

# Middle-Class Urban Mothers and their School Going Children: A study of Ghaziabad Town in North India

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**Abstract :** *This Paper aims to explore the centrality of middle-class mothers in the education of their school-going children in urban Ghaziabad. The narrative accounts of fifteen stay-at-home mothers of school going children present interesting details and aspects of their daily routine and challenges pertaining to their children's educational achievement. The physical, emotional and mental involvement with the children of primary and secondary school emerged as a challenging work for the mothers in the study.*

**Keywords:** *Parenting, mothering, educational labour, emotional labour, social networking tasks, discipline*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Middle-class mothers' role in parenting their children of primary and secondary school stages has emerged as an unchanging social fact of present day urban India. Parenting work can be seen to be a distinct category of work that engage mothers in the age-group of thirty-five to forty-five years of age because of the fact that their children are in the school going age. This paper focuses on the everyday nitty-gritties of mothers' lives around their school going children and the multitude of parenting tasks performed in order to facilitate smooth schooling, education and overall development of the children. The experiences, and everyday lived realities of the mothers, suggestive of an involved mother are elements upon which this paper is built on. Mothers' physical, emotional and mental involvement with the education of the school going children is a significant part of the study.

The Parenting tasks of mothers are often subsumed under the rubric of mothering work and thus rendered insignificant and invaluable. This is because mothering work is care work rooted in intrinsic qualities of the women and is not productive work (Reay, 1998,8). Reay quotes Bell Hook's views on mothering as significant and valuable work which must be recognized (8). Reay further quotes Ellen Ross on the unending hard work involved in the love and care of children (ibid). Dorothy Smith (1988) has conceptualized maternal involvement in education as work. Women's mothering work is often taken for granted both by the women themselves and the academics who write about parental involvement in education. Kay Standing conducted a research among the lone mothers in Britain. The involvement of mothers in both primary and secondary schooling of children according to her is a form of unpaid household labour that breaks down the public/private divide by taking the work of the home into the school and that of the school into the home (Standing, 1995, 2). Parenting is that area of social practice where most of the activities are carried out by women. However, the literature on parenting hardly recognizes the different types of work that mothers as parents undertake on an everyday basis. Diane Reay says that there is deliberate effacing of 'which gender facilitates a smooth relationship between home and the school' (1998, 10). This clear-cut omission of gender from the debate on parenting according to Reay hides the operating inequalities within parenting relationships and privileging the male in the text. Most of the writings on parental involvement assume that father and mother share an equal experience in parenting. Most texts on parenting are premised on the assumption that it is gender neutral and 'partnership' is reciprocal and equal between the parents and the school (Vincent, 1996). The fact that schools actually interact with mothers on a day-to-day basis is hidden in the discussion on parenting. Mothers do tremendous amount of work to facilitate their children's schooling and also make the work of the schools easy. Mothers' parenting work with reference to schooling has been taken up by the feminists who criticize the literature on parental involvement for taking mother's work for granted.

Henrike Donner's (2006) study of the lives of the middle-class mothers in Kolkata is a remarkable contribution towards parenting research in India. In a detailed ethnography, she explored how middle-class mothers contribute to early years of education of their children. This study was based on their attitudes and parenting practices that were deemed necessary for mothers to be the right consumers in a highly competitive educational landscape of the country. The parenting practices as well as mothers' role as implicated in the educational practices has been a less-researched area in the Indian context. The educational environment of Kolkata around early 2000s in which she did her fieldwork was one of prevailing parental practices related to the privatization of services utilized by educated middle class urban mothers. Some of the pertinent changes visible in the city were the rise of English medium education which occurred over the last two decades, accompanying privatization of English medium schools and increasing tendency among the middle-class parents to send their children to preschools privately owned and run on the Western model (373, 374). However, this education in English medium preschools was class-based and not everyone could afford it. Schooling was a major concern for the middle-class parents in Kolkata and the responsibility of developing and nurturing the academic capabilities of the children lied on the mothers. "With the admission to preschools, middle-class parents and in particular mothers feel that they are involved in the wider project of producing graduates, Indian white-collar workers in a global economy" (Donner, 2006, 378). The English medium schools in Kolkata scrutinized the parents with the underlying assumption that fathers were only involved with children's education in their leisure time. But the scrutiny of the mothers was not an easy one. Full-time employed mothers who did not have time for children were not preferred by the schools. A typical Bengali middle-class household was one where parents and grandparents shared the responsibility of schooling of young children. Many tasks were being shared between women belonging to different generations. However, the schools emphasized the role of mothers as primary carers and the discursive construction of the child's needs was linked to intimate knowledge which only mothers could have (381). Being mother of a young child was like a full-time occupation of the middle-class women in Kolkata. Mothers were supposed to play the key role in the children's schooling and school related activities. The main focus of Henrike Donner's study was the different ways in which motherhood, childbearing and childrearing became associated with wider consumption patterns and particular forms of domestic arrangements in the context of preschool education in Kolkata. According to Henrike Donner, the ideologies of motherhood and parenting were being defined by the emerging consumer culture of the 1990s. Whereas Henrike Donner's primary concern was attitudes and parenting practices of middle class mothers in Kolkata, Mila Tuli (2012) in her article "Beliefs on Parenting and Childhood in India" talks about the significance of parental beliefs which guide parental behaviour and activity. According to Tuli, beliefs

are ideas about the manner in which children ought to be raised, about what they feel are the essential part of the children's lives and about the goals and values that they consider important for children and childhood. Parental beliefs depend on a particular culture which determines the manner in which children should be raised. Mila Tuli takes into account the heterogeneous character of Indian society where family is the key social institution and is also the hub of all activity from the day a child is born. However, children also grow up in a network of multiple interactions with members from within and outside the family (Tuli, 2012, 82). In urban nuclear households, experiences of childhood and parenting show a great deal of diversity making it difficult to provide a single prototype (83). Families in urban India continue to be characterized by jointness. Tuli identified some of the beliefs that mothers held regarding parenting. These were mothers' beliefs about pregnancy and childbirth, beliefs about food and eating, beliefs about behaviour regulation, beliefs about encouraging independence, beliefs about development and learning and beliefs about family relationships (84,85 and 86). These beliefs about parenting held by mothers are actually domains where mothers as parents work on an everyday basis. Parenting tasks emerge from these beliefs and mothers act as the primary figure in the lives of their school going children. In this study, I have tried to look at how the beliefs translate into various types of physical, mental and emotional tasks for mothers in this particular age-group.

## II: METHODS

This paper is based on in-depth open-ended interviews with fifteen stay-at-home mothers in the age-group of thirty-five to forty-five years in the Vasundhara neighbourhood of Ghaziabad town. Interviews were completed in two to three rounds mostly within their domestic space and sometimes also in the outside space such as a park, on the bus stops, on the school gates, nearby grocery shops etcetera. Most of the interviews were done when children were in school and mothers had few hours of relaxed time although there were still work to attend to for which they kept doing back and forth. So mostly interviews lasted for one and a half to two hours in one go. With the permission of the women the interviews were recorded and later transcribed and analyzed.

Women chosen for the purpose of the study are middle-class on the basis of their education, income and occupation of the families. Vasundhara locality of Ghaziabad town lies at the border of Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. This place has become a hub of newly constructed societies occupied by middle class families. Most of the people settled here are migrants from neighbouring states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Haryana who have their jobs either in Delhi or N.C.R. The men in the families are working mostly in corporate sector with a small chunk of the population doing business. The annual income of these families is somewhere in the range of eight to fifteen lakhs which I came to know during interactions with the women in the families.

### II. SENDING THE CHILDREN TO SCHOOL

This section will deal with all types of mothers' labour which are consequential for schooling. Sending children to school involved descriptions of early morning routines where recurring evidence of women undertaking manual work of parental involvement were found. Since twelve out of fifteen women in the sample had two children each, their morning routines were very tight with no space to breathe vis-à-vis mothers of single child who were a bit relaxed. Lakshmi a forty-year-old mother of a son and a daughter said I have to literally struggle with them in the morning. My daughter does not get ready for school on her own. She is careless with her hair, her school dress and sometimes just in the nick of the time, I am tidying up everything. Both my children are fussy about their breakfast and tiffin. I have to prepare two different types of food for them, otherwise they won't eat in school. A lot of my time in the morning is spent in cooking. I then go to drop them at their stop which is nearly half a kilometre away from home. After seeing them off one by one, I rush back home to attend to other household chores.

Morning routines for most mothers was a lot of running around and hassle and finishing everything on time was both difficult and important. There are a number of things like food, dress, hair and shoes that demand mothers' immediate attention in the morning. Presentability of the child in school is a mother's responsibility.

Shweta a thirty-six-year-old mother said *My daily routine is a web of activities around my daughter who is in second standard. I leave the bed by six in the morning, prepare my daughter's tiffin and breakfast for the family. But I do not prepare lunch because my husband eats in the office canteen. I do the basic preparation for the cooking in the night so that everything gets ready on time in the morning. I try not to repeat the food I give for tiffin every day to retain my daughter's interest in eating. By 6:30 a.m. I wake my daughter for school. She is not a tough child in the sense that she is very independent about getting herself to school, but I suppose behind all that I have organized everything. It all has to be organized for her so for instance her clothes are always laid out in the same place ready for her to put on. I've got a list in the kitchen of the things she needs for school.*

Women with two children in the study were finding it difficult to manage the morning schedule. Women having a single child, though were doing the same things, but were able to manage their time well comparatively. Older children were taking up responsibility to some extent, whereas with the younger ones, waking them early in the morning and persuading them to get ready for school appeared to be the toughest job. Mothers not only get them ready, but even reach them to school. Nearly half of the women interviewed accompanied their children to the stop, waited there till the bus arrived and half of them drove the children to school. The daily routine of the women's household chores is intimately linked to the school schedule for more than ten years for each child. Women consistently maintain the regularity of the school day against competing demands. Middle class mothers while giving accounts of their parenting job, often ignored the micro details of the numerous domestic tasks that they do in order to run the household routine. In the first instance it appeared as if domestic labour was not significant for them vis-à-vis parenting labour specially one concerned with meeting the expectations of the school. Most mothers nearly twelve out of fifteen, preferred to cook by themselves in the morning, whereas three of them had a cook who would come only in the morning. Maintaining variety in the tiffin was another issue that confronted the mothers of school going children. Many schools have instructions regarding the food regime to be followed for the week which puts extra burden on the mothers. There is a list that the school circulates every month regarding what needs to be brought in the tiffin and what needs to be avoided. Fridays are generally considered to be the junk food day, so the mothers can choose to give food items like pizza, pasta, burger etcetera.

Sending the children off to school involved moments of stress, conflict and coercion in order to get them to school on time. Not a single mother in the study talked about having a relaxed breakfast. On account of getting early and not sleeping on time, often posed health challenges for these women. Despite being highly organized, time was an issue for the mothers. Mornings for mothers across the sample was very similar experiences in which women had to work hard in order to produce a presentable, adequately fed and properly groomed child for the classroom. Fathers were generally absent from the accounts of the mothers in accomplishing the task of sending the children to school. This was primarily the case because the timing of going to school and fathers leaving for office/work generally coincided. Many women talked about how their mornings were spent running around for the stuff that the husbands needed for office. Parenting was first and foremost

enormous amount of physical labour for mothers. After the children are gone, women resumed their other household responsibilities of the day such as cooking, washing, cleaning and dusting.

### III. CHILDREN RETURNING HOME FROM SCHOOL IN THE AFTERNOON

Mothers in the study seemed to play a significant role in their children's homecoming specially in case of primary school-going children. This is because the safe returning of children depends on the mothers who are standing on the bus stops in the afternoon or waiting outside the gate of the schools. This is a usual scene on the roads that mothers are found to be waiting for their children to arrive. The responsibility of the school is over after the bus drops the children on their bus stops and the responsibility of a mother begins from there. In my conversations with the mothers, I came to know that the stops are often far from the house nearly one to one and a half kilometers away. Mothers have to first reach there much before time. Only in few cases, I found that the bus stops were very near to the residence.

Vandana said that *I have to go to pick both my sons at different times, the younger one has to be picked from the school and the elder one has to be picked from his stop which is one kilometre away from home. First I pick my younger son from school at around twelve and then go for the elder son at around three 'o clock in the afternoon. I had the option of sending them in van but I don't trust the van drivers and bus seems to be safe option because the buses generally are under the control of the school authorities. When I go for the stop, I have to take my younger son along with me on the scooter as I cannot leave him alone at home. Sometimes he creates a lot of resistance because he does not want to go out.*

In case of two children, mothers have to stand for a longer period on the stop as the buses of both the children reach on the same stop but at different times. In some cases, stops were separate locations which posed a further problem for them. Finishing the household work and managing the time becomes a big challenge for mothers sometimes because in instances of the domestic help coming late disturbs their routine for the day. Mothers are quite visible in a city like Ghaziabad at certain times of the day. They are found to be standing at the gates of the schools, standing under the shade of trees and sitting on the steps of the shops waiting for their children to emerge. After reaching home there is a whole list of work lined up for women which occupy them throughout the day. Washing of the school uniform, ironing, arranging their almirahs, managing their books, sorting out things that they have to take next day are all managed by these women.

### IV. EDUCATIONAL WORK OF MOTHERS

Mothers' educational work contributed directly to their children as performers in schools. Since the majority of the children in the study are in primary and secondary level of education, mothers have to be updated with what is being done in the class. For this they scrutinize the work being done in class on an everyday basis. This gives them an idea of how their children perform in class and depending on their performance and class involvement, mothers decide how to take their work forward. The time that the mothers have after the children reach home is very crucial from the point of view of what has been done in school, what needs to be done at home and what has to be produced the next day in school. This implies that mothers meet three types of targets every day in terms of class-work, homework and performance-based assessments, projects and presentations. How each woman negotiated these tasks was quite case specific. The school day is the fixed feature of the weekday and the time immediately after school is important in which the mother attends to the matters of the school. Stay-at-home mothers have time at their disposal to discuss their children's work with them.

Shweta's educational routines appeared quite thorough and complete. She said *my daughter Pavni reaches home at three 'o clock in the afternoon. After she changes her school dress, has her lunch and a rest of half an hour in which she watches television, I make sure that she completes her homework and do a revision of what has been done in class. I go through her bag and check all that is done in class. If there is a problem in the class work, I work to correct her mistakes. She goes to play in the evening for an hour. After she returns, I again sit with her for studies. I work hard with my daughter so that she grabs the concepts and does not rely on rote memory. I believe that whatever she learns should remain with her life-long.*

Shweta said that her life revolved around her daughter and she was strict in terms of studies. She puts in extra hours of hard work and applies new methodologies to teach her daughter. Internet was one such source which came to her help. Her daughter lacks concentration in studies and tries to do many things at the same time, so Shweta spends considerable amount of time channelizing her energy into studies.

The situation of employed mothers would be different and would have its own demands and challenges. As far as time availability is concerned, employed mothers would have limited time at their disposal as compared with stay-at-home mothers. However, this does not imply that the parenting of employed mothers is in any way inferior or superior than the latter. There are variety of situations in which mothers in India live and this study does not attempt to draw any type of conclusion regarding parenting or mothering. The way mothers in the study negotiated their educational tasks differed greatly. Each woman had her own educational arrangements. Some of them were highly routinized in their schedules while others were a little flexible and tried to balance other activities of their children with education. One thing that was common among all the mothers was the value that they attached to education and the beliefs that they held vis-à-vis school education. They valued the utmost importance of education in securing a good future for their children. However, they supported other activities like sports, arts, music etcetera and contributed their energy and time into these extra-curricular activities simultaneously. They held the belief that these activities are important for the overall development of the children as they impart confidence and positive personality traits in them. Mothers held a firm belief that, they have a positive role to play in the children's school education. For them children's educational achievement was supposed to be the first priority for securing their future. However, this is not about being critical of mothers who view other activities as of equal or more importance than school relevant work. The mothers in the sample were involved in monitoring and supervising the educational performance of their children. From the narratives of mothers, it was quite obvious that they put in tremendous amount of hard work, time and energy to bring the academic performance of their children at par with others. Mothers did not only rely on their labour, they even made their presence felt in the school. Positive involvement with the school and teachers was also found in the sample. Almost all the mothers interviewed endorsed frequent communication with the teachers. Diary was one mode of easy communication that kept the teachers and mothers in contact with each other. Also, most of the schools now have their own portal and each child's information can be logged in through his or her username given by the school. The class teachers upload all the homework, class work information, test schedules and monthly syllabus on the portal. Mothers keep track of each and every thing that is going on through the portal. They can even send messages to the class teacher through the portal regarding leave, holidays, queries etcetera. Few mothers in the sample said that they hardly communicated with the teachers because the children were doing good academically. They would interact with them in person on parent teachers meeting. The mothers expressed their strong belief that they were active participants in their children's schooling and staying at home was an important part of their role they were playing in the educational development of the children.

## V. WEEKEND TASKS OF MOTHERS

School days are highly organized and routinized by the mothers and there is not much scope of any extra-curricular activities which school-going children can pursue on school days. So, weekends and holidays are times when mothers and children are interested in doing something beyond the curriculum of the school. A number of extra-curricular activities are being facilitated by mothers for their children. Children in the sample were involved in various activities of sports, music, art, dance, gymnastics etcetera. Five boys of middle school were going to the cricket academy, three children comprising one boy and two girls have joined badminton, three children all boys were in football academy, six girls were going for music classes and three girls and two boys were going for dance and art respectively. Mothers were making various kinds of arrangements for the children who were going to the different sports academies on weekends. The timings were generally fixed from late afternoon till evening so that mothers were done with the household chores. Jaina whose son goes to the cricket academy *said on weekends, I try to complete all the household chores like cooking, cleaning, washing by two p.m. so that me and my son are done with our lunch after which we take some rest and then get ready for the academy. My evening work starts by seven because I am there in the academy with my son till 6 p.m. So, on weekends my domestic help comes after I reach home in the evening to do the dishes.* Few women like Rashmi, Lakshmi and Veena gave primacy to some tasks over others as a means of strategizing the weekends to prove useful for the children. They preferred to cook one meal and ordered food from outside so that they could save time for other important activities related with their children. Out of the eleven children who were going for the sports academy, there were cab facility for seven children whereas in case of four children, it was their mothers who were doing the pick and drop who knew driving. Fathers also came to the rescue of mothers in pick and drop but they never committed themselves to be always there for this work. In case of girls who were going for music, dance and art classes, mothers usually accompanied them and sat and waited for the classes to be over. The time that they chose were generally between four to six p.m. keeping in mind their evening schedule of work. Schedules in sports academies were quite tiring for children, so mothers were taking extra care of their food and other health supplements. Other than the extra-curricular activities, mothers reported of a number of class projects and activities which needed preparation with children at home.

## VI. MOTHERS' WORK DURING HOLIDAYS AND VACATIONS

Holidays and vacations are those timings of the year when mothers of school going children have respite from the work of sending them to school and managing every day's school tasks. In North India, there are two long vacations that children get in schools. These are winter vacation and summer vacation. Other than these there are holidays spread across the year based on the festivals and national holidays. Vacations are times when the school sets certain targets for mothers in terms of long list of holiday homework uploaded on the school portal. Mothers are supposed to download homework in different subjects which comprises of written work and projects. As far as written work is concerned, it is a matter of making the children do the work by setting a small target each day. However, the methodology of completing the homework differs from one mother to the other. Since summer vacations are quite long in schools in North India, so, mothers plan this period according to the family's expectations as well as the school's expectations. Mothers in the study were quite conscious about the right usage of this period with regard to their children's curricular and extra-curricular achievements. This was also the time when mothers try to meet family expectations in terms of making visit to the in-laws, parents or close relatives. Other than these two vacations, mothers avoided movement from their cities as that would impact negatively upon their children's schooling and education. The first fifteen to twenty days of the summer vacation were spent in making visits to in-laws and parents. The latter part of the vacation is spent on completion of holiday homework, projects and studies. Summer camps are good options for children as they engage them in activities like swimming, football, cricket, music, creative work and rock sport. Some mothers preferred individual training in swimming and other activities rather than summer camps. Despite holidays, mothers have to follow a school type of routine for making such activities possible for their children. Mothers not only have to facilitate these for the children but also have to be extra cautious and vigilant over safety and security of the children. So, they spend both time and energy in being part of such activities. Most mothers said that they remained in front of their children when they were first learning swimming. Lakshmi said *I had to spend two to three hours in Yamuna Sports Complex when my daughter was learning swimming.* Other than the extra-curricular activities, a significant portion of the vacation is spent in completing the school homework. School projects were a cause of worry for mothers of both primary and secondary school children. In case of primary school children, projects are much beyond the mental capacity of the children with the result that it is the mothers who are doing them on behalf of the children. The schools are also aware of this fact, still this has become a general practice in all schools. Mothers are often quite pestered with the task of making projects. They complained that it was a sheer waste of time. Students of secondary level that is ninth and tenth get projects that are even beyond the capacity of mothers or fathers. They said that nowadays schools demand working models of science projects which we cannot make at home. It involves a number of electronic devices such as switches, diode, motors, etcetera. It is not possible to make a working model at home. Both ninth and tenth are crucial phases in the lives of the adolescent children in India. Mothers under study did not leave a single stone unturned in order to provide conducive atmosphere and situation for their children to study and perform well.

Apart from projects, schools entrust the responsibility of preparing study material for class on mothers. Each child is assigned one particular topic which will be taken up later in class when the school reopens. The work that the teachers are supposed to do, are entrusted upon mothers. In the name of parenting, schools are making use of the labour of mothers for free. Nearly all the women under study reported about their labour being utilised by the schools in overt and covert ways. Well-qualified, middle-class, stay-at-home mothers who can devote all their time and energy to the children is a requirement of the schools in India. Teachers and schools expect a certain level of maternal involvement in their children's schooling.

## VII. EMOTIONAL LABOUR OF MOTHERS

The interviews with fifteen mothers in the study suggest that they perform extensive emotional work with their school going children. As this sample comprises of twenty-nine children out of which nineteen are in primary and middle school and ten are in secondary school, mothers' emotional involvement with children varies according to their age. This implies that emotional handling of primary school children is very different from the emotional handling of secondary school children. The emotional labour of mothers not only facilitates children's schooling in significant ways but is very important for children in their day to day lives at home, among friends, in the neighbourhood and society at large. Children of standard one, two and three under study posed challenges for mothers in going to school. They are reluctant in going to school simply because they do not like school and mothers have to persuade them with love and affection every day in the morning. Suman said *I promise my son every day that I will buy him his favourite chocolate in the afternoon so that he goes*

to school without crying. Still it is difficult for him to go. Children in primary school undergo a number of experiences in school which requires mothers' emotional intervention in a number of ways. Catharine H. Warner uses the term 'emotional safeguarding' for mothers' emotional handling of the situation in school (2010, 704). Like care work, emotional safeguarding requires a significant amount of emotional effort from parents and is related to discourses on mothering. Educational concerns of mothers include both the academic and emotional aspects of child development. According to McCarthy and Kirkpatrick, mothers balance the children's social, emotional, academic and family needs (2005, 67). Primary school children do not open up with their experiences very easily and it is that when mothers try to cull out details of the happenings in school that their feelings of unhappiness, anxiety, frustration and lack of confidence come to light. There was enough evidence in the study to suggest that educational growth cannot go alone, rather has to be balanced with the emotional caretaking of the children. On one hand there were accounts of how mothers had to make emotional interventions in case of primary school children by talking to the teachers, communicating with the school authorities and also dealing with the children with love and compassion. In case of secondary school children, mothers had to handle the anxieties, nervousness, lack of confidence and frustration related with educational demands and challenges. There were all types of questions and apprehensions that came to the minds of the children and they sought answers and assurance from mothers. The havoc of tenth exams though very much visible in the narratives, is not only true to this sample, but is true to the Indian system of secondary education. However, this study does not limit the scope of mothers' emotional work only to the domain of schooling, and performances in exams or education related goals in general. There are instances of everyday occurrences in the lives of the children that demand mothers' emotional interventions. Most of the times mothers were talking to their children about all kinds of issues that are disturbing to them and comforted them with encouraging words. They also took up matters with their children's peer group, teachers, parents of other children and also people in the neighbourhood. However, the emotional work that mothers do is not without costs. They themselves undergo a lot of anxiety, unhappiness, nervousness and frustration in dealing with negative emotions of their children.

### VIII. SOCIAL NETWORKING TASKS OF MOTHERS

From the study, it came to the fore that mothers are part of wider formal and informal networks which are sources of information that they believe can be utilized for the educational advantage of their children and also for pursuing extra-curricular activities. The formal networks of mothers included teachers, career counsellors, mothers of children of the same age group and also experienced mothers. The informal networks comprised of close friends, relatives and neighbours. Social networking is a two-way process and to build connections, these mothers had to invest in terms of labour and time. There is a whole realm of work women do outside home, in the neighbourhoods and communities to build relationships to provide the contacts, services and support necessary for the running of their families. There are different out-of-school activities of children for which women are heavily dependent on the mutual arrangements that they make and their social networks. There are many activities which women arranged in their domestic spaces to benefit everyone and in turn also took favours from other women. Women open up their domestic spaces for arranging music classes for children in the evenings. Mothers' social networks played a significant role in the exchange of information related to education and extra-curricular activities in the school. Mothers deliberately met each other on parent teachers' meetings, talked to them and exchanged each other's phone numbers. Mothers in the sample were part of the what's App group of their children's respective classes. Many different social networking groups were formed and women were making interesting use of such groups. Suman talking in reference to the bus group said any information regarding the bus flows so easily among the moms. We are no longer information deprived. Earlier for anything regarding the bus, I had to call the school reception and often our queries were unanswered. But now we are able to negotiate with the school authorities regarding anything related with the bus. There was constant exchange of information going on between mothers.

### IX. DISCIPLINING TASKS OF MOTHERS

Mothers are the primary figure in the lives of the children of school going age. They play a vital role in regulating their behaviour and conduct in day-to-day life. There were certain beliefs that mothers hold about socially acceptable behaviour and conduct of their children. Mila Tuli (2012, 85) in her ethnographic work on the beliefs of parenting in India said that mothers' involvement is supposed to be the primary factor in disciplining their children. "The role of fathers and grandparents in behaviour regulation was reported to be secondary to that of the mother, with fathers often being viewed as ineffective, last resort players in this domain because of their minimal involvement in everyday familial activity" (85). She talked about a number of strategies that mothers adopted to direct the conduct of their children such as "persistent repetition, offering explanation, instilling fear, invoking guilt and negotiating with rewards" (ibid). Discipline is meant to obtain compliance and although compliance can be motivated externally (by fear of consequences), it can also be the result of adherence to an internalized value (Bugental and Grusec, 2006). Since this study comprises of children of primary and secondary school going age, the strategies that mothers employed to discipline them depended on the age of the child. It was also found that the issues that required mothers' attention differed drastically in the different age groups. In case of primary school children, mothers' primary task was to instill certain values in them and making them aware of the acceptable and the un-acceptable. The values that mothers cherished were those of truthfulness, obedience, cleanliness and hygiene, respect for the elders and teachers. In order to drive home their point, mothers mostly adopted two strategies of reasoning and asserting themselves verbally. Mothers tried to exercise control through talks and explanations. There was no example of physical assertion by mothers. As regards cleanliness and hygiene, mothers were very strict with their children. Shweta said *I make a conscious effort of inculcating in my daughter Pavni the habit of keeping things in their place and not messing up with the stuff. After reaching home from school, she takes out the tiffin box from her bag, keeps it in the kitchen sink, changes her clothes and keeps them in the washing machine. She has the habit of picking up her toys and articles and keeps them in their proper place. If she does not do so, I will not yell at her but throw all her stuff in the dustbin.* Shweta knew very well how to motivate her daughter to co-operate with her in keeping the house clean and arranged. Physically punishing her is not the solution rather making her realize that these things belong to her, so she should care for them. She has made a separate bedroom for her six years old daughter so that she can play and mess up only in one room and keep the rest of the house organized.

There were some mothers in the study who were quite strict about bed time and T.V rules. Young children of primary school generally want to keep the television on even while doing homework or studying. This was not acceptable to the mothers who explained to their children first with reason why T.V and studies cannot go together. If they did not pay heed, then actions such as prohibiting T.V for them for a week or so were taken. Mothers made sure that the children were obedient.

Davidov, Grusec and Wolfe (2012, 318) have distinguished between authoritarian and authoritative types of disciplinary practices of mothers. Authoritative practices reflect mothers desire to direct their children's behaviour but in a more sensitive manner that takes into account their needs and feelings. Authoritarian practices are more controlling, reflect mothers stricter and less flexible approach. Hoffman

and Blade (1999, 122) also differentiate between authoritative as a reasonable way of controlling children as opposed to authoritarian which is more rigid way of exercising control.

There were three mothers in my study who were quite authoritarian in their style of parenting. Chavi's elder son Adamya is not allowed to play for a week at a stretch if he picks fights with any one while playing. She said *he is very aggressive in nature, so I have to control him like this. When he is not allowed to go out to play for a week, it's a big thing for him and he will pay heed.*

Similarly, Jaina also looked quite authoritarian when it comes to his son's studies. She said *my son is in seventh standard, so now he should be responsible towards his studies without my reminding him. If I find him to be not serious and circumventing, I simply restrict him on his T.V watching time. He is not allowed to watch for a certain duration which I decide.*

Mothers were quite authoritative in terms of allowing their children to watch television and also kept vigil on the content of the programme that they wanted to see. Chavi, Veena, Ekta and Rashmi never allowed their children to watch T.V in their absence. Chavi and Veena had put a ban on cartoons like 'Shin Chan' and 'Ninja Hattori' because according to them they promote rebellious behaviour in children.

Compared with primary school children, the approach that mothers adopted to discipline adolescent children were different. Mothers try to gain knowledge of the activities and whereabouts of their adolescents through soliciting information from them, by setting rules and keeping close surveillance and children's self-disclosure of their activities and whereabouts.

Meenu keeps a close surveillance on her sons who are in ninth and tenth standard respectively. She said that they are very close to her and share with her all the stories of their friends, so she knows what is going on in their lives. But they keep distance from their father and are scared of him. Meenu said *my sons try to be disciplined in front of their father, they never watch television in his presence. Once my elder son told me that one of his classmates had asked him to watch some video on the internet. I conveyed this to my husband who talked to him and tried to solicit information from him with regard to the exchange of information that was taking place between them.*

Mothers of adolescent children specially sons share such issues with their husbands and take advice regarding the way forward. Mothers like Rajni, Ekta, Lakshmi and Jayanti did not allow their children to use internet on their own. Rajni said *we have Wi-Fi but my son can access internet only in my room from my desktop when it is needed for the purpose of study. We have got certain contents of the internet blocked keeping in view the growing age of our children.* Mothers need to be extra vigilant vis-à-vis their growing children and their usage of internet and devices like mobile phones, iPad and tablets.

Mothers like Ritu and Meenakshi said that while taking their evening walk, they try to keep an eye on what their children are discussing with their friends. For them it is very important to know what interests them and is there anything that is hidden from them. However, some mothers (very few) were in favour of permitting the use of mobile and internet for their children. They said that it is not easy to monitor them all the time. One thing that the mothers in the sample were worried about was how their adolescent children reacted to the mothers' disciplining acts. Whether they were taking things positively and sharing everything or were devising new strategies of avoiding embarrassing situations in front of their parents. 'Discipline interventions by mothers have different effects on different children depending on the situations for example coercive-insensitive discipline strategies have adverse effect on children with difficult (vs easy) temperament, in school-aged (vs younger) children and in preadolescent boys' vs girls' (Davidov, Grusec and Wolfe 2012, 315). Thus, mothers' knowledge of how the child would perceive and react to different discipline strategies becomes important in choosing responses.

## CONCLUSION

The English dictionary meaning of parenting is to be or act as a mother or father to someone. From this definition parenting is both mothering and fathering. Parenting looks like a gender-neutral term used in educational parlance, but ideological definition seems to be very much isolated from the empirical facts which speak in favour of mothering. This study highlights the multitude of parenting tasks falling in the domain of mothers of a certain age group whose children are in the primary to secondary school level. Education appears to be one of the biggest concerns for mothers in the study of both primary and secondary school. There is a huge pressure of educational performance on children as well as mothers. Mothers adopted a number of strategies like monitoring, supervision, routinization of schedules, co-operation and communication with the school in order to attend to the various educational requirements of the children. There were different academic challenges with different kids which the study highlights and mothers found ways to address them at their level.

However, the challenges of different age group of school going children are different and needs to be dealt with differently. This study provides accounts in which emotional handling of children differed for primary and secondary school children. At the primary school level, children are emotionally protected whereas in the secondary school level, where there are varied challenges before them, they are emotionally emboldened by the mothers,

Parenting is not a monolithic category of work that women in this study were only doing. There are other tasks that fall in their domain of work such as daily household chores, working towards maintaining intra-household familial ties and pursuing activities of interest from within their homes. But they were only secondary as compared with the time and commitment that parenting required. The families are not nuclear in structure throughout the year; there are three to four months in a year when in-laws of the couple were staying with them. This situation both increases as well as decreases women's work. It increased their work because it involved more cooking time, cleaning and washing and taking care of their clothes, bed and their daily needs. Because of the fact that they were elderly, women had to take care of their health in a number of ways. So, accommodating more members in the same domestic space impinged on their parenting work with the result that they were less focused towards their children. But the grandparents at home also proved beneficial in a number of ways. In case of primary school children, mothers and grandmothers shared some of the physical work. Grandparents acted as guardians when mothers were away for some work.

In this study, there were ample accounts that when the children were away, mothers involved themselves in different activities of their interest such as doing sale business from home, uploading recipes on you tube, doing hobby classes, tuitions, parlour business etcetera. These activities were a kind of positive diversion for them which were useful in taking away some of their boredom emanating from the daily mundane activities of parenting. But there was no doubt that parenting took primacy in their lives and they were overwhelmingly involved with their children.

This study does not resolve the debate regarding whether parenting is an exclusive activity of the mothers or there are multiple actors involved. But certainly, the narratives suggest that most of the parenting work falls in the domain of the mothers with other actors like fathers and grandparents also taking up some responsibility from time to time. It also depends upon their availability which is an exception rather than the rule. But mothers have to be always present for the child which is quite evident in the study.

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