Migrant Childhoods and Temporalities in India: A Reflective Engagement with Dominant Discourses

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Temporality is recognized as critical to the understanding of childhoods by contemporary scholars of childhood. This paper explores the varying temporalities through which marginal childhoods (and their educational inclusion), particularly those situated in contexts of temporary internal migration, are constructed in the Indian context. Drawing on ethnographic data from the city of Bangalore, this paper problematizes how dominant ideals around migration, childhood, and schooling frame migrant children's lives through linear temporalities. Furthermore, the paper argues that policy interventions that ostensibly include migrant childhoods do not engage critically with the politics of linear temporality which, in turn, is central to the exclusionary dynamics of migrant children's schooling.

Key words: *linear temporality; marginal childhoods; educational inclusion; temporality of schooling; migrant childhoods and temporality*

This paper explores the varying temporalities through which marginal childhoods (and their educational inclusion), particularly those situated in contexts of temporary internal migration, are constructed in the Indian context. Temporary migration is short term, circular, and seasonal in nature and one of the significant livelihood strategies adopted by the poorest and marginalized communities in rural India (Keshri & Bhagat, 2012). Educational inclusion of children belonging to temporarily migrating families is particularly challenging because, as opposed to permanent and semipermanent migrant families, they not only live more transient lives but also face multiple forms of structural exclusion in both source and destination sites.

Drawing on ethnographic data from the city of Bangalore, this paper problematizes how dominant ideals around migration, childhood, and schooling frame the lives of migrant children (situated in contexts of temporary migration) through linear temporalities. Furthermore, the paper argues that policy interventions that ostensibly include migrant childhoods do not engage critically with the politics of linear temporality which, in turn, is central to the exclusionary dynamics of migrant children's schooling.

Temporality and its socially constructed nature are recognized in contemporary times as central forces that shape experiences of childhood (James & Prout, 2015; Tesar et al., 2016). Far from being neutral, natural, universal, or equalizing, dominant constructions of temporality may in reality be deeply contested (Gupta, 2002; Knight, 2019; Nuttall & Thomas, 2015; Tesar et al., 2016). For instance, Gupta (2002) points out that children's journey through age classes in schools is a "forced step-march" (p. 42); it is neither natural nor universal but constructed through specific Western imaginations of childhood, mediated through the epistemic category of age (Gupta, 2002). In a similar vein, Dhankar (2017) argues that in the Indian context educational policies such as detention or no-detention are bound to fail in the "unbending" and "ironclad" class-wise structure of our schooling system (p. 37). He argues that a

class-wise system, in line with which the entire infrastructure, resources, and processes of the education system are arranged, does not ensure meaningful learning. In the context of childhood, the "timed" developmental pathways have long been critiqued by scholars for varying reasons, such as their propensity to "perpetuate inequalities, homogenize children, and essentialize childhoods" (Tesar, 2016, p. 400) and to neoliberalize childhoods through "discourses of efficiency and effectiveness" (Nuttall & Thomas, 2015, p. 3). Furthermore, canons of neutral, linear temporality exclude categories of children for whom the temporality of life is "out of sync" and therefore cannot be reified through temporal fixations that define policy and practice (Knight, 2019).

The first part of the paper builds on the aforesaid critiques of linear temporality by exploring its constructions in dominant discourses of migration, childhood, and education. After a brief introduction to the research site, participants, and methods, the later part of the paper explores the ways in which dominant constructions of temporality shape educational experiences of children situated in the context of temporary internal migration in India. Through ethnographic narratives from the Indian city of Bangalore, multiple vantage points of temporality that affect migrant children's schooling and educational inclusion are discussed.

Marginal childhoods, schooling, and temporality

This section explores constructions of temporality as manifested in dominant discourses of migration, childhood, and education. This discussion conceptually situates the current study in an endeavour toward engaging with migrant childhoods and their educational inclusion beyond the ontological security of linear temporality. This is done through unpacking the dominant and taken-for-granted temporal understandings of (1) migration as a progressive movement toward development; (2) marginal childhoods as a project of moral reformation; and (3) modern schooling as a temporally neutral site.

First, dominant economistic accounts of migration understand it as a process of optimal labour distribution—resulting from rational decision making of individuals—and as an indication of economic growth and development. Such accounts are closely aligned with theories of economic growth and modernization that evaluate the predicaments of different societies to be situated in distinct spatio-temporal junctions of varying linear models of development. The Marxist interpretations of migration—often serving as a counternarrative to economistic accounts—question how growth, development, and modernization are contingent upon the historical, structural, and global relations of dependence and exploitation. Nevertheless, the latter too fails to radically question the linear spatio-temporality circulated through the "eurocentric, historicist metanarrative of modernity" (Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2003, p. 189). Furthermore, it can be argued that both economistic and Marxist theorizations of migration fail to address the lived realities of temporarily migrating families, as for them, the village and the city are neither waiting rooms to be escaped nor archetypal terminuses to be reached. It is by breaking these binaries that their mobility and association with multiple places shape their lives. The "temporary" nature of their migration itself disrupts linear models of understanding migration journeys and development. de Haan (1997) states that such "unsettled settlers" represent the failure of "standard categories" (p. 929). Experiences of families and children whose mobility is embodied by "circulation and simultaneous commitment" to multiple places cannot be understood adequately through straightforward spatio-temporal dichotomies such as origin/destination or permanent/temporary migration (Haas, 2007, p. 56). Far from being straightforward, decisions about migration and return are often "haphazard, spontaneous and opportunistic" (Parry, 2003, p. 220) particularly in the case of temporarily migrating families. These contingencies are central to migrant life worlds, and based on my own study, I have argued elsewhere that formal schooling system is implicated upon linear spatio-temporal ideals that exclude temporally mobile childhoods from accessing meaningful learning and education (Rajan, 2021b). In this light, the prominent assumption that children's migration alone creates conditions that undermine their education may be

insufficient to explain their educational exclusion.

Second, children on the margins are constructed as educationally "deprived," "lacking," "uneducable," and, more importantly, "in need of reform" in the dominant discourses of education and development (Balagopalan, 2003; Dalal, 2015; Velaskar, 2005). The ontological fixity and politics of such temporal constructions around children on the margins have been problematized by various Indian scholars. It has been argued that discourses of lack and educability construct children from marginalized communities as "nonepistemic" beings (Batra, 2015) and as responsible for their learning failures (Dalal, 2015). These constructions have "damaging" impact on children's educational experiences (Balagopalan & Subrahmanian, 2003) and expose the slow pace of meaningful educational inclusion in the Indian context despite the efforts toward "formal inclusion" (Subrahmanian, 2003). Such temporal construction of development of children on the margins is empirically validated in varying contexts of rural and urban India. For example, in her ethnographic exploration of rural schools in Karnataka, Sriprakash (2016) argues that "being placed so firmly outside the normative citizen-subjecthood, the 'poor child' is positioned as a governable subject in need of reform" in the development narratives of global India (p. 154). She argues that while the nation's "aspirations for consumption, economic growth and an international outlook" and the construction of "urban English educated as bearers of modernity" and of "normative citizen-subject as middle-class urban" constitute the dominant and desired imaginary of education and development, the image of the poor rural child is absent from the dominant narrative of developing India (pp. 152–153). This absence, she points out, is not only because of the marginal socio-cultural and economic backgrounds of families but also because of the insignificance of rural livelihoods to the development of India's knowledge economy. In a study in western India, Dyer (2014) demonstrates how pastoralist livelihoods and situated learning are framed based on notions of "deficit" in the dominant discourse of schooling. She critiques modernity's "normative framing" of "education inclusion and policy" for mobile pastoralist children as sedentarizing them and uprooting them from their families' "traditional" livelihood means (p. 24). Such field engagements with children's lives and educational experiences have reiterated the deficit temporal construction of marginal childhoods, not only in state-sponsored formal sites of schooling, but also in "alternative" NGO sites. Balagopalan (2014), in her ethnographic study of urban street children in Calcutta, discusses how "agents of good governance" construct "reformist moral telos" of saving the "reified" category of "street children" (pp. 30, 31). This, she argues, is done through "homogenizing and hegemonic assumptions" around street children as requiring protection and disciplining. For example, children's "case files" written by NGO workers encompass stories of street children in ways that reaffirm their identities as "abandoned," "neglected," "victimized," "vulnerable," and *norom mati* (soft clay).

Third, in addition to the temporal reference of formal schooling around ideals of adulthood, discipline, moral reformation, and progress as discussed above, there are other straightforward ways in which time and temporality are integral to the workings of modern schooling. For instance, ways in which "time is used effectively to produce, control and order the everyday lives of children" (James & Prout, 2015, pp. 227–228) are evident in the institutional site of schooling. School plays a major role in enabling the growth and development of children as "natural beings passing through biologically determined developmental stages" and as "marginalized beings awaiting temporal passage…into the social world of adults" (Prout & James, 2015, pp.10, 11). Saul (2020) problematizes four temporal assumptions around schooling: (1) the "neutrality bias": the idea that time is neutral which is independent of educational oppression; (2) the "uniformity bias": the idea that school time presents equal opportunities for all students toward achievement; (3) the "spatial bias": the priority given to space above time in the discourses of educational inclusion; and (4) the "developmental bias": the idea that children pass through foreseeable ages and stages and that the resulting individual and social relations of time are both normal and utopian (p. 2).

In my own research with migrant children, I have shown that these biases have serious implications for children

of temporarily migrating families and take particular relevance through the normative construct of age-grade-learning-level correspondence in modern schooling (Rajan, 2020, 2021b). I have discussed how policy and practice in education that operate along notions such as age-appropriate learning disfranchise the migrant child subject. The Indian state has created a parallel world of "alternative" and "substandard" schooling for migrant children primarily through NGO interventions because these children cannot fall in line with the temporal order of modern schooling. The field narratives shared in later sections of the paper strengthen this argument by exposing other temporal dynamics through which dominant constructs of migration, childhood, and education are manifested in children's lives.

Research site, participants, and methods

There are 30 revenue districts in the Indian state of Karnataka, which are further divided into 34 educational districts. The fieldwork sites for the current study are located in and around Bangalore East Taluk (of the revenue district of Bangalore Urban) and Bangalore South 4 Block (of the educational district of Bangalore South). Situated in the southeastern part of Karnataka state, Bangalore Urban District, according to the latest census data, has a total population of around 9.6 million constituting 5 million males and 4.6 million females (Government of India, 2014). Having a geographical area of 2,196 square kilometres, Bangalore Urban District's population density has increased from 180 persons per sq km in 1901, to 4,381 persons per sq km in 2011 (Government of India, 2014). It is also the most urbanized district in Karnataka having around 91% (around 8.7 million) of its total population residing in urban areas (Government of Karnataka, 2016).

Studying circular migration between the agriculture and construction sectors in Raichur and Bangalore respectively, Pattenden (2012) argues that due to changes in the forces and relations of production, "the trickle of migration" to Bangalore became a "stream" in the early 2000s (p. 171). A study of migrant construction workers in Bangalore shows that most migrant workers come from northern districts of Karnataka (such as Yadgir, Kalburgi, and Raichur) and also from other states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand (Premchander et al., 2014). Another study in the city points out that when levels of migrants' social and educational marginalization are higher, they are likely to be "pushed out of rural areas" (Sridhar et al., 2013, pp. 300–301). In line with these trends, a considerable proportion of migrant families who participated in the study were largely from northern districts of Karnataka such as Gulbarga, Raichur, and Yadgir. The interstate migrants were primarily from the states of Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh.

The current study was conducted for a period of 13 months between January 2017 and May 2018. Families and children were approached through three NGO schools (hereafter referred to as NGO-1, NGO-2, and NGO-3) that offer bridging programs for migrant children (living within and around 10 km from the schools) and attempt to mainstream them to formal schools in the city. All three NGOs were located in East Bangalore, which has witnessed rapid expansion of the IT sector and giant construction projects in recent decades, the reasons for a significant presence of migrants. Most families belonged to marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds, occupied the squalors of the city, and were employed in informal labour sectors with extremely vulnerable conditions of living and labouring, though there were variations in the profiles of migrant families that different NGOs catered to.

NGO-1 largely works with intrastate migrants who are also comparatively longer-term migrants than in NGO-2 and NGO-3. Their duration of stay in Bangalore is longer and they are also employed in comparatively stable informal sector jobs such as contract *pourakarmikas* (sanitation workers) in Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike

(BBMP). NGO-2 works with both intrastate and interstate migrants who are employed in the informal labour sectors of construction and domestic work. Their migration is more short-term and circular in nature. NGO-3 largely works with interstate migrants. Their duration of stay in the city is longer than those in NGO-2 but shorter than those in NGO-1. While some of them are employed in the comparatively stable informal labour sectors of painting and driving, others work on construction sites and as rag pickers.

Children in NGO-1 largely belong to North Karnataka, and Kannada is the most-spoken language among them. About half of the children from NGO-2 are from North Karnataka and speak Kannada. The other half are children from different states of India speaking different languages. In contrast, NGO-3 has a small number of children from North Karnataka and children in NGO-3 largely belong to east and north Indian states of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh and speak Bengali and Hindi. Also, more than 85% of the children in NGO-1 and NGO-2 belong to the Hindu religion, while NGO-3 has a fairly uniform distribution of Hindu and Muslim children. Among those who reported as Hindus, more than 90% belonged to marginalized caste categories such as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in all three NGOs. Profiles of participants indicate that temporary migrant families and children in the city stand at the intersection of multiple marginalities in terms of their caste, class, and occupation. Secondary literature and data indicate a similar trend, showing that the poor and socially marginalized communities in rural areas are more prone to temporary migration than others (see, e.g., Keshri & Bhagat, 2012; Mishra, 2016) and that they face multiple vulnerabilities in both source and destination areas.

The narratives discussed in this paper are specifically from the NGO-3 school. Out of a total of 88 children who participated in the study, 24 children (11 females and 13 males; 16 in the age group 7–12 years and 8 in the age group 13–18 years) were from this NGO. Formally founded in 2010, NGO-3 was started through the voluntary effort of one of the founding members to identify many out-of-school children (OoSC) and motivate them to join the formal schooling system. NGO-3 currently works with OoSC in three Indian cities including Bangalore. It aims to provide migrant children access to basic education, enable them to enroll in age-appropriate classes in English-medium private schools, and provide after-school support. The parents are required to pay half of the private school fee (and are counselled by the NGO about the importance of doing so); the other half is provided by the NGO through individual sponsors. Transforming an *"illiterate child into an English-speaking child"* (founding member, NGO-3) and through that process developing the individual and the family is proposed to be the organization's major focus.

Out of the many programs that the NGO runs, fieldwork for the current study was situated in one of the bridging schools it runs near East Bangalore. Ethnographic methods were employed in the conduct of fieldwork. These methods are about researching "with, rather than on, children" (Christensen & James, 2017, p. 1) and, by extension, with, rather than on, adults, since migrant children's families and NGO functionaries were also a significant part of my research. The method of participant observation, integral to ethnographic inquiry, helped me to engage deeply with participants in a variety of settings. The actual processes of participant observation employed in the study, namely observation and informal conversation, were made possible by *being there*, *hanging out*, and *going along* with children in their everyday spaces. The most important methodological process that enabled me to engage with the field was "being there to observe, to ask seemingly stupid but insightful questions, and to write down what [was] seen and heard" (Fetterman, 2009, p. 9). In the context of ethnographic research, mechanisms such as hanging out are not identical to their colloquial meaning of "having fun and letting things happen" (Murchison, 2010, p. 84). Deep hanging out (Geertz, 1998), as a research method, entails immersing oneself in a social experience by having long, informal conversations with people. Similarly, going along involves accompanying research participants in their natural settings—asking questions, listening, and observing—to understand and interact with them and their environments and bring a "phenomenological sensibility" to ethnography, expressing the "fundamental reflexivity

of human engagement with the world" (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 478). Such ethnographic methods can be theorized as a form of place making in which the researcher and the research participants are together implicated (Pink, 2008).

Temporal modalities: Age, reformation, and aspirations

"They can neither go forward nor backward"

Kenny and Danaher (2009) argue that the traditional "sedentarist mindset" of the formal school system is predicated on the norm of fixed and permanent residence accommodating children who are able to attend the same school for prolonged periods of time. The mismatch between such a system and the "deviant" realities of mobile children who "arrive and depart at varying times over the school year" (Kenny & Danaher, pp.1, 2) have worsened the marginalization of migrant lives. In similar lines, Dyer (2014) argues that "geospatially-fixed schooling"—schools that are fixed in place and time—by capitulating to "modernising political economies of development" (p. 177) aggravate the educational deprivation of pastoralist migrant children in India. Building on these arguments, my own study finds that the discord between mobile childhoods and immobile schools along the axis of spatio-temporality is the fundamental problematic in the educational inclusion of migrant children in India (Rajan, 2020, 2021b).

Due to the temporary nature of migration undertaken by their families, children who participated in the study often had to drop out of their village schools. Though some of them would get mainstreamed into formal schools through NGO bridging programs in the city, only a very few were able to continue their schooling in the city. Children and their families either kept moving between the village and the city or between various locations within the city for varying sociocultural and economic reasons such as conditions of life and work, seasonal labour, better livelihood opportunities, extended family visits, and village festivals. The temporal order of neither state schools nor NGO schools could accommodate such fluid spatio-temporalities of migrant families and children. Migrant children step out of the multiple slices of space and time of the spatio-temporality that defines the school and therefore get pushed out. Moving in and out of the system periodically, migrant children are compelled to "catch up" with their "normal" sedentary peers in the mainstream school. Elsewhere I have discussed the following field narratives by one of the NGO-3 teachers (addressing children) that reflects the need to "catch up" their lost slice of time (Rajan, 2020).

> Close your eyes. Breathe in and breathe out. Imagine that you are going to a mainstream school, okay? After two months. Tell yourself that you would go to mainstream school, study well and participate in all cultural activities. There will be many "normal" children coming to that school, those children may be coming from Montessori or after completing LKG, you have to develop in par with them.
>
> You can play outside, that is fine. But once you come inside, whatever you want to read, keep on reading—English, Kannada, EVS, whatever you want to read. Do not waste time. First of all, you have already wasted half of your life. There is no time to rest now. How long will you keep playing like this? Till your old age? You do not want to study? You do not want to earn? Who plays like this for 24 hours?

These narratives indicate how teachers place migrant children outside the temporal order of schooling unless they are able to "catch up" without wasting any more of the limited time that is left for them to complete schooling within a specific age. Furthermore, "falling behind children in time" makes the NGO's job of mainstreaming children to age-appropriate schools in the city all the more difficult. Enrollment in grades that do not correspond to children's age is not preferred in a system where the temporal relationality between age and grade is assumed to be linear and static. As the principal of a government school put it, *"they (migrant children) can neither go forward nor backward"* if they do not catch up. NGO teachers therefore constantly reminded children of the realities that their "age has

gone past," their "age is falling behind," or "they have exceeded age." Such an age-class system that determines entry, progress, and exit from the school structure creates social stigma, particularly for those children, such as the participants in this study, who are "out of time with their contemporaries" (James & Prout, 2015, p. 234).

Such discourses of the "becoming" child are problematic on two accounts: first, the becoming child is unequivocally future orientated and second, this discourse bets on "that which the child will be" and the present incompetency of children (Uprichard, 2008, p. 304). This means that notions such as "time past" and "time future" assume critical significance during childhood, which in turn "denies time present in the life of the child" (James & Prout, 2015, p. 235) and connects to the Western teleological drive—that is, the historical obsession with origins and endings (Gupta, 2002). Tesar et al. (2016) ask a pertinent question that is relevant in this context. Referring to the seminal ideas on childhood of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Piaget they ask: "What experience of time appears as real, as taken for granted, through their machinations of learning, teaching, and thinking?" (p. 360). Furthermore, Tesar et al. argue that in contemporary neoliberal and future-focused educational frameworks that give primacy to economic productivity and profitability, both temporality and children's becoming have become commodities which in turn shape the ways in which "measurements, treatments and pedagogical experiments" (p. 361) are enacted upon children. In the context of educational interventions for migrant children, states and NGOs are caught up in the temporal order of development and education wherein age-appropriate mainstreaming is the norm. Not only is such mainstreaming considered ideal for schooling and child development, but it is also in line with funding and future prospects of the NGOs themselves because quantitative targets of mainstreaming out of school are central to how development work is imagined by national and international agencies. And for migrant children in the margins of the city, this normative temporal movement in the school structure connects not only to their journey toward adulthood but also toward moral reformation, as we will see in the following section.

"Some people will remain dirty, what to do?"

The fundamental discourses around the exclusion of marginalized children are reinforced through their everyday use in formal learning spaces, and such exclusions are historically inherent to Indian modernity, for which the institution of formal schooling played a "civilising role among marginalised populations" (Balagopalan, 2003, p. 56). One of the prominent ways in which children from marginalized communities are "civilized" in educational spaces is through labelling their bodies as "unhygienic" and "undisciplined." This study found that NGO-3 constructs and reinforces such temporal assumptions about migrant children on the margins of the city. The NGO's overarching objective to mainstream children to English-medium private schools and help children escape their marginal sociocultural and economic locales (and thereby attain middle-class life ethos) is in itself an indication of morally reformatory educational temporality. This had multiple manifestations in the everyday workings of the NGO-3 school. For instance, teachers in the school thought that "these" parents were *"ghatiya"* (stubborn) who were fine with feeding their children junk food but were not sending them to school. The teachers were *"scared"* to go for community visits because it was very *"unhygienic" and "risky,"* and "these" people were *"alcoholic and talked disrespectfully to teachers."* One of the teachers said,

> You cannot imagine how these children were when they first came, they were so raw, so dirty. Even to talk to them, you needed to maintain some distance. And now you can see the improvement, how they are coming. Still, a few of them are dirty, it is okay. Some people will remain dirty, what to do? We have started from basic things, from "how to wash your hands" to "understanding English," even if they cannot speak English. Initially they stayed blank when something is asked in English. Now at least they will be able to tell the answer in one word, even if they cannot complete the sentence. But they will give you answer, for sure. That too in nine months, we did this.

Such dispositions of migrant families and children are assumed to shape the access to and retention in school. It is perceived that migrant families in the city are not "impoverished" as one might imagine. At the same time, they are blamed for investing in food items, clothing, mobile phones, and cultural events extravagantly instead of prioritizing children's education. See the following narratives by functionaries in NGO-3 for instance.

> Though we assume that migrant children are vulnerable, at the end of the intervention, we feel that they are no longer vulnerable. They get everything free for their education. Migrant families also have their own system of survival and perceptions, their own decision making. They spend a lot during festivals and marriages. They buy smart phones and eat a lot of non-veg food too. But when it comes to investment in their children's education, they are not willing. Sometimes we think poor are really poor, but they earn good amount of money. (Founding member, NGO-3)

> These kids, you know, are so irregular. They come for two days, become absent for one day. Then again come for one day, then again absent. How do we make them understand? Today I teach something and next day the child is not in class. What to do in such situations? Simply they will not come, this reason, that reason, stomachache, and other silly excuses. Most often their parents are not sincere. Sometimes parents want their children to do their housework. They are not understanding that they are playing with their children's lives. They do not understand the value of education. Some people understand, and their lives become quite different. (Teacher, NGO-3 School)

These narratives reflect the temporal reformatory projects that are central to how migrant childhoods and migrant children's educational inclusion are perceived by education functionaries. Furthermore, such projects are often mediated through children's religious, regional, and social class identities. Consider the following classroom conversations in NGO-3.

> Teacher: Are you a Muslim?
>
> Mamata (a 12-year-old Muslim child from Bengal): Yes.
>
> Teacher: How come? Everyone is converted these days. (Addressing other children) Have you ever heard the name Mamata in a Muslim community? It is a bad state of affairs, they are converting everyone. Overnight an entire village will be converted. In Calcutta, Muslims will not let you live, either they will convert you or kill you or you have to run away from your place. What is your mother's name?
>
> Mamata: Tanya.
>
> Teacher: Oh, they have converted Tanya to Taslima!? (Addressing another Muslim child from Karnataka) In Bijapur also, I heard there is population jihad.

In another instance, the teacher scolds an eight-year-old girl from Uttar Pradesh (UP) because some children complained that she had lied about returning a book to the school library.

> I know, you do not have to tell me. It is the birthright of UP people to tell lies. They learnt to tell lies even before they learn to say, "mummy pappa." Uttar Pradesh is the land of such great people. Learning to tell lies will be useful for their future, right!? They have spoiled the entire system.... Can you imagine the height of corruption there? ... The whole UP and Bihar have become like that.

Such derogatory remarks (in the above cases about children's religious and regional backgrounds respectively) were constantly made against children by the teachers. Children were denigrated if they were not regular in attending school or did not score well on a test. Insensitive comments such as *"You would have been reading Quran at home, but not your textbook"* and *"Go pick waste like your family, anyways you will be doing that in the future"* were a

regular feature. In one instance, when a child was seen to have missed turning off the water tap in the school, one of the teachers remarked, *"In their own homes they don't have water for four days, but they are wasting water here."*

As Hanson (2017) argues, children, in addition to their journey of becoming adults, are "also "waiting for economic prosperity, social justice and peace permitting everyone to live a joyful childhood and thriving adulthood without poverty, exploitative labour or discrimination" (p. 281). Such waiting, he argues is central to projects of development. Particularly in the context of development in the global South, the marginal child at once becomes immature (in comparison to the adult) and primitive (in comparison to "normal" children within and outside the nation). This construction of the marginal child has its roots in the equivalence formed, in colonial formulations of development, between "European past and cultural others in the present" (Gupta, 2002, p. 42), which, in turn, creates taken-for-granted temporal categories such as "primitive, backward or underdeveloped, developing, and developed or advanced" (Gupta, p. 50). In the Indian context, not only has the metaphor of childhood been equated to primitivism and thereby used to rationalize imperialism (Nandy, 1984), but marginal childhoods, in particular, were differently employed in the colonial registers of educational provision and expansion (Balagopalan, 2014).

The colonial myths of "parental indifference" and "aspirational lack" among poor families have been further reinforced in postcolonial Indian policy, though they have been invalidated time and again by various studies (PROBE Team, 1999; Rajan, 2021a; Sharma, 2021). Therefore, it is pertinent to go beyond the binary of "being" and "becoming" and understand childhoods—particularly those situated in marginal contexts—through the "trio-lectical prism composed of 'been', 'being' and 'becoming'" (Hanson, 2017, p. 284). Doing so will enable us to unpack the linear temporality of reformatory politics through which marginal childhoods are acted upon in the Indian context and to foreground inequality and exclusion in the question of how educational interventions are differentially imagined for migrant children.

"Do you want to become like your parents?"

The dominant idea of education as a means of social mobility and empowerment was evident in this study in the manner in which the scope and purpose of education was typically presented to migrant families and children by the state and NGOs. Prominent narratives included the following: *"Do you want your children to struggle and suffer like you?" "Do you want to become like your parents?"* These questions also implicitly convey that the current sociocultural and economic locations of migrant families are not worthy of being characterized as forms of aspiration that families and children ought to have. Education is presented and perceived as a temporal act that would change the nature and direction of migrant lives. It is portrayed as a claim toward a rupture from the marginal locations of migrant families and children. Migrant families and children themselves are often seen embracing such views. During community surveys undertaken by NGOs, most families and children expressed their interest in school education. There were a few exceptions, particularly in the case of older children, for reasons of disinterest in school, huge learning gaps, or gendered cultural expectations. Most of them believe that schooling would help them escape their current context of manual labour, which is "difficult," "dangerous," and "precarious." In one of the migrant children's words,

> In my family no one has completed school. If you complete schooling, you have a future (*bavishya*). Life will be good. You will get many good things in life. And you will get a *udyoga* (professional occupation), won't you? If you do not go to school, you will go for *pani* (work/job, typically manual labour) not *udyoga*. *Pani* is difficult. We have to carry heavy things on our head. Sometimes people die in worksites. Recently ten people died because of an accident in the worksite where my father was working. My parents and aunty were working there when this happened. They were all shocked when this happened. Should we also go to *pani*?

Many children articulated a similar difference between *pani* and *udyoga* and the perceived role of education in obtaining a *udyoga*. Some of them articulated education as a means for "becoming big." In one of the children's words, "*odidre doddavarakubothu*" (if you study, you can become big). And "big people" (*doddavaru*) meant people who had good jobs, lived in big buildings, and had more money. Many children articulated this perceived scope of education through the idea of *aage badna* (to progress). It was reflected in their words such as "*duniya mein kaise jeevit rahe padai ke bina?*" (how do we survive in this world without studying?) or *"padega thabi tho badega*" (you grow when you study).

Temporal aspirations around education and its perceived role in social and economic mobility are also seen to be closely tied to the idea of "English" education. In the Indian context, English learning is generally perceived to be "synonymous with modernity, progress and social mobility" (Advani, 2009, p. 22) and a determining factor of better employment prospects (Boyden, 2013). The majority of migrant families cannot afford to enroll their children in English-medium private schools. Yet, their aspiration for learning English stems from its perceived importance in obtaining white-collar jobs in the city, facilitating social mobility, and constructing a refined sense of self and identity. Aspiration for learning English is also augmented by the discourse of its global reach, as expressed in the words of many migrant families and children: *"English sab jagah chalta hei"* (English applies everywhere). The city is thought of by many migrant families and children as a site where they can construct new identities, emulating the English educated middle class. English is aspired to, not only in terms of its functional benefits but also in terms of the ontological transformation it can bring to their lives, including new behaviours and lifestyle. Consider the following narrative from the conversation with a parent, Gopal, from Purnia district of Bihar.

> My sister's daughter is enrolled in an English-medium private school, and she can talk English very well. It was so nice to listen to her talking in English. That is when I thought my children also should talk English like this. That is why I closed my shop in the village and brought my entire family to the city. You should listen to her talking in English. Whatever you ask, she can reply to you in English. Don't you think every parent wishes their children to speak English like that? Everything is in English. You can also see differences in their behaviour, talking, and style of reading and writing. When I see how children in private schools behave, I felt my children also should be like that. If their lives get settled, our lives are fulfilled. We middle-class people cannot do anything further without English. We do not have the knowledge of English. We have the knowledge of Hindi, but what is the value? If you learn English, you can earn well. Here (in Bangalore) you have to know both English and Kannada. English has its unique worth. My ambition is to make my elder son a doctor and younger son an engineer. Now it is up to them to study. But we have to keep some targets as parents. Dr Prateek Singh and Engineer Aswin Singh, imagine that tag in front of my sons' names!

Thus, education is clearly perceived as a window of opportunity for social mobility and white-collar occupations. It is strongly associated with English learning and the possibilities of the city, albeit only a miniscule number of migrant families likely have concrete long-term plans or even the means to pursue these aspirations. Empirical research in the Indian context further reveals how the educational aspirations of communities and children on the margins are shaped around the projected imaginaries of education as a means of escaping poverty and accomplishing upward social mobility (Boyden, 2013; Drèze & Sen, 2002), acquiring distinct cultural dispositions (Jeffrey et al., 2004), and facilitating social and economic transformation (Ganguly, 2018). Yet in reality, marginalized communities are differently placed in the grand promises of education and development, such as white-collar occupation.

For instance, Jeffrey et al. (2004), in their ethnographic study with educated young men belonging to the Chamar caste of Dalits in the Bijnor district of Uttar Pradesh, demonstrate the complex ways in which formal education acts upon the lives of the marginalized. They argue that in hierarchical societies with limited job opportunities,

schooling of people on the margins does not necessarily lead to a "simple upward trajectory" (p. 964). While schooling is central to the aspirations and identity formation of Chamar young men, their failure to convert the presumably obtained "cultural capital" of schooling to secure employment reveals the complex structural equations of inequalities that determine their lives. This observation is particularly relevant to communities and children on the margins as their lived realities do not fit neatly into the projected development ideals of modern India, and their homogeneous construction as outliers of the nation's development makes them into objects of reform. Their inscription on the margins is part of the very ontology of education and development in contemporary India and not an accidental offshoot of its corollaries.

In terms of understanding the temporal modality of educational aspirations that families have, it is important not to simply invert the dualism from "becoming" to "being" but to understand the intricate links between them (Holloway et al., 2019; Uprichard, 2008), as families themselves aspire towards the "becoming" potential of education and thereby temporally move forward from the status quo in line with NGO constructions. Despite migrant families' concrete engagements with (and marginalization in) multiple places, as opposed to dominant discourses of migration, the city as site for mobility and progress is still not fully foregone by the participants. In fact, it is by their very participation in the dominant project of temporality that migrant families can hope to overcome their marginalization. It is another matter, though pertinent, that the real prospects and materialization of aspirations are mediated through politics of education and development that shape the lives of children in the margins.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at dominant constructions of temporality through which migrant children's lives and education are acted upon in the Indian context. The linear temporality of migration, childhood, and education put forth ideals of progress and development that make migrant children's lives out of sync with the temporal order of schooling. Furthermore, temporal imaginations around moral reformation construct migrant childhoods as lacking and in deficit. The paper also engages with how educational aspirations of migrant families and children, articulated along the lines of English learning, white-collar jobs, and social mobility, reflect the complex interactions between aspirational and temporal futures of schooling.

The paper highlights that a simple reversal of linear temporality may not be adequate to understand and act upon migrant children's educational inclusion. What is needed is a close reading of dominant modes of temporality and their location in exclusionary politics of inequality and marginalization of migrant childhoods. The idea of linear temporality within development—individual and social—need not be rejected outright for its determinism or universalism but should be decentered to open way for multiple development accounts (Nielsen, 2015) and their exclusionary politics. Or in other words, we should critically engage with the dominant myth that time is a neutral mechanism—an "apolitical, ahistorical force, objective in its function, a structuring means from a nameless above" (Saul, 2020, p. 1)—disconnected from social and educational questions related to "inequity, discrimination, oppression, and exclusion" (Saul, p. 18). More pertinently, we must ask, "what temporal considerations should we bring to policy change?" (Nuttall & Thomas, 2015, p. 3), as childhoods on the margins are not only labelled as situated outside the normative temporality of schooling and development but are also actively denied a chance to inhabit such temporality, which is at the least the discourse with power.

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