

Children's Entanglements with Water: The Local-Global Interconnections

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The Pahari Korwas have been listed as a 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group' in the Indian Constitution. The impact of deforestation and mining in the mineral-rich region of Chhattisgarh, where they reside, has resulted in displacement, increased environmental pollution, and poverty, further increasing their vulnerability (George 2015). Through an illustration from my ethnographic work in an Indigenous community in Sarguja district, Chhattisgarh, I explore children's everyday lives, particularly focusing on their engagement with hardships and risks. The research took place over a period of seven months. The methods included observations, informal dialogues with children, drawings, and photographs, which were then analyzed thematically. These engagements with children took place at their schools, homes, neighborhoods, and during walks from one place to another.

Children's lives are directly or indirectly affected by global events, including migration, capitalism, colonialism, and natural calamity (Hanson et al. 2018), creating a 'globalized childhood'. I meaningfully engage with the impact of global events in the lives of children, including how these events are shaped by history, politics, and, in particular, climate change. Using human relationships with water as an example, this research shows that the local and global are not distinct from one another, as Hanson et al. (2018) and Twum-Damso Imoh et al. (2018) have previously argued in terms of how these two intertwine. I extend this argument by illustrating how the local is impacted by global events, often disproportionately impacting the marginalized communities.

Local-Global: Fluid Interconnections

The Pahari Korwa community in a village in Sarguja, including the children, had a deep embodied relationship with water (Hadfield-Hill and Zara 2019). In the context of the Pahari Korwa village, both the children and other community members' lives and routines revolved to a large extent around water as a resource, similar to observations by other scholars in their respective research contexts (see Dyson 2014; Punch 2005; Robson 2010). These everyday activities included filling water from the borewell, bathing, washing clothes, and playing. As a result, the children spent a lot of time near the water bodies in the village, including borewells, wells, and a pond. In the summer, the groundwater level reduced, and with water scarcity, these routines were altered and children spent more time walking to faraway wells to access water or accompanying their parents to water bodies in the jungle. It shaped their everyday discussions as they expressed difficulty in accessing water, or waited for the monsoon to replenish water bodies, which, if in excess or erratic, could also be harmful to the crops or cause difficulty in movement. Similar to Hadfield-Hill and Zaras's (2019) experience, this analysis shows how young people lived with water, how it shaped their routines, and how it impacted their lived experiences of inequality.

Nightingale (2003) argues that people's environments cannot be considered as a passive backdrop to their lives. Scarcity of water in the village required people to limit its use and focus on preservation along with making risk assessments for floods and droughts. In many ways, the children in the village shared more in common with the adults in this setting than with some children elsewhere in the world or even their urban counterparts in India. For many children in the world, the availability of water can be taken for granted as something that can be accessed through a tap with an unlimited supply. This example helps recognize and relate to some of these 'local' experiences of water scarcity that are exacerbated by the global climate crisis.

Understanding children's engagement with water helps observe how the local and the global intertwine (Hanson et al. 2018). It further helps recognize 'the global in the local' and 'the local in the global,' which opens up spaces to explore how these spatial and environmental dynamics impact children's lives in ways that are particular to their geographical locations and unlike childhoods elsewhere (Hanson et al. 2018, 273).

While writing about children's everyday lives in the Indigenous community, it was difficult not to focus on the macro issues and structures of material inequality and historical marginalization, as they played an important role in shaping their lives. Children's everyday lives in the local context of an Indigenous village were impacted by a larger global phenomenon – the climate crisis. Research indicates that countries in South Asia are most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of global climate change (Lal 2003; Mirza 2011). Observed impacts of climate change show inter-seasonal, inter-annual, and spatial variability in rainfall during the past few decades across all of Asia (Singh and Singh 2015), in the form of droughts and erratic rains. Kraftl (2018) argues that issues around water may not affect all childhoods uniformly, and my analysis of the Pahari Korwa village illustrates how the impact of the crisis is being experienced unequally with marginalized communities — and their children in particular — facing harsher repercussions with the least access to resources (Mishra and Eapen 2020).

Re-thinking Local and Global

To move beyond the North-South divide, firstly, we need to acknowledge that globalization is not a universal phenomenon, as global processes often produce different impacts in different parts of the world (de Castro 2020). As illustrated through this research, communities in the Global South are disproportionately impacted by climate change, worsening the already existing inequalities among children worldwide. Secondly, to understand their interconnections better, we need to reassess and re-imagine the ways we think about these terms – local and global. Often the way these terms are used equates 'global' with childhoods in the Global North that are seen as modern (de Castro 2020) and suggests 'local' as Southern childhoods that are traditional, non-modern, and a place for practicing the production of colonial differences (Escobar 2007). Through an investigation into Pahari Korwa children's lifeways with water, we see how their local lives are affected unequally by the global phenomenon of climate change, thus complicating the North-South childhood divide and revealing their entanglements through water.

Conclusion

Through human and water relationships, this article contributes to the debates about 'local' and 'global' childhoods by blurring fixed boundaries and capturing their interconnectedness (Hanson

et al. 2018). Discussing the impact of water on the lives of the children, this article demonstrates how climate change has an unequal impact in terms of further marginalizing vulnerable communities and reminding us that globalization is not a universal process. This argument pushes ways to reimage 'local' and 'global' by not simply reducing the southern childhoods to being non-modern, othered, or deviant (Abebe and Ofofu-Kusi 2016). Rather, the global flow of water and its scarcity on a changing planet reminds us that the local is always affected by the global, with children living at the crux of climate change.

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