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**Mother-Work and School Culture:**  
**Parenting Strategies in Banaras**

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**Abstract**

The relationship that families share with schools has undergone significant shifts in contemporary times. Class, occupational status and social geography of their location have affected the relationship at a time when parents are expected to assume an active role in their children’s learning. In this respect, the role of mothers has been extensively examined in the existing literature on the class and race differentiated parenting strategies with respect to schooling. While such literature has comprehensively added to our understanding of class specific and gendered ideas of parenting, it is often criticised for sidestepping on the questions of the agency of mothers from lower social class positions. The paper seeks to examine how the ideas of parenting are shaped by occupational and spatial location by drawing from experiences of mothers with lower educational backgrounds. Their location in the urban neighbourhoods, variously identified as ‘slums’ and/or as ‘weavers’ settlements’, is constitutive of their collective identities as belonging to a world which is marked in terms of its occupational, linguistic and educational distinction from the rest of the city dwellers. The women in these settings are, however, constantly engaged through investments in their children’s education. The conversations with these women are revealing about their efforts in disciplining the lives of their children in ways that make them better adjusted to school.

**Key words:** Consumption practice, Education, Middle-class, Mother-work, Parenting

**Introduction**

The relationship that families share with schools has been re-casted in new forms in contemporary times. These times, among other things, are characterised by the ascendance of the neoliberal policy regime that has exacerbated economic and social insecurities on one hand, and affected the provisioning of services like
education on the other. As a result, an average individual is often viewed as a ‘consumer-citizen’ whose identity and politics is based on his consumption practices. The new consumption culture that defines much of the class-specific practices is also reflected in the preferences for schools. Family life across different segments of class has been oriented towards moulding children’s lives in ways that gear them towards success in school life and beyond in an increasingly competitive and economically insecure world (Bowe, Gewirtz & Ball, 1994; Ball, 2003). The literature on the emergence of a ‘new’ middle-class in India and the consumption practices of its several fractions has strengthened our understanding of class fractions and their linkages with education (Deshpande, 2002; Fernandes, 2006; Donner, 2008). This has also contributed towards a sharper articulation of the social reproduction of inequality in terms of a skewed provisioning of education and, consumption-oriented activities of middle-class parents (Kamat, 1985; Nambissan, 2010, 2017).

However, the gendered forms of the micro activities of parenting, particularly of mothers have not received adequate attention barring a few exceptions (Kumar, 2007; Donner, 2008). It is through the material labour of the mothers towards the educational development of their children that the cultural ideals of education are being formed and realised. These activities, identified as ‘mother-work’ tend to be shaped by the intersecting variables of class, community and social-geographic locations of the mothers involved. In other words, while all mothers might be engaged in the childcare activities, the nature of their engagements and the benefits that these activities fetch in an education market varies. The literature suggests that mothers become active producers of the class and gender based identities through their engagement in the intensive care-work of children (Lareau, 1985; Reay, 1999; Vincent, 2001). The intensive and focussed nature of care-work by middle-class mothers has assumed different dimensions in post liberalisation India (Donner, 2008). One important aspect of the mothering activities, particularly for the middle-class women in the urban settings, is to make children ready for school life and to gear them towards success in it. That is because schools promise to provide gateways of particular kind of socio-economic mobility. The mobility is linked with credentials that one earns, in the form of certificates, access to highly valued symbolic resources and network. Success of children in school-related activities becomes the primary responsibility of mothers in family settings.

The gendered character of such an engagement is not a new phenomenon but its
newer forms in classes that aspire for the middle-class lifestyle at a time of economic and social insecurities have not been examined in sufficient detail. Also, much of the available literatures in Indian context have focussed on middle-classes located in the metropolitan cities. This paper seeks to explore the specific nature of engagement of mothers in the schooling of their young ones in families located in a non-metropolitan urban context and how class and community identities intersect and shape them. Secondly, it seeks to examine how the access to valued cultural resources is shaped by the segregated patterns of living in specific neighbourhoods of Varanasi. Thirdly, it will focus on how the mothering practices in these locations, while trying to emulate the middle-class school norms and practices, often contributes to the reproduction of gender and class based identities.

Class and Gender Dynamics of School and Family Relations in Urban India

The school and family relationship has been extensively examined within sociological studies of education which have highlighted the influence of class, race and gender. Drawing on the seminal works of Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein, various scholars have advanced our understanding of the class differentiated nature of the relationship between parenting style and school success. While Bourdieu’s work employs the conceptual tools of habitus and cultural capital, Bernstein’s work draws attention to class and occupation specific cultural practices within families that encode ways of acting in the school context (Bourdieu, 1985; Bernstein, 1997).

In this respect, Annette Lareau underlines the notion of ‘home advantage’ that students from middle-class families share because of the class specific practices at home. She has underlined how the practice of ‘concerted cultivation’, which refers to a specific parenting style that is intensively engaged and goal-oriented, helps middle-class students to do better at school in comparison to their counterparts from the working class families (Lareau, 1985, 2002).

Going beyond the binaries of school and family, S.B. Heath in her work has demonstrated how class and racial composition of urban settlements also contributed towards developing specific styles of communication among families in the urban context of US. She suggested how these locations and closely bound spaces of community life loomed large on communicative styles within family context that affects the children’s experiences at school (Heath, 1983). These
processes have had implications for gendered labour of women within the family context. The class specific character of these processes has also been highlighted in the role played by mothers in their investment in children’s education.

In the last few decades, growing number of studies have started focussing on the role played by the middle-class mothers in the social and cultural reproduction of class and status based privileges through schooling (Lareau, 1985, 2002; Vincent, 2001). It is suggested that the intensive mothering work of the middle-class women is often directed towards ensuring that the class based privileges are transmitted to their children which contributes towards their academic achievement at school vis-à-vis others. In other words, middle-class mothers have been playing an important role in the gatekeeping of the symbolic resources associated with social mobility in urban life.

Diane Reay (1998) seeks to bring out the gendered character of the process of social reproduction of inequality in and through schooling. Her work highlights how women from different class categories make extensive investments of time and efforts in organising and assisting their children in school-related tasks. Her work also highlighted the differential modes of engagements of working class and middle-class mothers. These differential modes of engagement actually help women from middle-class families to secure favourable terms for their children vis-à-vis school authorities and teachers. That does not mean mothers from working class and coloured families are not sufficiently engaged in their children’s education, but it does suggest that school staff often operate with class and race specific codes. While middle-class mothers are viewed as proactive and succeed in their claims vis-à-vis school as a matter of right, working class mothers are viewed as not interested by school staff (Reay, 1998, 1999; Vincent, 2001). Reay (2014) has highlighted how class-differentiated use of linguistic resources has bearings on mothers’ power vis-à-vis school teachers. Drawing on Bourdieu, she highlights the skilful use of linguistic capital by middle-class mothers to the advantage of their children in a school context. However, the literature on mothering practice as contributing to the social reproduction of class-based advantage is often criticised for not questioning the discourse of mothering in the sphere of education and for sidestepping the question of agency of working class mothers. The policy discourses in a neo-liberal world have placed working class mothers in a disadvantageous position while constructing them as deficient and responsible for the academic failure of their children (Braun, Vincent & Ball, 2008).
In the Indian context, a number of studies have demonstrated that the exclusive access to high status schools and symbolic resources like English is enjoyed by a certain fraction of middle-class families. Geetha Nambissan (2010), in her work on middle-class parenting styles, has highlighted how middle-classes in Indian society have managed to secure advantages in the school market by employing specific strategies. Vaidehi Ramanathan (2005), in her work on English and vernacular divide in the state of Gujrat, has talked about gatekeeping mechanisms and ‘assumption nexus’ employed by the middle-class families educated in English medium schools that continuously keep lower class and vernacular medium students out of the prestigious institutions. There is a number of studies using various disciplinary perspectives that attest to similar claims about close linkages of class background of families and access to quality education in contemporary India (Kamat, 1985; Drury, 1993; Ladousa, 2014; Goswami, 2017). But the majority of such work is silent on questions of gender and fail to provide a nuanced account of the relationship that mothers share with the schools and the schooling activities. There are only a few exceptions to the general trend.

H. Donner (2008), in her account of the middle-class women in Bengal, argues that with the insecurity of employment opportunities and the promise of the rise of the IT industry has had an effect on the ways mother’s role in a family is envisaged. She argues that in a changing political-economic context, middle-class women have to adapt and adjust to the new set of contradictory expectations in the family as mothers. As modern mothers, they are expected to take care of their family members, including children. But the competitive style of parenting means that they start investing most of their time and energies towards educational development of their children. These efforts begin at the pre-school level and are aimed at long-term returns for their children. Ironically, these class-specific strategies, employed by the educated women often end up reinforcing the prescribed gendered division of labour within the family realm. The couple of studies that focus on mothers from working class families provide important insights about their engagements and anxieties about their children’s educational future (Panda, 2015; Goswami, 2015).

While all these studies offer rich insights about the interconnections between family and school life in contemporary urban India, we have fewer details about these aspects in non-metropolitan locations. One of the noted exceptions has been the study of educational markets by David Drury (1993) where he relates the differentiated ways of parental strategies adopted by middle-class fractions to
secure the scarce educational capital for their children in Kanpur. However, like others, he too has focussed on how middle-class families negotiate the school market to secure the best deal for themselves. As mentioned earlier, the specific issue of mothers’ engagements is not given adequate attention in most accounts of modernity and aspirations of social mobility in urban life.

Nita Kumar (2007), in her study of development of education in Banaras, has drawn attention towards *mohulla* specific processes of work leisure and learning, which both overlap and in few cases, present a contrast to the world of school in terms of spatial organisation. These contrasts and similarities have bearings on how families from specific locations view school life. She has also argued that there is a need to recognise that in colonial period a focus on mothering work is essential to develop an understanding of the narrative of modernity in South Asia (ibid, p. 134).

Therefore, one needs to reflect more closely on the experience of mothers from lower-income groups in non-metropolitan urban centres to get a fuller picture of how aspirations of mobility are being moulded in contemporary times and in what ways do categories of class, caste and community play out. It is also important to note that a lot of migration to urban centres in India has relied on community and caste based networks and has shaped the urban geography of cities. In other words, urban life in Indian cities has been segregated along the lines of class, caste and community. A historical contextualisation of such urban space is necessary to make sense of life in residential areas in contemporary times. In the next section, I seek to combine an understanding of the political and economic context of Varanasi with an understanding of the historic development of residential neighbourhoods which are also centres of material production of Banarasi saree. It is against this backdrop that I re-visit materials from my fieldwork conducted in the city and focus on narratives of mothers regarding their educational work with their children.

Examining the work of women as mothers, who are constantly negotiating their lives in a close and dense network of community and family ties, would thus provide a key vantage point in this paper. This paper seeks to examine the location of such women by taking cognisance of the processes that constitute her social and spatial contexts. Towards this end, I map out the class, community and caste specific ways in which neighbourhoods have emerged in the city of Banaras to examine the specific nature of relationship that families engaged in the
The traditional occupation of manufacturing Banarasi saree share with modern schools. The distance between the two worlds represented by the family and the neighbourhood on one hand, and school on the other, creates a cultural distance which needs skilful navigating of cultural practices. Then I present the challenges that women face in preparing their children for a school culture which in many ways contradicts the lived aspects of their life.

Methodologically it focuses on mothers’ engagement with children’s education in communities and neighbourhoods that are deemed as educationally backward (Kumar, 1998, 2000). It views women with lower educational background as both constrained by structural relations while acknowledging that they are actively engaged and invested in their children’s education. The paper includes insights gained from interviews conducted with women from eleven households from mixed community and class positions in the city of Varanasi during 2007-2011. These were located in specific residential pockets and linked to a private school that I have examined in detail elsewhere (Goswami, 2017, 2019). Seven of these families were occupied as small-scale traders from both Muslim and Hindu groups and four were engaged as employees in public and private organisations. These included four Muslims from Ansari community and seven households were from caste-Hindu groups.

In this research, my social position as an educated woman of caste-Hindu background has constructed my relationship with these families in specific ways. I accompanied the children from school to home, and, therefore, was always seen as a representative of the school fraternity. Men were more occupied with their business and I had shorter conversations with them. Eventually, I spent more time interacting with mothers, grandmothers and aunts of the students. My insights about their involvement in children’s school-related activities are drawn through in-depth interviews which lasted for about one to two hours each. All these families were located in the northern central parts of the city adjacent to the commercial hub of the city. Their current location in the city is deeply tied to the history of urban development in the north Indian states.

**Urban Space and School Market in Banaras**

Historically, residential segregation along community and caste lines has been a distinctive feature of the old city space in Banaras. Nandini Gooptu (1997), in her study of the ‘urban poor’ in the 19th century towns of North India, notes how the
city administration, through town planning programmes, targeted the urban poor, strived to create separate areas of habitation for them, ghettoising them in certain pockets of the city. Among other things, such spatial arrangements were meant to protect the relatively wealthy from the threats posed by the ‘unsocial’ elements represented by the poor in the city. The town planning mechanisms, rather than addressing the problem, ended up ghettoising the poor and the resultant physical mapping of the city also reflected the social and class differences in which the areas marked for settlement of the poor had lesser access to civic amenities.

Though the town planning of the city has gone through many changes, different communities in the city continue to live a segregated and conclave life in present times. The latest report submitted by the city administration refers to three distinct areas in the city: the old city, the central city and the peripheral areas. The report also identifies the old and the central city as areas where the manufacturing and retail areas for traditional crafts are based (JNNURM, Varanasi City Development Plan, 2015). The areas marked for handloom weaving and embroidery work like Kacchi bagh and Koyla bazar are also identified as slums in the same report. The industrial cluster of silk weaving in Varanasi is an industry which can be called informal in its organisational structure and in manufacturing but employs the largest number of employees. Apart from the weavers, these areas are inhabited by small-scale traders and petty businessmen, and wage workers who are often from Muslim and low-caste Hindu groups. The residential and commercial areas tend to overlap in a labyrinth of the narrow lanes which connect the inner residential pockets to the main roads which house retail shops and also to civic amenities like schools and medical facilities. Such residential areas are separate from the main market cum residential area at Chauk in the old city, where mostly rich Hindu traders live and engage in the retail trade for finished products. Both these areas are densely populated and connected through narrow lanes but these areas vary in terms of status and prestige. In local parlance, the wealthier areas of the old city are termed as pukka mahal. It literally refers to the neighbourhood consisting of pukka construction, denoting a membership to the most central part of the old city. On the other hand, the settlements like Alaipura, Lallapura and Reveritalab are located at the outskirts of the main part of the old city where weavers’ pockets are located.

The life of people in the saree industry is organised in unique ways. It is sustained by a complex web of familial and inter-community relationship among retail traders, suppliers, master weavers and weavers. These locations are known as the
weavers’ settlement, but many of these families have started running power-loom and hiring workers to operate these, indicative of a relatively better-off position than that of the weavers. For few decades, people have started shifting to some other ventures but the majority of households and their members continue to have some kind of connection with the saree industry. Their homes also house their workplace in which residential parts are located in the upper floors and the weaving work is carried out in the ground floor. They continue to live in joint-family settings with or without a shared kitchen. Family members are also engaged in similar occupations. In most of the cases, the married women of the family are also usually from the same city or from rural areas adjoining the city. As these families started moving to the position of master weavers, earned more resources and were free from full-time manual weaving, their families started investing in modern forms of schools for the children. Such places are marked by a lack of mobility and social stagnation and are represented as the backward areas. Similarly, people inhabiting these places have always been profiled as problematic and not fitting in with the normative ideal of citizenry (Kumar, 2000). Nita Kumar (2000), in her work on the educational history of the city, has demonstrated the ways how urban geographies structure people’s life in specific ways. In another context, it is seen that parents’ notions about place and locality shapes the school preferences that they exercise (Bell, 2007).

Over the years, a number of transitions can be seen in the educational preferences of these families. Most of the young men and women from Ansari families have been to some madrasa school for five to eight years, unlike the younger generation. The younger siblings are moving to non-madrasa schools and, at times, to English-medium private schools in the vicinity. These moments of change, however sluggish they might seem, are not without their tensions. The families would not send their children to the English-medium schools in the far-off parts of the city or allow their daughters to continue in a co-educational school beyond the upper primary levels. A daughter’s education is still a luxury which can be afforded only by a few, and has to be achieved while following strictly gendered norms of community living.

For these families, the sites of education are plural and not restricted to the schools alone. The alternatives sites of education in family and workplaces are sometimes in conflict with the school education and adjustments have to be made accordingly. For example, having made the transition to school education, these families continued to arrange for private instructions in the reading of Koran
along with school subjects like Science, Maths and English. Their choices for schooling seems to have expanded but has closely followed the community specific norms of gender. These families have invested in their daughter’s education in a modern co-educational school only upto a certain level, after which they had to be re-admitted to an all girls’ school in the vicinity. In my interactions with them, almost every family seemed open about sending their younger sons into higher education, a luxury which is not given to the eldest son because the eldest son is supposed to take care of the family business. They also discussed increased investments in education in supplementary forms, such as paying for private tuitions and coaching, etc.

However, not all ‘business families’ associated with the school have a similar experience with school education. There are other families of caste-Hindu traders, predominantly from Jaiswal and Yadav castes, who are going through a phase of transition from the traditional joint-family business to newer business ventures which are less dependent on kin networks such as traders of machine-embroidered cloth and retailers of grocery. In such families, the mothers’ generation had limited exposure to schools not exceeding the high school level in any case. In these families, future aspirations for social mobility are more closely tied up with investments in formal education of their sons, as compared to the Ansari families. The younger siblings in the families were admitted to an English-medium school, while the older ones attended the school discussed above. The eldest daughters in all the families attended a Hindi-medium all-girls’ school. Like the Ansaris, these families appeared to be more invested in gendered school choice for their children, but unlike them, they considered investing more in boys’ schooling, exploring good schools for their children even outside the mohulla. In terms of linguistic practices, these families are making a clearer shift from the exclusive use of Bhojpuri-Banarasi towards using Hindi at home.

All these families are, therefore, more invested in the schooling of their younger generations as compared to the older generations, but they still practice caution in terms of investing in a culturally and physically distant English-medium school of the city. For the families of the traders, the cultural barrier of approaching a distant English-medium school was strong enough to deter them from thinking of investing in them. The private school that their children attended in common is proximate to their dwelling place. It also represented a school which was accessible to them, not just in monitory terms, but also because it was offering lessons in Hindi-medium with a strong focus on English. Most of the parents,
particularly the mothers, had not been to college and were hesitant to approach teachers directly about their children. The teachers’ conceptions of such students were also marked in less favourable terms; they often saw these students as lacking in terms of a ‘culture of education’. The construct was drawn on the basis of educational, occupational and linguistic background of students’ families and only a few students coming from families employed in service sector, speaking in standard Hindi and having educated parents were seen as adept with the school culture (Goswami, 2017). It is against this context of shifts in occupational and educational preferences of these families that I present the narratives of women and their engagement in the educational refinement and disciplining activities.

Mother Work and Educational Discipline

The families and their social world cannot be understood without accounting for the work of the women in these families. The women, mostly the young mothers, and at times the elderly sisters, are actively invested in holding together the social, cultural and economic aspects of their life through their work. As the families, over the generations, have started investing more in the schooling of their young children, by opting for a private school, it also reorganises the time and energies of the mothers in specific ways. The private school was widely perceived as placing a premium on school success and instilling discipline among its students, and the responsibility of making the children ready for school fell upon its mothers, at times assisted by the more educated members of these families.

In spite of being placed in positions that are viewed as lacking power, they were more invested in children’s education. It was reflected in terms of the time spent with them in getting them ready for school, preparing and packing school lunch, looking for a tutor, attending the school PTMs, talking to the teachers and supervising their progress. I have focussed on their controlling and disciplinary tactics employed in sanctioning or encouraging specific behaviours, language practices, and cultural forms that are believed to have a bearing on academic success at school. As I have already highlighted in the previous sections, the language variety used in these families are different from the ones preferred in schools. School teachers lament the fact that students coming from these families cannot speak and write Hindi in a manner deemed fit for school. They also labelled students on the basis of the kind of Hindi they actually used in school as deficient than those which used standard Hindi in school. Therefore, in a context like this, it is not just English that is important, knowing the right kind of Hindi
also becomes a valued resource from the perspective of the lower classes. Apart from the lower educational background of the parents, one major obstacle in acquiring the standard speech was students’ location in residential and occupational arrangements that were deemed ‘backward’, in teachers’ estimation.

The mothers in family settings that seemed to lack the ‘culture of education’ were not unaware of their vulnerabilities in educational spheres. My interviews with them revealed how their extensive engagement with children’s lives also included strategies that were directed towards cultivating a more respectable form of language in their children by disciplining the use of mohulla-specific ways of speaking and being.

The social space of a mohulla is usually associated with leisure activities such as playing, gossiping, and indulging in other idyllic activities among peer groups. It represents an unregulated space where the popular language varieties described as ‘Urdu-Hindi mix’ and ‘Banarasi boli’ are used. It is also a highly gendered space, as it is an area which is experienced differently by men and women. For men, of different age-groups, it is a space meant for spending free time in group setting. Men of different age-groups often formed groups and used the space for hanging out. However, for married and unmarried women, it is construed as a threatening space which has to be crossed as soon as possible and most preferably in daylight. Women’s relationship with the neighbourhood is not an easy one because of the mix of familiar and the strange in these surroundings and the strict norms of gendered conduct imposed on them. Similar instances have also been reported from more metropolitan context when women have to carefully navigate their movement in the city to ensure security and safety at personal level (Phadke, 2013; Parikh, 2018). However, the metropolitan context is characterised by anonymity, while the spaces in the neighbourhood is marked by familiarity. The threat of violence that women face while navigating the urban space in India has received a lot of attention in public domain and media attention after the Nirbhaya rape case. But the everyday nature of symbolic violence that women face and skilfully negotiate in their familiar locations is hardly ever discussed.

Most of the women that I interviewed shared concerns about their daughters’ safety during their commute from school. Often women complained of lewd remarks routinely made by bystanders in these lanes.

Almost all the women complained about the behavioural traits of men in the
neighbourhood which marked the life in mohulla itself as lacking in use of refined speech. A similar concern loomed large in their conversations about schooling of their children wherein they expressed how their life in the neighbourhood was not conducive to the kind of socialisation they wanted for the children in general and for girls in particular.

It was not an easy task, however, to deny and wish it away from their life, but they did manage to negotiate with it in their own terms and adopted specific strategies to minimise its influence on their children’s lives. Some mothers managed to restrain their children, both boys and girls of younger age-groups, from playing outside their home. For example, Sivanya’s mother, living in a rented house and staying alone with her children when her husband is away at work, devised her ways of keeping children away from the neighbourhood. She regulated her children’s playing habits by motivating them to play inside the house rather than go outside. She arranged for indoor game for her children for this purpose. The perceived threat of the effect of mohulla is very pronounced among mothers while discussing the educational lives of children. The threat is also articulated in terms of the polluting effect of language that is used in the mohulla. It was reflected in their preference for standard languages like khadi boli, shudh Hindi and Urdu over the ones used in their neighbourhood.

Married women in these families, by and large, expressed a sense of shame with the use of non-standard languages in their family and worked towards cultivation of standard speech practice among children. Most of these women devalued local ways of speaking and distanced themselves from its use. Many women ironically used the term dehati, i.e. ‘belonging to the village’, to describe the local language variety of Banaras and complained that it is disrespectful, vulgar and abusive in nature. In their estimation, these varieties thrived in their families and in the mohulla or neighbourhood in which they lived.

While all the families strive towards refinement of their young in matters of speech, the mothers in joint family settings and those engaged in traditional occupation of the saree industry were faced with greater difficulties. The joint family network and close and continuous proximity to an occupational culture which thrives on a form of speech that is non-standard makes their effort towards speech correction a solitary affair in the family, often inviting scorn from other family members. Their inability to restrict the non-standard language use, in spite of their efforts, suggests the difference of their socio-economic symbolic worlds
which make these families value different cultural resources in different domains, viz. Banarasi or Urdu-Hindi for trade and for interaction with the elderly and the neighbours, but standard Hindi and English for children’s future.

Attempts were made by all these mothers to make their children more refined and cultured in their mannerisms and speech. Through such engagement with the upbringing of their children they sought to achieve a higher social status. These micro-processes of parenting are important to understand the spatial embeddedness of the experiences of these families and their struggles implicit in the process of shifting towards higher-status schools and the associated school cultures. Their negotiations with the spatial aspects of their life in the neighbourhood are a necessary component of their hopes for a better future of their children.

**Conclusion**

The urban space engages women in varied ways in and through a divergent set of activities. These activities are channelled through the intersecting vectors of age, class, caste, community and location. While family life in urban settings has been putting a premium on school-related activities of children at home, we see shifts in the mothering work performed by women from different locations. In this paper, the focus was on how urban spaces marked by segregated living in the city shapes the mothering work of women at a time when families engaged in traditional occupations are becoming more dependent on modern schooling. Almost all the families were getting more involved with the schooling of their young ones as compared to the previous generation of children. To a large extent, it can be linked to the shifts in the nature of work in the traditional manufacturing practices and resultant economic insecurities. Their location in the inner circle of the city with a distinct mode of life provided a contrast to the official cultures represented by the school opted for their children. The academic success in school calls for a continuous moulding of the lives of children in ways that they become better adjusted at school.

The mothering work here refers to the activities of women in not just nurturing the life inside the family, but more importantly, in bridging the gap between the worlds represented by the private school and the world of community mediated living. The cultural forms and manners of speaking valued in the world of traditional occupation are in stark contrast with the cultural forms and speech
patterns valued within school. It shows how particular neighbourhood emerges in contrast to school in their evaluations of people, and speech practice. The paper illustrates how married women attempt to bridge this gap through their mothering work directed towards refinement of their children’s ways of speaking and by restricting their movements inside and outside of the mohulla. The mothers in these locations have to diligently work towards an elusive middle-class identity which is valued within school. In the context of an unfamiliar surrounding which is hostile for young married women, these attempts towards ‘refinement’ can also be seen as a mark of distinction for themselves in ways that can be justified in their familial role. In these ways, women from lower educational background contribute towards reproducing a culture of education that can only be achieved by furthering the domestic division of labour along gendered lines.

Notes:

i It is important to note that middle-class is a particularly difficult to define conceptual category to be employed in studies of educational inequities in India. Many scholars such as Leela Fernandes and Satish Deshpande have resorted to using notions of ‘middle class fractions’ and ‘middle class practice’ to describe the relationship between class position and education.

ii As per Economic census of Uttar Pradesh, the proportion is more than fifty per cent as cited in City Development Report Varanasi, JNNURM, 2006, pp. 28-33. Retrieved from City development plan for Varanasi - India Environment Portal [News, reports, documents, blogs, data, analysis on environment & development | India, South Asia

iii According to an estimate, the labour force involved in the silk industry of Banaras is around 1-3 lakh weavers, 1,500 traders, mostly Hindus, and around 2,000 girastas or master weavers, mostly Muslims. See Rahul Varman and Manali Chakrabarti (2007). Case studies on industrial clusters: A study of Kanpur leather & footwear, Varanasi silk saree and Moradabad brassware clusters. IIT Kanpur.
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