children, leaving those who do not succeed feeling they are 'a waste'.

Introduction

Global development and education policies have emphasised the importance of school attendance in the creation of human capital, and the mantra of Education For All appears to have been thoroughly taken on board by parents and children in the global South. Globally, school enrolment rates have increased massively in the past decade, particularly among primary school children (UNESCO, 2011). A huge burden of expectation is placed on children acquiring ever more qualifications as an anticipated route out of poverty, and a high value is placed on schooling, with the result that children (and their parents) have raised expectations and aspirations of their future pathways. The assumption is that young people with copious qualifications will be able to find jobs in an imagined formal labour market of 'professionals', doctors or engineers, but global economic instability and uneven development mean that it is not clear that these ambitions will be realised (for critiques of the evolving global educational consensus, see (Knutsson and Lindberg, 2012), (Mundy, 2006) (Mundy, 2007). However, the policies, practices and values of global neo-liberalism are undoubtedly re-shaping childhood in profound ways. As Sharon Stephens noted in her seminal work on the changing politics of childhood nearly two decades ago, 'children stand at the crossroads of divergent cultural projects. Their minds and bodies are at stake in debates about the transmission of fundamental cultural values in the schools' (Stephens, 1995, p. 23). Stephens also noted that many researchers operate 'in terms of distinctions between political economy and culture, the public and the private, that are themselves in the process of

profound transformation' (p. 8). Her comments were prescient, and this paper attempts to bridge the binary by exploring how children themselves experience 'standing at the crossroads' that she identified. The paper explores how the tensions between the global and the local are experienced by children, and how they manage the intersections of the demands of home and school. It asks whether the rapid introduction of modernity automatically means the wholesale acceptance of neo-liberal values and individualism (that is, the idea that individuals exist autonomously and freely, see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), and looks at how children value differing dimensions of their lives, in such ostensibly dynamic policy and economic circumstances.

This paper is structured as follows. The next section provides some socio-economic and policy background. It then describes Young Lives (a study of children growing up in poverty in four countries, see below), and draws on qualitative longitudinal research with children in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India, to describe how children make sense of their experiences, how they value various dimensions of their lives, and the extent to which they exercise some control over their activities. The paper suggests that children's and parents' values, especially in relation to family obligations and responsibilities in situations of poverty, as well as hopes for the future based on educational attainment, help to understand how young people balance the tensions between individualisation processes required by neo-liberal childhoods, and the valuing of care networks and family interdependencies.

Children, youth, aspirations, values and capabilities

Social values can be understood as the norms, ideals and aspirations shared by people in specific locations and cultures. Evidence from social anthropology and cross-cultural psychology shows how differing cultures have differing ideas about how children develop and learn, and these ideas shape childhood in fundamental ways (see for example (Rogoff, 2011), (Serpell, 2011), (Morrow and Boyden, 2010)). Children's roles and responsibilities reflect views about their evolving competencies, as well as what they need to learn for their future adult roles. These social values are not fixed, but dynamic and subject to change. They are not simply a reflection of local cultural practices but are affected by powerful forces related to globalisation and development, as this paper demonstrates.

In the global policy literature, there is much concern about youth transitions, which is itself value-laden and un-reflexive (Morrow, 2012). For example, in a report for the UN Population Council (Lloyd, 2005), what counts as a 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' transition to adulthood is very clearly defined. Lloyd lists a number of attributes of 'successful transitions', and these include the following: good mental and physical health; an 'appropriate stock of human and social capital to enable an individual to be a productive member of society'; the 'acquisition of pro-social values and the ability to contribute to the collective well-being as citizen and community participant'; 'adequate preparation for the assumption of adult social roles and obligations...', capability to make choices through the acquisition of a sense of self and a sense of personal competence; and finally a 'general sense of well-being' (Lloyd, 2005, p. 26). This list of attributes emphasises *individual* development, though Lloyd does recognise that 'in some cultures in which strong family and community linkages are valued more than autonomy' (Lloyd, 2005, p. 25). Further, she notes, 'differential rates of change have led, in some cases, to growing differences among adolescents within and across countries, as some young people experience progress and others are left behind' (Lloyd, 2005, p. 20). Lloyd takes a human capabilities approach, based on Sen's work, emphasising 'the ability of human beings to lead lives they have reason to value and enhance the substantive choices they have' (Sen 1997, p. 1959). Capabilities approaches emphasise people's 'substantive freedoms',

such as the ability to engage in economic transitions, or participate in political activities, or live to old age. The emphasis is on people having the capacity or choice to act in particular ways, and poverty is understood as depriving people of capabilities. However, the approach is fundamentally individualistic, and begs the question of precisely what people (in this case, parents and children) may value, and how values intersect with the choices they make. The a-historical, context-free stance of human capabilities approaches can be challenged by a political economy perspective that locates the experiences of children caught in the tensions between new opportunities created by increased formal education, yet uneven economic growth and development (Pells, 2011). Further, as Balagopalan (2011, p. 295) reminds us, the situation of children in India cannot be understood simply as a snapshot in time, but must be embedded not only in an understanding of questions of 'caste, religion, class and gender that frame children's everyday lives', but also understood in relation to (post-colonial) histories, economy and politics.

India - policy context

India has experienced dramatic economic growth over the past two decades, yet there is grave concern about rising inequality, and it is clear that on a range of social indicators, vast sections of the child population are not experiencing improvement in their quality of life and outcomes (see Drèze and Sen, 2011). The Government of India has wholeheartedly endorsed global neo-liberal educational policies, school enrolment has increased over the past 15 years, and children are now spending a great proportion of their time in school. Further, there has been a vast expansion of private schooling. Private schools are thought to be of better quality and thus likely to lead to better job prospects (Woodhead and others, 2013), (Galab and others, 2011). However, there are grave concerns about the quality of schooling both in public and private schools, as well as the potential for formal education to deliver its promises. Under the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, school attendance is compulsory to age 14, and national and state level exams are held at age 15 at the end of 10th Grade. Children who pass the exams are entitled to progress to Secondary Education. The Government of India has introduced a reservation system to prohibit discrimination against children from Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, and Backward Classes¹. The policy context is changing rapidly, and at the time of writing, there are plans to provide universal access to secondary and further education to age 18, introducing life-skills and vocational training. The Government of India is also reportedly considering banning child labour for all those under 18. Unsurprisingly, the vision of youth is of children staying longer in formal education, in line with the global model being promoted in international policy debates.

If we take aspirations to be a reflection of parents' and children's values, in line with other studies (Kingdon, 2005), recent analysis has found that there are profound inequalities between children in differing social groups, and also between children within households (Dercon and Singh, 2011). In Andhra Pradesh, as in other parts of India, there has long been evidence of a marked bias against girls, linked to lower educational aspirations of parents for their daughters. However, this has changed during the recent period of economic growth. In the mid-1990s, the bias against girls in education manifested itself in lower enrolment rates as compared with boys, rather than in how much was spent on girls relative to boys once they

¹ Scheduled Castes (SCs) are the lowest in the traditional caste structure and were earlier considered to be 'untouchables'/*dalit*. SCs have been subjected to discrimination for years and had no access to basic services, including education. Backward Castes or Classes (BCs) are people belonging to a group of castes who are considered to be 'backward' in view of the low level in the caste structure. Scheduled Tribes are indigenous communities, who are traditionally disadvantaged and live in forests and mountainous areas.

were enrolled (Kingdon, 2005). The pattern since then has been reversed: all children are likely to be enrolled, but boys are more likely than girls to be enrolled in private schools, and to have more money spent on their education (Pells, 2011). Dercon and Singh (2011) in analysis of Young Lives survey data found that there are large gaps between parents' and children's aspirations and children's outcomes along caste lines, and children from traditionally deprived caste and tribal groups experience greater gaps than along gender lines. This, they suggest, indicates that 'studies of exclusion need to account for the structural processes which lead to multiple axes of deprivation and across many domains' (p. 31).

Young Lives

This paper draws on data from longitudinal qualitative research with children in Andhra Pradesh, India, from Young Lives. Young Lives is a 15 year study investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in four countries, Ethiopia, Peru, India (Andhra Pradesh) and Vietnam. The study aims to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and the role of policies in improving children's life chances, in the broad context of the Millennium Development Goals. Young Lives collects data from two cohorts of children in each country: 2,000 born in 2000–1 (the younger cohort) and 1,000 children born in 1994–5 (the older cohort). The sample is not representative, because poor rural and urban sites were intentionally over-sampled. A survey is carried out every three years with the full sample of children and their caregivers, and is complemented by qualitative research with a sub-sample of 50 children in four communities in each country, their parents/caregivers, and other key figures in the community, including teachers, local health workers, *sarpanch* (community leader) in four communities.

Drawing on data from three rounds of qualitative longitudinal research, conducted in 2007, 2008 and 2010, with twenty-five children born in 1994/5, the paper explores children's expectations and experiences of school, and how these change over time as other sets of values influence their daily lives and time use, using four case studies, selected to reflect a range of experiences broadly in line with trends found in statistical analysis (Galab others, 2011). There is copious educational research in India, but (as is the case with educational research globally) such research tends to focus on schools, teachers, and children's outcomes, rather than on children themselves, and few studies have prioritized children's accounts of their daily lives (though see Pujari and Misra, 2008), (Alex, 2007). Furthermore, Young Lives presents a unique opportunity to explore how children's aspirations change over time, in the light of their experiences. Longitudinal research enables us to track what happens to these young people as they navigate pathways to adulthood in dynamic contexts, and qualitative research helps to understand the processes and practices that lie behind the statistical trends. However, it is important to flag some limitations. First, as noted, the Young Lives sample is not representative. Second, it would be wrong to generalise from the four cases presented, but they are broadly representative of trends found in analysis of Young Lives survey data (see Galab and others, 2011).

Fieldwork is conducted by local research teams, fluent in local languages. A range of qualitative research methods are used, including one-to-one interviews, group discussions and creative activities. Interviews are conducted in homes, fields, or in village community premises, and are voice recorded, transcribed, and translated. Interviews are structured around specific questions, and last from 30 minutes to 2 hours. Data are coded by themes, using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. For this paper, a case study approach has been utilised, by examining all interviews with children over successive data collection rounds. Data are divided into different domains such as education, work and aspirations, and

creating a narrative for each domain (see www.younglives.org.uk for details of methods, ethics, and analysis). Names of children and places are pseudonyms.

Case study children

Harika and Ranadeep both live in Poompuhar, a very poor rural community in southern Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh. Both are from Backward Castes. The main occupations in the community are in agriculture, and daily wage labour. Children are involved in cotton seed pollination work which means they miss school for two to three months each year, though this declined between 2007 and 2008 (Morrow and Vennam, 2010). A new local secondary school has recently opened, and by 2010 children were attending school regularly. Seasonal migration (February/May until June/July) was common, but the introduction of a poverty reduction scheme, MG NREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme, introduced in 2006, guaranteeing 100 days work a year for adults in public works and land cultivation for a wage of 100Rs/- a day) means that wages have risen. There is plenty of work in public works (a railway track, and canal work) as well as subcontract work on small farms, but this has unintended consequences for children, as they may substitute for their parents working on family land while their parents undertake wage labour.

Harika – ‘if you study well, you will get an educated husband’

Harika is the only daughter and has one older and one younger brother. Her older brother had been fostered by close relatives. When first interviewed in 2007, her father was immobile because he had injured his leg in an accident. Harika’s mother had shouldered the responsibility and spent a large part of the day at the family fields. Harika did most of the household work, while also attending to cotton pollination work. Like most children of her age in the village, she missed school during the peak season in the cotton fields. She found it difficult to manage school and work, and she also found it difficult to perform well in examinations. She described feeling forced to attend the examinations to meet the school requirement so that she could continue to be enrolled: ‘Sir told [me] to write the exam, otherwise my name will be deleted. So, I thought, I have to write.’ In 2007, Harika described her daily routine:

I wake up at 6’o clock in the morning and sweep the floor. I sweep the floor and wash the dishes. I will bring water. After bringing water, I will brush my teeth... drink the tea.... I do study for a while and after studying... I go to the [fields]. After doing the crossing work, I come back at 11 o’ clock and take a bath. I will study for some time and come to school at 2’o clock... after eating lunch. I will come to the school and write the exam and go back home at 4.30 p.m. After going I will press the cotton and sweep the floor and cook the food for night.....

She said: ‘If I go to the fields, I won’t get an education’. Later on, she said: ‘children must not be forced to do hard work from childhood itself. If they only study, it’s nice and their lives will be good.’ In 2007, Harika wanted to become a teacher: ‘I can educate the children and tell them good things’.

When interviewed in 2008, Harika had obtained a scholarship of Rs 6,000/- a year, payable conditional on completing school, that is, continuing education beyond Class 10². Generally,

2 Scholarships to encourage children to stay in school are available to various groups (SCs, girls) through different programmes. This particular scholarship was based on an aptitude test for which Harika was coached by the head teacher. 6,000 Rs/- translates to about £75/\$115 and represents a sizeable amount of money, given that a day’s pay is 100Rs/-, about £1.20/\$1.90.

children in Poompuhar were working less than in the previous year. Harika's father had recovered, and 'he is going to the field now... I used to go in his place every morning'. She said the family economic situation was better:

we had a financial problem, we didn't sow anything in the fields as our father was sick. Now we are doing so, we are growing crops all over now, we don't have any problem now.

In 2007, Harika was still responsible for some aspects of farm work, including supervising wage labourers while her mother was away selling vegetables at market. She was attending school more regularly, and had missed 15 days of school compared to 2007, when she had missed school for more than two months. She said this was because her family cropped half the number of acres for cotton, and they used new cotton seeds. She explained that she is absent once in two or three weeks: 'when my mother goes out somewhere, when she goes out of the village. I have to go to the farm ...'.

By 2010, Harika was at College, and aspiring to be a doctor. She described how in 9th and 10th grade, she did not work in the fields, but only did domestic chores (washing dishes and cooking rice and dhal). She explained: 'I needed to study and keep up my attendance in school that was the reason I did not go to the fields'. She reflected on her childhood, and how she had wanted to study 'but my parents said no in the beginning, later when I insisted they said it is my wish and agreed to send me for further education'. She thinks being educated is better:

you will have a better life if you study, there will not be much work. You will get better jobs,... if you study well, you will get an educated husband.... if you get a husband who is in agriculture, you have to go to the fields and work, and if you get an educated husband, you can be happy... we see our parents working, and we feel that we should not be like that.. they work in the fields, and work hard daily.

Harika's ambition is now to be a doctor, but she also sees her educational qualifications quite pragmatically as a route to finding an educated husband, and as a route away from the hard work involved in agricultural that she has watched her parents undertaking.

Ranadeep – 'I will be a waste'

Like Harika, Ranadeep worked in cotton pollination work during his childhood. The family farm 10 acres of land, growing paddy and cotton. In 2008, he had described his parents 'making' him do farm work (cotton pollination work and irrigation) which he did not like. He described how teachers scolded him if he missed school. He talked about his ambition to migrate and open his own business, running a small shop. He wanted to study well to get a good job, and was planning to continue intermediate education, hoping to attend a college in a nearby town, staying with his paternal uncle.

However, by 2010, Ranadeep had left school after failing Maths, and was now farming. He explained that all his five friends had failed. He still aspired to go to College, and had applied to re-take the supplementary exam. He talked about how when he was studying in 10th class, there were 43 students, of whom 23 have moved up to intermediate college. He felt his friends who had succeeded and are now at college 'look at me very cheaply' [look down on

him] and said 'I am hurt because I am not there with my friends'. He explained that he, and other children in the community, failed their exams because they attended school irregularly, trying to combine school with work. In the past, his uncle told his parents not to make him work on the land, but:

my parents never listened to him... there is nobody to work in the fields, and there is no labour..., and we need to pay Rs100/- as wages every day, and we were not able to afford it, so they stopped me from going to school. [My parents] told me I need to do both work and studies.

This led to family arguments, because his father blamed his mother for sending him to work:

My father knows, he has studied so he knows the importance of 10th class, but my mother is not educated... so she does not know... she says we will not get jobs even if we study, so she will tell us to come to the fields and work. I told her 10th class is important, and I will be a waste if I don't complete my 10th class, My mother never listened. So my father took me to the fields to work, they stopped me from going to school for a month. During that time they [schoolmates] covered most of the lessons. Then I used to borrow the notes from my friends in the night, and used to study, and used to say the answers when the teachers asked me. I used to ask my friends what they learned in school that day, and used to update myself... my friends helped me a lot.

This example illustrates the importance Ranadeep had attached to formal schooling, trying to catch up with missed lessons, as well as the conflict and negotiation taking place within households (see also Punch, 2007). Ranadeep is balancing his 'needs' as an individual with the household's needs.

By 2010, he had abandoned his plan to open a shop. He didn't want to tell his family, and said 'I dropped the idea because I never had the money'. He talked about the family financial situation, explaining that the household needs to pay for pesticides, fertilizers and wages.

'For that only they spend, and nothing else... what will they spend on me?... I know they are struggling in the house, so how will I ask?'

He also described a recent crop failure, explaining that 'we need to repay [cotton seed supplier] – we have to pay him from our pocket, since the crops have failed'. He anticipated settling in agriculture, and talked about marriage, and the characteristics of the girl he will marry. His parents will decide *when* he will marry, but he described how his wife will need to be either equal to him, or educated to a lower level. He talked at length about dowry payments – if he has a good job, his family can ask for a bigger payment: 'they will feel I will take care of the girl well, so they will give, but if I am doing cultivation, who will give? They will not give.' Ranadeep explained what had happened to him by referring to destiny: he described how his friend Prahalad, who had also failed Grade 10 exams, said that 'in our fate it is written that we must only do agriculture/[be farmers]. There is no way we can go to college. He also felt bad, and told me this'.

These two cases highlight some of the contradictions these young people face, between what might be thought of as individualistic values required by neo-liberal policies of self-development and acquisition of formal qualifications, and the norms and values embedded in

a collective culture where family members support each other and children are expected to contribute their labour and effort to the shared enterprise.

The next two cases explore the experiences of two young people from *adivasi*/tribal backgrounds in Patna, a very poor rural community in Srikakulam district of AP. The two tribal groups living in the area are Savara and Jathapu. Jathapu people speak Telegu, but Savara have a different language and script, and children find school difficult. Produce and goods are traded through a barter system, though the introduction of NREGS has meant that a cash economy is developing rapidly. Numerous government programmes and interventions have been in place, including schools run by the ITDA (Integrated Tribal Development Agency). Children attend local primary schools, then move to nearby towns in order to continue in Secondary School, staying in hostels (see also Froer, 2011), (Behera, 2009).

Yaswanth – ‘we must have the capacity to earn’

Yaswanth’s father died when he was in 1st grade, and his mother ‘struggled, worked hard, and took care of me and my sister’. When first interviewed in 2007, Yaswanth was helping at home, fetching water, firewood, buying provisions from the shops, and his mother had high hopes for him, settling into a ‘small job’, so that he can take care of her in the future. As the only son, Yaswanth feels very responsible for his mother, and this sense of responsibility has been a constant feature of all his interviews. When interviewed in 2010, he said ‘I just want to lead a simple life and take care of my mother and myself’. His sister has recently married and his mother incurred debts in order to pay for her dowry. The debts are a source of anxiety for Yaswanth as he explains that ‘if we don’t repay them they will mortgage my house’. Yaswanth has also been ill (with ‘tumours’), and payment for his treatment has led to further debt. Yaswanth ideally wants to continue to study and to go to university, but when interviewed in 2010 was very fearful that he would not complete 10th grade. He described struggling at school ‘I feel I want to study, but I can’t... lessons are hard to understand and learn’. He was frightened of the teachers, and did not like to ask for help. The economic situation of the family and his struggles at school mean that Yaswanth is considering leaving after 10th grade, and looking for ‘anything which will earn me and my mother to lead happy life... anything, like repairing vehicles... we must have the capacity to earn’. He described how he had enjoyed school when he was younger, because at that time, ‘we had no debts, now we have debts, so my mother is worried... she keeps thinking about the debts’. He also mentioned that she worries ‘when she has to buy me books because she will not have money.’ He says that when he marries, if his wife comes from a poor family he will not ask her family to pay a dowry, because of his own family’s experience. Family-oriented expectations seem to structure his ambitions.

Santhi – ‘sometimes I feel like a mad person’

Santhi is in many respects an exceptional case, because her family is ‘middle class’ and very different from other families in the same tribal group. The family moved to X., a town about 13 kms away from Patna, in 2005, in order to access what they perceive to be high quality schooling for their children. Santhi’s father is a government school teacher, posted to a tribal area about 30 kms away. Santhi’s uncle and cousins are engineers, and medical students. Santhi had always wanted to be a doctor, and in 2007 and 2008 expressed her ambition to be a paediatrician very clearly indeed. She did well at school, despite experiencing ill-health and great deal of anxiety about her tests and examinations. During 10th grade, she suffered from chest and stomach pains for 6 months, and missed school, which caused her anxiety: ‘the pressure was mounting on me more as I fell behind’.

By 2010, Santhi had succeeded in securing admission to Intermediate College, and staying in a hostel. Initially, she was studying Bi.P.C. (Biology, Physics and Chemistry) for medicine, but had been ill again on joining college, so had shifted to Maths stream, much against her will. Her parents had been worried that if she studied for medicine she would work too hard, and fall ill again. She was very upset about this, but after talking with a sympathetic teacher, had modified her ambitions and was now studying Maths rather than the more intensive medicine course. After 12th class, she plans to study Engineering, and then look for a job.

She described the pressure she feels to succeed in order to reward her family, who have supported her throughout her schooling: 'I am frightened whether I will reach the expectations for the support that gave me. I also feel tense, and if we are tense, we will forget what we study'. She describes how indebted she feels to her parents, who sought out a college with a good reputation

they worked hard and got me admitted into this college,... so the only way to repay their support is to study well and score good marks and achieve a good position in society about which my parents feel proud and be happy without any worries.

The family have financial difficulties, because of ill health (Santhi described how her brother had been very ill), and Santhi's schooling is no longer free because there is a hostel fee of 5-600 Rs/- month, and 3,600 fees. Santhi has received marriage proposals, but her mother says: 'we told them it is not possible for 4-5 years because she is studying'. Santhi constantly worries that her studies will be stopped for marriage, and refuses to discuss the possibility with the interviewer.

Santhi also describes working extremely hard, with intensive period of study and very little sleep (only 1-2 hours at exam periods). She comments:

If we have a little more time it would be good, so we can discuss and tell our problems to our friends but we cannot... studies are important, friends are also important. Now sometimes I feel like a mad person, if I see the timetable. Every time it is studies only, nothing else, there is no rest. If we take rest after studying, then only we understand. If we keep studying continuously, what will we understand? ...If you score less marks it is your fault... they don't know the stress we face'.

The pressure felt by school children has been noted in other studies of children's experiences of school in India (Pramanik, 2008). In relation to her own choices, and to link back to human capabilities approaches that emphasise the desirability of people being able to lead lives they have reason to value, Santhi's values cannot be separated out from those of her extended family. She explains that she has not made decisions about college herself, her parents and uncle did so for her. She says she used to resist the discipline imposed on her in the past, but now she listens to her elders and 'I amend my ways and respect elders and obey them'. There is no sense here of her own individual values, rather, a huge burden of expectation imposed by her family, that she will achieve academically and succeed in life.

Discussion

What do these four cases tell us about values and norms? Young people express a great sense of obligation to their parents, whether or not they are doing well at school. What they seem to value, then, are family relationships, and the potential to care for their parents – this is very strongly felt for boys, particularly in Yaswanth's case. Patriarchal conventions mean that girls

will leave their families of origin, but still (in Santhi's case, at least) feel a strong sense of obligation to their parents. Boys are also disadvantaged by family indebtedness and moral imperatives to help their families. Ranadeep's mother seems to have over-ridden his father's views that he should go to school and not work, which challenges (gendered) assumptions about who holds power within families, though family members often make decisions and have responsibilities for different spheres of social life. Ranadeep's 'failure' seems acutely felt, and the invocation of fate seems to be the way he explains what has happened. Children who do not pass examinations risk being blamed for their own failure, for a lack of motivation, when it is the circumstances in which they find themselves that constrain them. This leads inevitably to frustration and disappointment, and is clearly expressed in Ranadeep's words, 'a waste'. Had he passed his Grade 10 exams, he would have been able to continue in further education, as it was, he was facing a future life of drudgery (as he saw it) of subsistence agricultural work. Being or becoming a farmer is no longer valued as an aspiration for children in A.P., and indeed in many other parts of the world (see, for example, White, 2012). For young people like Ranadeep who are no longer at school, social norms and values seem to remain conservative in so far as they prioritise family relationships over their individual futures. Thus, patriarchy remains important not just for constraining girls, but also for boys, in that they too seem to not want to break the traditional cycle of wanting to marry a girl 'less educated' than them, also revealing the gender bias prevalent within Indian families (see Pells, 2010), (Boyden and Crivello 2011).

Harika talks in terms of formal qualifications not only leading to the possibility of becoming an engineer, but also as route to securing a better marriage. Yaswanth aims for a simple life that enables him to look after his mother. Ranadeep explains that he has to contribute to the family economy in agricultural work, and he sees his future as a farmer, but this is not the kind of life he values, in human capabilities terms, and farming does not enhance his marriage prospects. It is ironic to note that of all four cases presented here, the young person who seems to be under the most pressure, is Santhi, who described her time being entirely taken up with her schooling and feeling great pressure to fulfil her parents' expectations to succeed educationally.

There seems to be a moral economy of paying debts of gratitude to parents, of intricate connections between material and social values within the context of kinship, that fosters intergenerational mutuality. This sits uneasily with dominant approaches to 'youth' in international policy discourse that emphasise the arguably unreachable goal of independent, autonomous adulthood. There is thus a tension between individualistic values of neo-liberal policies, and the complexities of these young people's lives, as they try to navigate situations created by poverty. Further, the sense of 'failure' and 'waste' expressed by Ranadeep raises questions for human capabilities approaches – how will these young people 'lead lives they have reason to value'? Formal schooling has raised their expectations and they have taken on board the dominant idea that they should aspire to be (for example) doctors, yet for some, they have been 'left behind' as farmers. Farming is not (apparently) a valued activity but rather, something to be endured. These young people do have the capacity to aspire, but economic circumstances – affected by family illness, debt, poor crops – combine to thwart their ambitions.

In conclusion, the case studies demonstrate the varied pathways that children growing up in poverty in rural India are taking, and the complexities they encounter. Formal schooling is viewed as important for equipping children with skills to increase opportunities, and is seen as a route out of poverty and a way for children and families to improve their social standing,

including enhancing marriage prospects for girls. However, as we have seen, there are concerns about the valuation given to children's childhoods, their responsibilities, and the sense they make of the future. In each example, children's visions of the future have all had to be modified as they have grown older. The low value placed on agricultural work, and the high value place on formal schooling, may have profound consequences for young people, and the potential for them to lead lives they have reason to value. All four of them started out with high expectations for the future, but the economic contexts of their families, as well as the opportunities for work in their localities, are not changing rapidly enough to match these expectations. There is a contradiction between the pace of change, the values underpinning the change, and the values of children and parents living through these changes, so eloquently described by Sharon Stephens as a 'crossroads' of diverging projects (Stephens, 1995). Children and parents seem to be balancing the need for survival in the present against anticipated benefits of schooling in the future. There is uncertainty among children and parents whether skilled employment will indeed be available after children finish their formal education, so they emphasise the need to acquire practical skills while they are still children. Girls still need domestic skills for marriage. Boys face social pressures to provide for parents in old age, and to contribute to dowries for their sisters. For boys in situations of poverty, this affects their progress through school, and the sense of failure is palpable.

The structural constraints of poverty underpin all four accounts. Global values to become producers and consumers in free market economies are likely to conflict with, or become part of, young people's value systems. Markets intrude with the accrual of debt to pay for dowries, health care, or indeed consumer goods. What we see in these children's accounts are their aspirations slowly diminishing in the light of lived experiences and difficulties their families face. These operate along gender lines, as well as social positioning of caste and economic status. Children are caught in tension between aspirations of the global model of childhood and youth imagined in neo-liberal policies, and local experiences and environments. Thus, the emphasis in global policies on increasing school enrolment and acquisition of qualifications needs to be balanced by attention not only to children's relationships with their families and communities, but also to the appropriateness of formal education and skills training in the context of opportunities for work and specific labour markets.

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