Altered Lives of Children from Coolie-Camp, Delhi:

Navigating through the Vulnerabilities amidst COVID-19 Lockdown

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Abstract

This work attempts to provide the centre stage to children's views and their voices in the research. Situated at the interface of childhood studies, urban design and mental health, this work brings to the forefront the experiences of children (and their families) living in slums during COVID-19. It attempts to uncover children's experiences of dealing with the COVID-19 from their particular socio-spatial location. This work puts across how children are re-configuring their lives through the new normal that is COVID-19 and the mandatory nation-wide lockdown in the context of Delhi, India.

Keywords: *Research with Children, Children's Voices, Socio-Spatial Housing, Life in Slum, COVID-19 and Nationwide Lockdown.*

Introduction

The COVID-19, which originated from Wuhan, the Hubei province of China in 2019, has altered the lives of millions of people across the world. Virtually every aspect of our taken for granted lives, directly

or indirectly, got affected by this global pandemic. Acting as a great leveler this pandemic has also revealed the deep seated social, economic and socio-spatial inequalities of our societies. Women, children and elderly in a crisis situation, people facing job losses and increased cases of domestic violence during lockdown are few of the numerous ways in which this pandemic is impacting people's lives. The fear and uncertainty generated from this pandemic is humongous for every section of society. Developing countries like India and other countries in South Asia, already struggling with resource crunch, poor health infrastructure, lack of opportunities for employment, no proper and safe housing for all; are worse hit by COVID-19.

With the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, at the margins lie young individuals, who are not even considered or consulted in the adult centric society. This group of individuals, that is children, we can say are physically present but seldom are their views and expressions taken into account. In these times, children are living with extraordinary restrictions. In India, with the COVID-19 guidelines and advisories of mandatory nation-wide lockdown (March 25, 2020 to May 31, 2020 and thereafter phased unlock), norms on social-distancing, shifting of scholastic activities to online mode, negligible opportunities to meet with peers and access to public spaces; children's lives are highly confined, in the wake of this *new normal*[1]. The lives of young people and children (individuals below 18 years old) have changed beyond recognition during this current pandemic. Children as part of families (and households) that have their jobs and businesses impacted, or have lost family members due to COVID-19, are bearing the burden of social, economic as well as psychological crisis alongside the pandemic. Always at the receiving end of adults (be it parents, teachers or other adult guardians around), children's views, concerns, anxieties about the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic have remained unregistered. The top-

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[1]New normal is used as a phrase to depict the normalcy one is trying to achieve by making adjustments with the COVID-19 restrictions as part of their day to day life.

down approach, through the international platforms like The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), or via national platforms through different agencies, in the form of dos and don'ts are percolated down to children during COVID-19 pandemic. Seldom, do we lend an ear to children's concerns, anxieties and views around the ongoing situation. We must explore and make every possible effort to bring to the forefront children's voices and the lived (every day) realities of children and their families in the time of pandemic. Therefore, a bottom–up approach is attempted by this study.

Why do children's voices need to be heard?

Children play a vital role in society. Often seen as the future generation, i.e. adults in making; children are hardly seen as individual beings in their own right. In different societies children's positioning is assessed way below adults in the social hierarchy. Qvortrup notes that "children have not so much been ignored as they have been marginalized" (in Corsaro 2018, 6). Adults often view children in a forward-looking manner, as becoming rather than appreciating that they are with ongoing lives, needs, desires and so on. This understanding of children and childhood- as unfinished products, is evident in the way children are treated. The understanding and representation of children from adult's lens ends up portraying children as vulnerable, dependent and in the need of assistance; rather than establishing children as rights bearing thinking and active beings capable of navigating through the crisis situation and at times acting as a helping hand for their peers and families.

Locating children (and childhood) historically, Aries (1962) has shown how the conceptualization of modern childhood – as a distinctive phase came into being. James and Prout (2015) demonstrated that childhood is a social construct. This paradigm shift paved the way for multiple childhoods that are embedded into local and cultural constructions rather than viewing childhood from a

singular homogenous lens. In Indian context Kakar (1978) has examined the infancy and childhood of upper caste Hindu male children and its embeddedness into specific cultural and social environments. Similarly, Nandy (1997) also deconstructs childhood in Indian context in the backdrop of India's colonial past. Variables like age, class, caste, gender also have a bearing upon children's treatment by adults. These norms then define the life course of the child accordingly. The traditional society like India, though appears to be developing and modernizing in the current neo-liberal scenario, but it still holds back its prejudices and inequalities towards children.

The marginal position of children in society has been challenged by The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (henceforth UNCRC 1989) by putting children's rights to the forefront in the form of a conglomeration of 54 articles. Ratified by 196 countries worldwide including India[2], UNCRC has provided for a broader and stronger foundation for strengthening children's rights. Article 12 of UNCRC acknowledges children's right to be heard. It reiterates for having respect for the views of the child. It mentions, "Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously"[3] (UNCRC 1989, 1). Article 12 when read alongside other articles of The Convention, has established children as individuals with agency who have the capacity to think and express their concerns. This is a significant contribution from the rights based

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[2]India has signed the UNCRC but is the only member state that is not a party to it. Retrieved from: https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en

[3]The summary of UNCRC 1989 articles, retrieved from https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UNCRC_summary-1_1.pdf?_adal_sd=www.unicef.org.uk.1601315056632&_adal_ca=so%3DGoogle%26me%3Dorganic%26ca%3D(not%2520set)%26co%3D(not%2520set)%26ke%3D(not%2520set).1601315056632&_adal_cw=1601310359414.1601315056632&_adal_id=d747b762-da2a-42ec-9d9a-96d269fec3ea.1601310359.3.1601315028.1601310359.6e92b147-fddd-49b0-9741-86b40048d79e.1601315056632&_ga=2.33495990.905224903.1601310355-1457143559.1601310355

perspective that helps in replacing the traditional paternalistic and protectionist view point towards children. Furthering children's rights The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)[4] has also released COVID-19 statement[5] (on April 08, 2020), on holding children's rights more firmly. In the form of 11 recommendations, the committee has laid down COVID-19 specific guidelines to be taken care of including children's physical, emotional and psychological health and well-being. The committee expresses concern regarding the vulnerabilities of children which have increased manifold in the countries that have declared emergencies and mandatory nation-wide lockdowns (as in the case of India). The recommendation in its point 11 mentions,

Provide opportunities for children's views to be heard and taken into account in decision-making processes on the pandemic. Children should understand what is happening and feel that they are taking part in the decisions that are being made in response to the pandemic (The Committee on Child Rights 2020, 3)

At international and national levels, at least in the discourses on children's rights, the marginalization of children is beginning to end. But, as a society, we still need to incorporate and consider children as actively thinking beings, as individual members of the society. Referring to children, Singh has mentioned that, "these little architects…are often seen but not heard" (2020, para 7). In Indian context, COVID-19 has pushed to the margins the already marginalized status of children in the society leaving them vulnerable and voiceless. Not recognizing the basic rights of a group of individuals is in a way pushing them towards the extreme

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[4]The Committee on the Rights of the Child, retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crc/pages/crcindex.aspx

[5]COVID 19 statement retrieved from https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CRC/STA/9095&Lang=en

vulnerabilities. Do children want school to reopen, scholastic activities to shift to online? There are such questions where children's viewpoints must be sought.

While dealing with children we must keep in mind that child is not a homogenized category and there exist millions of children with strikingly different experiences paving the way for multiple childhood/s. Child, according to Nieuwenhuys (1998), is therefore considered as a sociologically empty category which does not acknowledge a child's socio-cultural contexts. The differential norms for boy and girl children of different ages, the experiences of rural and urban children, children of different castes and communities inform us again and again of their social embeddedness. Kumar (2016) asserts that the common label of childhood is limiting when it comes to capturing the reality of girl children and their childhood experiences in India and we cannot equate childhood with girlhood.

Until we ask children, we may not know what they think is going on and what are their immediate demands. In a preparation and response to COVID-19 pandemic, paying attention to children and their ways of navigating through such times, is an act of justice. In this attempt to bring the voices of children, what they think about the ongoing pandemic and how they make sense of the changes in lives and general routine due to COVID-19, is attempted in the paper.

Children as Collaborators in Research: Perspective from Research with Children

James & Prout list six key features of this new paradigm New Sociology of Childhood, which are:

1. The socially constructed childhood is different from biological immaturity. It is a contextualized interpretation of human's early life based on societal beliefs and cultures.

2. Childhood is intertwined with other social variables in societies

such as gender, class, ethnicity etc.

3.   Children's own individual perspectives must be considered while studying children and childhood.

4.   Children must be viewed as active participants not only in construction of knowledge about them but also in construction of society as a whole.

5.   Due to direct involvement of children in construction of knowledge about them, ethnography is a useful methodology to study childhood.

6.   The new paradigm of childhood sociology is to respond to the process of reconstructing childhood (2015, 8).

This methodology promotes collaborative research with children. Acknowledging children's agency, Katz (2004) has also talked about altogether a different model of viewing children and their childhood experiences which include: resilience, reworking and resistance. This model foregrounds the agency of the child rather than treating the child as the victim of the situation. Children coping up with their daily situations and reorienting themselves innovatively, according to Katz (2004) is an important strategy which must be recognized. Generally, speaking for or on behalf of children adds on to their already vulnerable and dependent image constructing them as passive and lacking agency. But helping them to express views, making way for their voices to reach to wider audiences empowers them and helps in deconstructing the vulnerable and passive image of children into a more proactive, agentic and thinking being rather just a dependent. For an equitable society, it is important for us to have a platform where children's voices- their feelings, concerns, hopes be registered. In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic it is important for us to have a dialogic and receptive space that can help people and individuals vent their emotions and feelings and thereby a bridge of resilience and social solidarity can be established.

Contextualizing the Field

This paper is part of the broader ongoing Ph.D. enquiry on children's play and childhood in the context of Delhi. The national capital of India, Delhi is classified as a metropolitan area, having high population density as 28514 as per 2018 data. In the making of a dense city, with rapid urbanization, the informal and squatter settlements have also an important role to play. Srivastava (2015) chalks the city as a *series of interconnected spaces and processes*, which are to be understood in particular time and space. Often the people across these entangled spaces are understood on the basis of labour networks of informal markets and the employer employee relationship between the privileged and underprivileged.

Figure 1: Coolie-Camp, South West District of Delhi

The specific field site for this particular study is Coolie-Camp, a slum in Southwest district of Delhi. The slum selected for the study is also densely populated, and during the COVID-19 pandemic and with physical distancing norms, it has further intensified the vulnerable status of its residents. Children and their families living in slums are already at the margins because of improper housing conditions and lack of basic amenities like drinking water and sanitation facilities. During the COVID-19 pandemic they have been

pushed further towards the margins under the uncertain lock-down duration (and guidelines). After observing Janata Curfew (People's Curfew) on March 22, 2020 in Delhi (and India) on the call of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the entire country went into a nation -wide lockdown from March 25, 2020. The said lockdown which initially was put in force for 21 days, with its extending deadlines got stretched up to May 31, 2020. Under the lockdown all economic activities and movement of the general public was banned and social distancing guidelines were put in place. Thereafter, June 2020 onwards the un-lock started in phased manner. But, schools and educational institutions still remained under the lockdown even till mid October 2020.

With the nation-wide lockdown and discontinuation of economic activities, suddenly the residents of the Coolie-Camp who worked as domestic help, drivers, construction workers and so on turned jobless. It is in these highly uncertain times with respect to the lockdown, with health and food insecurity, job-losses; the conversation with children (and their family members) took place. With the parents losing their employment, children (and their families) were falling towards a dark and unsettled future.

The deciding factor that is taken in the study is socio-spatial location of their residence, which is the slum-Coolie Camp. By virtue of living in a slum where even basic facilities are not available - how children's experiences of lockdown, their routine amidst this new-normal and following of necessary COVID-19 guidelines on maintaining physical distance, home-quarantine are shaping the way they are experiencing this pandemic is explored.

Research Question

In the backdrop of COVID-19 pandemic and mandatory nation-wide lockdown (in India) the central question that is explored in the paper is: how the resident children of Coolie Camp (a slum), are apprehending the COVID-19 pandemic and navigating through their

day to day routine? This question has two important elements, as it aims to explore and present the experiences of children of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, from the vantage point of them being residents of the slum.

Research Participants

The research participants are children of age group between 6-14 years old. Depending on the willingness of children (and the oral consent of their family members), children have participated in the study. The researcher already shares a well-established rapport with the children and their families. The study has treated children as collaborators in research. The conversations which developed the current study have been done through phone calls, since during the lockdown, neither the families were ready to entertain the outsider into their home zone, nor was it feasible for the researcher to personally go and have face to face interaction with children (and their families). A substantial number of research participants that are 19 children (11 girls and 8 boys) representing 10 families contributed towards this study. Out of 10 families, 02 families had 02 children each in the said age range, 05 families had 01 child in the said age range and 02 families had 03 children whereas 01 family had 04 children in the said age range. All the children participated in the study are under the purview of family and are enrolled in school.

It is important to share that during the initial phase of lockdown i.e. 25th March 2020 (and early April 2020), all 19 children (and their families) were in contact, but as the lockdown got extended and mass exodus of migrant population was taking place[6], out of 10,

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[6]Different media houses covered this mass-exodus, calling it as one of the biggest after partition of India. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/30/india-wracked-by-greatest-exodus-since-partition-due-to-coronavirus and

https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/coronavirus-exodus-of-migrant-workers-out-of-delhi-unabated-but-police-block-their-entry-into-anand-vihar-isbt/article31198725.ece

https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-52086274

04 families had migrated back to their home-town (Rajasthan and Uttar-Pradesh) in early May 2020. Since then the contact with them is completely lost. Other remaining 06 families have contributed towards the study until August, 2020.

Data Generation[7]

This work lies at the intersection of childhood studies, urban design and mental health studies and thereby different eclectic approaches have been used as and when required to make sense of the field and children's concerns. The primary data is generated through one to one conversation with children. These conversations though happened over telephone calls had children talking to the researcher at times alone and at times in company of their parents or any other adult member of the family. Since, the researcher shares good rapport with the children and their families, the conversations sometimes took a very personal turn and therefore without the consent of the participants, these conversations were not recorded keeping the confidentiality and research ethics in place.

For the focused conversation, children were asked questions about the ongoing pandemic, lockdown and related changes in their routine. Some of the cue questions are as follows:

• （Now that school is closed) How do you spend time at home?

• Do you go to the park and roam with friends? Why or Why not?

• Do you like staying all day at home?

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[7]Instead of the data collection which is based on the premise that data is lying out there and the researcher is supposed to go and collect it; the primary data for this study is generated in the process of conversations with children where children played an active role and are seen as collaborators and co-researchers in the process.

- Share about your (and your family's) routine before and during the lockdown.

- Do you feel afraid about the COVID-19 *bimaari*[8]?

Meanings of having a Home in slum

> "We shape our buildings…thereafter they shape us"
> Winston Churchill (1943)

Studies in cultural geography, anthropology, sociology have established that the space we inhabit shapes our world-view. Rapoport (1969) in his work shows how larger socio-cultural dynamics is reflected via housing. Life in Coolie Camp, which is surrounded by the posh localities of South-West District of Delhi, shows an ambivalent relationship with its neighborhood. Coolie Camp is densely populated and since is not recognized by the Government is without the basic amenities like drinking water and sanitation facilities. The residents of Coolie-Camp struggle to get drinking water, which is made available via tankers which again have an erratic supply, as shared by my respondents. In the name of sanitation facility they have a public toilet which was constructed under SBM (Swachh Bharat Mission)[9], in early 2017. But this public convenience also is most of the time running out of water, is not kept clean and is the single such facility for the residents of the entire camp. On the socio-spatial front, congested lanes and dwelling units without proper spaces allocated, lack of ventilation presents a very difficult life to the residents of Coolie Camp. At times having a small room space of dimension 5 feet by 5 feet is home to a family of 5-6 members. Also, social distancing and quarantine are next to

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[8]COVID-19 is referred to as bimaari (an illness or disease), by children and their families in day to day conversation, so the cue-questions have retained this term.

[9]Swachh Bharat Mission is a countrywide mission initiated by Government of India in 2014 to curb open-defecation.

impossible in the densely populated informal settlements (Sanderson 2020, UNSD 2020). Most of the day to day chores like washing off clothes, chopping vegetables, and children taking baths and so on happen in the by-lanes of the slum rather than all inside the one room space. In the name of sanitation facilities, the public toilets and washrooms are the only option available to the residents of Coolie-Camp. 'Home' thus comprises this entire microcosm including the specific individual room of the respective families, the lanes and by-lanes of the settlement right outside the room, the public toilets and adjacent foot-path used as the multipurpose space for the residents.

But, in the context of COVID-19, the concerns of home have changed for the children and residents, as it has added yet another layer of vulnerability and risk to their lives. The spaces of the settlement that earlier were part of their home-space, are now accessed by children in a conscious manner, say the shared public toilets or gathering for collecting drinking water from tankers.

Home as an Experienced Category during the COVID-19 Pandemic

With the crumbling down of the health infrastructure in the wake of COVID-19, the only measure to keep oneself protected is to be confined in one's home space by taking all the precautionary measures. Home (and Housing) is a key site that is shaping our experience of this current pandemic (Garber 2020). Having an own dwelling unit counts as fortune in current times. The pandemic has altered how the *home* is understood and experienced especially in the socio-spatial context. The idea of home brings up an image of a very safe and secure space. But this is not true for everyone. Having a home comfortable enough that it can house all the members inside safely is a luxury which many do not get. Having a safe, secure and spacious enough place that can house five members at a time with a steady means of survival (an income) is a fortune that is not available to most of the people, as revealed during the nation-wide mandatory lockdown. The privileged classes have a comfortable home

comprising three to four bed rooms, hall and kitchen, stuffed with all necessary commodities for the coming days. But the underprivileged ones suffer as they have to risk their lives on a daily basis as not having enough space to accommodate six members at once as well as not having enough savings to stuff their *home* with essential commodities. The different advisories issued by the government in the wake of this pandemic say- 'stay at home', 'maintain physical distancing', 'wash your hands every hour', 'quarantine at home', 'keep your immunity intact', falls flat for the ones who do not own a dwelling, do not have personal washrooms/toilets, have no means to afford soap or sanitizers or are already living in vulnerable conditions in the settlements.

Precarious living conditions and loss of employment: A vicious cycle

Children as struggling family members are very well aware of the hardships that their parents are facing due to sudden job-loss. Many families had to leave the city as they were not able to pay the rent (including few of my respondents). Ramesh, a 10 years old boy mentioned that "*mummy jaati thi kaam pe kothi mein lekin unne mana kar diya... kyuki hum jhuggi mein rehte hain na…Ab hamare saare paise khatam hote ja re hai*" (my mother used to go to work- as domestic help at a house but they have asked her not to come, because we live in slum…now we are running out of money). Another girl Priyanka, 14 years old by giving reference to one of her friend (and their family) who went back to their home-town reiterated "*hum bhi gaon chale jate to accha rehta…kiraya nahi dena padta*" (it would have been better if we too could have gone back to our village…we would have saved rent as well), hinting at the uncertain times and seeing her parents and family struggle through the COVID-19 and unemployment. The adjacent localities of Vasant Kunj and Munirka that previously used to take the services of the residents of Coolie Camp have suddenly shed them in the wake of the COVID-19. This pandemic and the precarious residential space of the coolie camp residents have played the role of devil. The underprivileged are seen

as potential carriers of the COVID-19 due to their vulnerable living conditions and therefore, they are not entertained for employment in relatively privileged neighborhoods, and children are well-aware of this.

From Risky to Riskier Life: Survival Strategies

The children and families who remained back in the Coolie-Camp, for them also the meanings and experiences of dealing with this pandemic has altered the way they register their home space. As shared by adult members of the Coolie-Camp, they have never been so conscious about any *bimaari*[10] before. To remain safe they are keeping their home and adjacent spaces clean. Muskaan, a 14 years old girl shared that since their family could not afford soap or sanitizer so she with her siblings have made the homemade sanitizer by boiling *tulsi* and *neem* (locally available medicinal plants) leaves in the water which her parents take along when they go out to sell vegetables. In this way the young children using their minds are contributing towards the safety of their parents and are adapting to the new normal. However, the lives of the children are full of struggles, but they have their own innovative strategies of surviving through COVID-19 times.

But having the only public sanitation facility in the camp, they cannot keep the risk away. To minimize their chances of getting infected they were severely cutting down on the frequency of their visit to attend nature's call. Meena, a 13 years old girl in a shy manner shared about the difficulties in accessing the public toilet, which now is a high-risk site during COVID-19. Meena said, "*ab bas ek baar subh ek baar sham jaate hain...mahine ke time pe dikkat rehti hai*" (now only once in the morning and once in the evening we go…during periods [menstruation] it is more difficult to manage).

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[10]COVID-19 is understood and explained by the children and their families as bimaari- a disease, which is spreading due to uncleanliness.

Meena's anxieties and fears are originating out of lack of basic amenities relating it to the larger health and sanitation concerns during COVID-19. Again and again going to the public toilet during the pandemic in a way is inviting the infection. However, the children and residents of slum do not have an alternative option and have to risk their lives every day rather multiple times a day that too knowingly. They do not have a luxury of washing (or sanitizing) their hands with soap frequently during the entire day as they do not have proper water supply in their locality and hence washing hands frequently was seen as wastage of water- a precious resource which can be put to use for some other household chores. So, for saving the water and cutting down on the cost of soap, the trips to the washroom were reduced to the minimal. In this scenario, the guidelines which have been circulated by the Government for washing hands regularly with soap or using sanitizer is not possible for many. Maintaining safe physical distance in the name of *social distancing* which could be one of the basic ways for preventing oneself from this deadly disease, is completely absent from the lives of children and other residents of the slum. In the settlement where *public toilets* are only available and viable option, then the onus of maintaining physical isolation and keeping safe, is on the individual thereby turning their life from risky to riskier.

No to casual roaming but careful presence in the lane

The *home* and *home space* with its attached meaning/s has undergone a tremendous change during the lockdown phase. Home that earlier consisted of street and by-lanes of the camp which served as play spaces, socialization spaces now have become a potentially risky zone due to the fear of contamination. Sharing about the limited opportunities of casual roaming in the wake of lockdown, Manisha[11], 10 years old girl shared about her routine as "*poora din ghar (room) mein kaise rahe, garmi lagti hai, jab khana banta hai to dhooa hota*

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[11]Pseudonym used for keeping the child's identity confidential.

hai sab bahar baith jaate hain chhaya mein, ghumne nahi jaate" (the entire day how do we stay inside, it gets very hot and smoky when we cook food, so we sit outside in shade, do not get to roam in the neighborhood). Manisha here spoke of herself and her siblings that they cannot stay inside home comprising one room space, the entire day and rather sit in shade during different times of the day when the food is being cooked in the home. Prior to the lockdown, Manisha used to take her younger siblings to the park nearby (during afternoon and evening hours of the day, when her mother is not around) and spend time with other girls of her age playing in the park. But now due to the mandatory lockdown and enforcement by police personnel in the wake of COVID-19, their visit to DDA park (adjacent to Coolie Camp) is also discontinued. Manisha's response here is revealing about the constricted and congested space of their home, and how they are managing during the lockdown by sitting in shade outside home and singing songs and poems to keep her siblings occupied rather than roaming with friends in neighbourhood like their earlier days.

The concerns shared above shows that children are also actively making sense of the current COVID-19 pandemic in their own manner. Conscious of their location as residents of the slum, they could reason out why their parents have lost their job overnight and are not entertained further in the homes of their privileged neighborhood. Children's careful dealing of the outdoor spaces now, be it going to park, managing young siblings or having limited trips to the public toilet is hinting at how children have devised a plan to manage their lives. Children's partaking in the research and their elaborate responses, their initiatives to develop alternate measures of keeping safe by making home-made sanitizer shows their active participation. Children, rather than being dependent, are actually helping and sharing responsibilities with their parents in many household chores alongside taking care of their younger siblings. The idea here is not to assess children's understanding against adult's

understanding of COVID-19, but to provide them the platform to express their views and ensure their voices are heard. This study establishes children as thinking beings in their own right as established by New Sociology of Childhood (James and Prout 2015). Constantly engaging with their surroundings, well aware of the ongoing pandemic children have their own reasoning and strategies developed for dealing with the COVID-19.

The way forward

In the adult centric society, children because of their structural location (as being young in age and in powerless position in relation to adults) are treated as dependents. Socially, their rights then stand suspended as are often delineated through adult members in a patronizing manner. In such a scenario providing and safeguarding children's rights becomes all the more important. The issue of children's rights is not merely that they have rights or not but of the broader discourses around children that generate or not generate the need for their rights. The discourse established by New Sociology of Childhood (James and Prout 2015), challenges such a traditional understanding around children and their rights and establishes them as beings rather than becoming (or unfinished adults). Therefore, children's rights hold a very special place in the discourse of human rights. The paper explored these shifting discourses around children's rights with an emphasis on how through research children's voices be foregrounded, thereby addressing children as an active members of the society. Children's view of the COVID-19 pertaining to their socio-spatial location, their concerns, their way of navigating through the pandemic are brought up in the paper. The paper is a small attempt in the direction of highlighting children's voices and their agency by presenting their perspectives of COVID-19 and life during lockdown by sharing how children have perceived and understood the situation.

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