Ambivalent Encounters
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Initially, I assumed that people in Dasashwamedh would have much more measured reactions to the children who worked on the riverfront than Western tourists. Over time, however, I discovered that their responses were also emotionally charged and frequently conflicting. Some locals praised the children for their maturity and compassion, whereas others vehemently decried their precociousness and corruption. “Children go bad from doing this work!” I was told. “They become impulsive!” “They become arrogant (ghamandi) and bold (tez)!” “They stop listening to their parents!” Indeed, part of what interested me was the way people in the neighborhood both discursively and conceptually linked the minds (man), hearts (dil), and behavior (vyavhar) of the children to the reproduction of a larger social and moral order. Whether praising their capacity for empathy or criticizing the children’s arrogance and lack of fear, locals almost always articulated the children’s individual qualities in terms of their social consequences.

In this chapter, I explore how people in Dasashwamedh variously assessed the children on the riverfront, and I pay particular attention to the way they interpreted the impact of foreign tourism through discourses about their minds and hearts. My discussion departs from Lawrence Cohen’s insightful study of the ways that old minds, voices, and bodies signify across caste and class lines in the city of Banaras. Working between several neighborhoods, including the predominantly upper-middle-class neighborhood of Ravindrapuri Colony and the Nagwa slum, which is home to the “untouchable” caste of Chamars, Cohen contrasts the ways residents of the city invoke different “villains” when articulating the dilemmas of old age.

For upper-middle-class colony dwellers, Cohen notes that the senility of elders is frequently expressed through a narrative of “the Fall,” which underscores
the corrosive impacts of Western modernity, especially the disintegration of the joint family and the ensuing loss of respect for elders. In these narratives, he argues, disturbed or “unmatched” old voices and bodies signal a breakdown in the moral coherence and transactional economy of the Indian family. Among the lower-class and lower-caste residents of Nagwa, however, Cohen argues that narratives about “the bad family” and the ills of Western modernity are far less influential in people’s constructions and explanations of the dilemmas of old age. Instead, he observes that these people draw upon the “encompassing” themes of caste oppression, social weakness, and poverty, thereby mitigating “the need for intrafamilial accountability” (Cohen 1998, 230).

Although Cohen’s work focuses on the elderly, it provides a useful departure point for considering the following questions: What did the minds, hearts, and behavior of the children on the ghat signify to different people in Dasashwamedh? When did they invoke admiration, and when were they regarded as problematic or pathological? Was the behavior of these lower-class and lower-caste subjects “encompassed” by the themes of poverty and weakness? Or, did they signal the presence of “bad families” who were also seen as corrupted by Western influences, and more specifically, by Western cash? Finally, how were locals’ reactions to these children both similar to and different from those of Western tourists? For although both tourists and locals variously praised these youngsters for their admirable qualities and criticized them for their apparent corruption, their responses, I argue, ultimately reflected very different understandings and concerns.

**The Goodness and Godliness of Children**

Among people in Dasashwamedh, discourses about the innocence of children were also pervasive and polyvalent, traversing a range of ideas about the ignorance, purity, and playfulness of youth. Children, I was frequently told, are “innocent” and “ignorant” (masoom, nandan, nasamajh, anjan). They “lack the power to discriminate between right and wrong” (vivek karne ka kshamta nahin hoti hai). “They are incapable of sin or deceit.” For instance, after singing the following line, “children are pure of heart!” (bache man ke sache), from an old Hindi film song, Diraj Sahani went on to explain: “children do not have any cunningness (chal ka pat) in them. Their hearts are clean (dil saf). They can neither think nor comprehend, so whatever they do is deemed to be an act of ignorance. This is why they are the form of god (bhagwan ka rup). God plays with children. It is god who makes them laugh and smile.”

In certain respects, therefore, locals also operated with a “presociological” model of the child, which viewed children as “essentially pure in heart and uncorrupted by the world they have entered into” (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998, 10). However, in contrast to Western tourists, whose conceptions of childhood
innocence were often influenced by Rousseauian notions of the noble savage or by Lockeian conceptions of the child as a blank slate, people in Dasashwamedh elaborated the innocence of children through a religious discourse that emphasized not just the goodness of children but also, as Diraj alluded to at the end of his remarks, their godliness. Throughout my fieldwork, I encountered a range of expressions that metaphorically and metonymically linked children with gods: “children are gods,” “children are like gods,” “children live in god’s shadow,” or “children contain a portion (ansh) of god within them.”

Clearly, these expressions took on different meanings in different contexts. However, as Steven Parish has also observed among the Hindu Newar community in Nepal, in many instances people invoked these expressions to foreground children’s status as morally neutral, rather than morally innocent subjects. As Parish writes: “Children, in general, are said to be ‘like gods,’ and this comparison acknowledges their relative freedom from obligations and constraints, a result of their inability to conform to the moral code. Since children are ‘like gods,’ their many minor transgressions are supposed to be forgiven” (Parish 1994, 87).

Among people in Dasashwamedh, this idea was commonly articulated through the recurring refrain “Oh, forget it, they are only children!” (arey rahene do, bache to hain!) But it was also communicated in other ways. Most of the people I spoke with agreed that, unlike adults, children do not have to endure any karmic retribution for their wrongdoings. “As a child sows he does not reap” (jaise karega waisa nahin payega), I was often told. Thus, instead of describing children as living closer to a moral “paradise of goodness and reciprocity” (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998, 15), as some Western tourists tended to do, in their everyday speech people in Dasashwamedh deployed discourses about the godliness of children to emphasize the ways that children were viewed as existing outside the realm of human morality and reciprocity.

Yet, as I soon discovered, there was a big difference between the way locals talked about children in general and the way they talked about the children on the riverfront in particular. When people in Dasashwamedh assessed the children who worked on the riverfront, what came to the fore was a conflicting set of narratives that explicitly highlighted the moral and immoral behavior of these children. Moreover, as the examples below begin to illustrate, these assessments also reaffirmed a shared, yet at times contested, set of ideas about the differences between girls and boys and the differences between rich and poor children and families.

**Compassion and Understanding**

It was a late September morning. Sharmila and I sat on the ghat sorting through a bunch of garlands when Malika arrived with a tiffin of puris and subzi (vegetables) for her mother. “Mummy, if you do not eat your health will become bad,”
she said as she took the basket of garlands away from her mother and placed the tiffin in her lap. Sharmila’s eyes sparkled with pride. “Do you see how she takes care of me? Do you see what a thoughtful daughter I have? A son would never think of me this way.”

While it was rare for Sharmila to praise her daughters in front of them, it was not the first time that I had heard her compliment Malika. When business was slow, I often visited Sharmila at her garland stand on the ghat, and she would talk about how grateful she was to have a daughter as mature and understanding as Malika. “If it hadn’t been for Malika,” she frequently reminded me, “our entire family would have been doomed after my husband broke his leg.” One afternoon in March, I sat with Sharmila while she tearfully narrated the story:

SS: You see, when Malika’s father broke his leg our life really changed and things became really bad. In the proper course of things I should never have had to come to this ghat. I should never have stepped out of my home. I used to do household chores and I used to do sewing at home and I raised my children with that money but when his leg broke I thought to myself, “What is left in my life that is worth living for?” I was at a total loss as to what to do. My Malika was still very young, she was only seven or eight years old at the time and I thought to myself, “She is still a child, what can she do to help?” But I was wrong. I don’t know where she got the inspiration from, but I am swearing to you right here, sitting next to Mother Ganga, that Malika suddenly became so mature overnight that . . . [starts crying]. We did have some hard times during that period when her father was in the hospital. It was then that I began sitting on the ghat, and I used to sit there with such a long ghunghat [veil] covering my face. And the very first day that I came down onto the ghats to sell garlands I was crying the whole way. I thought “Oh God, I think I should die along with my children.” And yet, on the other hand, I said to myself, “I will see right to the end what God will do with me, whether it will be good or bad.” I put down my bundle of garlands and it was Malika who set up the shop, who put out the garlands on display. She consoled me by saying, “Mummy, don’t cry, everything will turn out fine, I will do what needs to be done.” Malika used to come to the shop with me in the morning and explain everything to me about how to run the shop. And after coming to the shop with me she used to leave to sell diyas. And then, after she helped me close the shop for the day, she used to go out again to sell these lamps and I would leave for the hospital to look after her father. I used to run the shop the whole day and I didn’t eat anything here. I only used to drink tea and even that was only when someone would urge me to do so. But to make a long story short, all I will say is that Malika did far more than a son could ever have done. Malika began to work with foreigners by selling
postcards and from that time onward we began to rise in life. And it was after this that she stopped wearing girls’ clothes and she began to dress like a boy.

JH: Why?

SS: Because she had to mold herself into that atmosphere, she had to do work that boys normally do. She had to talk with foreigners to sell colors and postcards and girls don’t do this work. She was the first girl.

JH: So did people give her any problems?

SS: No. She actually won people’s love. She received love from her environment because of her behavior. People were impressed by the fact that here was such a young girl who had such a feeling for her mother and such brains, she was so wise (samajhdaar). You rarely come across children like that. People say that a son could never have endured the extent to which I have suffered and the extent to which Malika has suffered with me. A son could never do that. And Jenny, I probably would have died if I had a son instead of Malika because he would surely have been only interested in fashion, he would only have been interested in his own petty scams.

In many respects, Sharmila’s narrative recalls Benedicte Grima’s discussion of the “aesthetics of gham” (misfortune). Along with shame and modesty, Grima argues that suffering plays a central role in structuring rural Paxtun women’s presentations of self and notions of feminine honor (Grima 1994, 86). However, among Paxtun women, “gham and taklif” (misfortune and hardship) are usually believed to begin with marriage. As Grima writes, “Before that,” a girl “is not expected to know anything about life, or to share in gham. She neither considers herself, nor is she considered by the community, to have begun living or to have any kind of story to tell. She is frequently referred to, in this regard, as kam-‘aqla, or ignorant” (84–85).

As I discussed in chapter 3, the girls who worked on the riverfront clearly invoked stories of hardship to assert and defend their feminine honor and legitimate their presence on the ghat. And here too, Sharmila suggested that despite being a child, Malika was no stranger to suffering. In fact, although Sharmila was proud and grateful that Malika’s earnings had saved the family from economic ruin, when we spoke, she often cast Malika’s financial contributions to the household as less significant than her ability to gracefully endure hardships and shoulder the pain of others.

Discourses about the feminine capacity to suffer and empathize surfaced in many conversations that I had. Anjali’s mother Madhuri provides another example. It was toward the end of my fieldwork and I had gone to visit Anjali at her home, since she was no longer permitted to sell tea on the ghats with her two younger sisters Mona and Gulab. With a bag of warm jalebis in hand, I climbed the dark narrow stairs that led to their rooftop apartment. It consisted
of two small rooms with concrete walls that opened onto a patio that had been partially covered with a tarp awning. When I arrived, Anjali was washing dishes from the evening meal the night before. Her younger sister Mona was vigorously massaging her mother’s legs as she leaned against a wooden charpoy. Gulab and Dinku (Madhuri’s youngest son), were playing marbles in the corner.

At the sight of the jalebis, the children lit up with a smile, and Anjali instructed me to sit down and talk to her mother while she prepared tea. Madhuri and I began chatting and I asked her how her oldest son Maneesh was doing with his cleaning job at the photo lab. She threw her hands in the air as if to express her frustration and disgust. “Oh that one, he is useless. Yes, he is working, but he doesn’t think of me, he thinks of himself. My daughters, they understand my suffering. They know how many hardships I have endured. You see, it is good to have girls. Girls are very straight (sidhi) but boys! My son is useless, he understands nothing!”

Although both Sharmila and Madhuri clearly viewed gender as a decisive factor in shaping children’s emotional capacities, they also suggested that class played a significant role. Like the girls who worked on the ghats, both Sharmila and Madhuri drew sharp contrasts between their own children and children who came from “big families.” For instance, after criticizing some of the boys from Dasashwamedh for their bad behavior, Sharmila remarked: “But the children from rich people behave in an even more uncouth manner. The children of poor people work hard, not all children are the same, of course. Some do begin to throw money around, loaf around. But the children from rich families, they will never think about their parents, they will just say, ‘Do this for me, do that for me!’” Or as Madhuri proposed, “My children have to work because my husband is no good, what can we do? But I have seen that children who come from rich families they do not behave nicely with their parents. They want their money. When the parents don’t give them money then the love between them is finished. I used to work for such a family. I saw this happen.” Or as Bali Sahani commented when reflecting upon his own childhood experiences working on the ghats, “Since I was a kid I knew I had to work to keep my family going. Those children who just study, they remain aloof from the struggles and sorrows of their families and just think about themselves and about enjoying life, but those children who earn they know about everything.”

Certainly, there were boys on the riverfront who were also commended for trying to understand and ameliorate their families’ struggles. However, by and large, girls were most often the recipients of such praise. By working hard, by subordinating their individual desires to the needs of others, and by demonstrating their capacity to empathize with their mothers’ pain, the girls on the ghats established themselves as morally responsible and virtuous subjects. Although these attributes clearly challenged everyday assumptions about the
innocence and ignorance of children, they in no way marked the girls as corrupt. Indeed, for mothers like Sharmila and Madhuri, having a mature and compassionate daughter far outweighed the benefits or charms of having a child who understood nothing of their plight.

Without Fear or Shame

Through their displays of empathy and obedience the girls on the riverfront usually, though not always, evaded being cast as corrupt or wayward children. The boys, however, often had a much more difficult time dispelling such charges. Many people insisted that their work in the informal tourist economy was having deleterious effects on their behavior. One recurring complaint was that the boys had lost their sense of fear and shame. In his study *Culture in Action: Family Life, Emotion, and Male Dominance in Banaras, India*, Steve Derné observes that among upper-middle-class men a sense of social fear is regarded as an “exemplary emotion” precisely because it subordinates the will of the individual to the larger social collective, thereby prompting “moral” and “correct behavior” (Derné 1995, 80). Other anthropologists working in South Asia have made similar observations, noting that the perceived absence of fear in individuals often evokes anxiety and criticism (Lamb 2000; Parish 1994; Vatuk 1990). As the following examples demonstrate, throughout my fieldwork, I repeatedly encountered such ideas and concerns.

**Demanding Children**

Lalu Chacha also came from the Mallah caste and was reputedly one of the first and most famous guides ever to work with foreign tourists in the Dasashwamedh area. He had begun guiding as a young man during the late 1970s. At the time of my research, he was in his early fifties, and was struggling with serious financial and health problems that had been exacerbated by his battle with drug and alcohol addiction. Among the young guides and children who worked on the ghat he evoked both admiration and ridicule. The legendary successes and stories from his youth seemed a far cry from the thin, wasted-looking man who stood before them then. In fact, I often sensed that Lalu Chacha’s downward spiral had prompted some of the boys to question their own futures, for he was frequently held up as an ominous example of what could happen if one continued working with tourists for too long.

Lalu Chacha himself was ambivalent about the new generation of boys who were guiding on the ghats. On the one hand, he sympathized with these “arrogant” and “impulsive children” whom he regarded as the products of poverty and disadvantage. On the other hand, however, he accused the boys of exacerbating tensions in the home by failing to subordinate themselves to “the
normative hierarchy of parents over children” (Cohen 1998, 178). For instance, one afternoon, I invited Lalu Chacha over for an interview. After listening to him talk about his own experiences working in the tourist economy, I asked him what he thought about the boys who were currently guiding at Dasashwamedh. He replied:

You see, our children work. But rich people send their children to school and they make sure that there is someone from the family or their staff who will escort the child safely back home from school. Then after coming back from school the child gets to eat and the child is given whatever he wants to eat, and then made to study again. So this really sharpens their children’s [in English] “mentality.” But our children are sent out to earn on the ghats, to earn money from foreigners so they become impulsive and whimsical. If children are earning, then they will inevitably be impulsive and do what they want (apne man ka karte hain). Then they will leave their parents behind, they will completely ignore them and then demand food the minute they enter the house simply because they are earning and giving money at home. This has happened in my house. These boys are earning from tourists, so when they go home they say instantly, “Give me food because I am earning.” They become very proud and arrogant. They want everyone to move the moment they enter the house, parents rush to serve them with eagerness.

In contrast to Sharmila and Madhuri, Lalu Chacha did not provide a narrative that extolled the moral virtues and emotional sensitivities of poor children. Rather, although sympathetic to a degree, his remarks read more like a moral indictment of these lower-class boys and their arrogant and disruptive behaviors. Although he certainly invoked poverty and poor food as a causal explanation, this did not preclude Lalu Chacha from simultaneously generating a discourse about “intrafamilial” accountability (Cohen 1998, 230). For Lalu Chacha, the problem was not just parents who were weak and poor but also children who were too powerful. By virtue of their earnings from foreign tourists, the boys had attained a position of centrality in the transactional nexus of the family (Lamb 2000) that enabled them “to demand” food and service on the spot.

Again, such criticisms stand in marked contrast to the ways that girls were usually regarded. Granted, most girls earned far less money than the boys who participated in guiding and commission work. However, even in cases where girls did attain similar positions of centrality vis-à-vis their earnings from foreign tourists (as was the case with Malika and Priya), they were usually praised for their “performative deference” (Cohen 1998, 180) rather than criticized for their excessive demands.
The Foot Massage

Observers in the neighborhood also complained that this lack of fear and shame could be detected in the boys' dealings with tourists. For instance, one day I stopped in to say hello to my friend Ganesh Sahani. Ganesh was in his mid-twenties, had grown up in the neighborhood, and by most accounts was among the first generation of children to guide foreign tourists at Dasashwamedh Ghat. Though perceptions of him varied, for many of the younger boys working on the ghats he represented a success story. Through guiding, he had earned and saved enough money over the years to convert the downstairs room of his family home into a modest silk shop. Moreover, due to a subsequent year-long romance with a Japanese tourist that almost ended in marriage, his shop had made it into a number of Japanese guidebooks, thereby providing him with a slight advantage over some of the local competition.

However, despite the publicity afforded by the guidebooks, like many other shops Ganesh's store was not located on the main road. It was tucked away in the winding galis of the old city, and this rendered him more dependent upon the boys who worked on the riverfront to bring him customers. He courted their favor by giving them commissions, but also by finessing a role that fell somewhere between friendly confidant, patron, and elder brother. On this particular afternoon, Ganesh was in the shop with Jay, Mohan, and Sara, the twenty-nine-year-old Canadian tourist whom Mohan and Jay had been guiding for several days. Mohan and Sara were sitting next to each other on the thin padded mattress that covered the shop floor while Jay was perched in the doorway. Ganesh had assumed the responsibilities of DJ, and sat across from them near the stereo. I took off my *chapals* (sandals), entered the shop, and strategically positioned myself as far away as possible from the blaring boom box. Ganesh promptly ordered Jay to go out and get chai and samosas while the rest of us waited and listened to Ganesh proudly showcase his newest Bollywood cassette tape. Mohan reclined on the mattress and stretched his feet out across Sara's lap. She began cracking his toes, massaging his feet, and cooing over him almost as though he were a baby. When Ganesh saw this, his face turned sour and in a quiet yet explosive voice he reprimanded Mohan in Hindi, “Hey, don’t behave shamelessly here! This is not appropriate. This is a home!” Mohan quickly withdrew his feet from Sara's lap and sat upright against the wall looking embarrassed.

Though seemingly innocent from Sara's perspective, the foot massage marked a transgression on several counts. First, it violated notions of domestic propriety by suggesting an inappropriate intimacy between unrelated members of the opposite sex. It also defied proscriptions regarding purity and pollution by exposing Sara to one of the most defiled parts of the Hindu body, the feet. However, what disturbed Ganesh the most about this quasi-lewd, quasi-polluting
display of intimacy was that it indicated to Ganesh that Mohan was not paying him the respect and deference he deserved. When Sara and the boys left the shop after having their tea and samosas, I asked Ganesh why he had become so upset. “Jenny,” he replied, “If you are with boys your own age you might behave in such an unrestrained manner, you might be so bold. But never in front of your elders! I would be ashamed to act like that before one of my elders! It would make me very uncomfortable! But these boys don’t think that way!”

_The Behavioral Conundrum_

The boys who pursued foreign tourists on the riverfront were, therefore, often confronted with a behavioral conundrum. On the one hand, they had to contend with local criticisms that their “shameless” and “brazen” behavior was spoiling their character and undermining traditional age-based hierarchies that required them to monitor and modulate their behaviors in front of elders. For instance, Titu owned a sari and silk shop in Dasashwamedh. Although most of his business was geared toward an Indian clientele, he had recently begun diversifying his product line with the hopes of attracting more foreign tourists. Like Ganesh, he also had an interest in persuading the boys to guide tourists to his shop, and he had been trying to entice them with handsome commissions. One morning, I went to his shop to interview him, and he shared his impressions of the boys on the ghats with me: “These children working as guides get spoiled (bigar jatey hain). Earlier, as far as I know, children did not work as guides, a few did, but even they used to work within a certain limit. First, they used to earn a very modest amount of money; second, they were always under the watchful eyes of everyone so they were afraid of doing anything wrong. Today these children are very bold (tez), their fear isn’t there anymore. You should see the way they behave with these foreigners on the ghats.”

Whereas Titu suggested that the boys had become bold and fearless because they were earning too much money and were no longer adequately supervised, the boys, on the other hand, often complained that one of their biggest challenges came precisely from having to pursue foreign tourists under “the watchful eyes” of elders and kinsmen. The ghats were littered with relatives and close social relations who also used the riverfront as a place to earn their living, and this could put the boys who worked with foreign tourists in rather awkward situations. Narratives about the bold/sharp (tez) minds and fearless dispositions of ghat children, therefore, both concealed and revealed deeper anxieties about fundamental transformations in the organization of social roles and space. While “the problem” was repeatedly articulated as an emotional deficiency on the part of the boys, it often stemmed from the transactional demands that tourism work placed on the children and the challenges that came with having to maneuver themselves and their customers through a diverse and uncertain
social topography. For instance, was Ganesh’s silk shop “a home” where certain forms of decorum needed to be maintained, or was it a place of commerce where the ultimate goal was keeping the customer happy?

The Virtues of Being Bold

As Derné has pointed out, in Banaras, a sense of social fear is particularly valued among males within the context of upper-middle-class family life, as it ensures that individuals will subordinate themselves to the established domestic hierarchy and thereby contribute to the harmonious functioning of the household. In other contexts, however, such fear may be regarded as a debilitating attribute. Indeed, the boys repeatedly emphasized that in order to win over customers and maintain respect amid the rough-and-tumble world of the ghats they had to be bold, brave, and sometimes outspoken. Of all the boys working on the ghat during the time of my research, Pramod most vividly embodied these virtues. Known for his tremendous wit, charisma, and feisty personality, he would challenge older boys and men on the ghats when they interfered with his business dealings or when they offended his sense of moral propriety. As I noted in chapter 3, one such example occurred when he publicly reprimanded Priya’s alcoholic father for drinking his daughter’s earnings.

One afternoon, Pramod and I were sitting on the ghat talking when two young men, claiming to be students from Banaras Hindu University (B.H.U.), approached us. With little regard for our conversation, they interrupted and introduced themselves to me, though noticeably not to Pramod. An onslaught of questions quickly followed: “Where are you from?” “How do you know Hindi?” “What are you doing in Banaras?” Though I found them incredibly irritating and deeply resented the sense of entitlement that these male intruders exhibited, I had become used to such interruptions. On numerous occasions, my conversations with the children on the ghats were derailed by nosey young men from outside the neighborhood who seemed to assume that I would find conversing with them far more gratifying than talking to “uneducated” children. On this occasion, I told the intruders that I had come to Banaras to write a book about boys like Pramod who worked with foreign tourists. Then, I pointed out that we were in the middle of a conversation and I politely asked them to go away. Apparently, both my response and request fell on deaf ears, for the two young men remained in our presence and immediately began issuing me a warning. Switching into broken English (perhaps assuming that Pramod would not be able to understand them), they cautioned: “Do not trust the boys on the ghats. They cheat you. They want your money. If you want to learn about Banaras, you come to our university. These are uneducated people. They cannot tell you about the city.”
Before I had the chance to respond, Pramod, who had been surprisingly quiet up until this point, stood up to berate the two young men. Waving his hands in the air, he shouted back in Hindi, “You bastards, I earn my money through hard work! Don’t come here and insult me! Leave us alone, motherfuckers! Go away! She doesn’t want to talk to you!” The two students were taken aback by Pramod’s slew of profanities, but they quickly countered with insults and threats of their own. Switching back to Hindi, they exclaimed, “See how this little boy behaves! Look at the dirty things he says! This is a public place; we can be here if we want! You have no right to tell us where to go! We are going to report you to the police for guiding!”

As the tensions between Pramod and the two young men escalated, Kaushal, who was in his mid-twenties and who sold garlands on the ghat, came over to intervene. Though they shared no actual kinship ties, from the time Pramod had begun selling on the ghats Kaushal had taken him under his wing. The two had developed a very close friendship, and Kaushal was constantly looking out for Pramod to make sure that he did not get into trouble. Pramod lovingly referred to Kaushal as his Guruji and Kaushal, in turn, referred to Pramod as his *chela* or disciple/pupil.

When Kaushal approached, he was joined by some of the older guides who happened to be sitting nearby. Forming a somewhat menacing circle around the B.H.U. students, Kaushal and the others took over the verbal assault and warned the two young men that it would be best for them to leave immediately and not show their faces at Dasashwamedh Ghat again. Looking rather nervous, the young men bitterly retreated. After they left, Pramod was still incensed by the incident, but as he and the others began to bask in their post-showdown glory, his mood quickly improved. “We won’t see those two again,” Kaushal said. “They know they do not want to have trouble with the boys from Dasashwamedh. Everyone knows our reputation in the city. They know we are not afraid of anyone!” Pramod smiled and nodded in agreement while Kaushal put his arm around him as if to congratulate him on the victory. “Do you see my chela, Jenny? He is not afraid of anyone! He is a very special boy!”

Thus, when directed at the appropriate targets, such as insulting and meddlesome outsiders, the boys’ lack of social fear was seen as a virtue rather than a vice. Through such run-ins, boys like Pramod not only demonstrated their abilities to stand their own ground, protect their business interests, and prove themselves among their peers and elders on the ghats; they also “spoke back” to the everyday injustices and insults that were heaped upon them as lower-caste and lower-class subjects. In so doing, they rendered the ghats a contested space, where social hierarchies were actively challenged as well as reproduced.

And yet, while boys like Pramod could be pardoned and even praised for their lack of social fear, their assertiveness on the ghats, and their willingness to
challenge social hierarchies, girls were usually criticized if they were perceived as displaying such qualities. Anjali, for instance, had a personality that was every bit as extroverted and fiery as Pramod’s. Indeed, it was part of the reason she derived so much pleasure from working on the ghats and was so despondent when she was forced into her post-pubescent retirement. However, in contrast to Pramod, her displays of wit and her attempts to assert herself among males who frequently harangued her did not win her praise or approval.

For example, Suriya Sahani worked as a boatman at Dasashwamedh and was in his early twenties. He was a gentle and serious young man who had achieved his own measure of local celebrity as a competitive swimmer. Although most of his business stemmed from catering to Indian pilgrims, he did occasionally take foreign tourists out for boat rides, and sometimes he would ask me to accompany him. It was through these outings that we became friendly with each other. One Sunday morning, he invited me to his home for a midday meal. After polishing off a delectable lunch of curried jackfruit, we retreated to the roof to digest, and I asked him if I could interview him. When our conversation turned to the children who work on the ghats, I asked him what he thought of the girls who sold postcards, diyas, and tea. He shook his head, and immediately cited Anjali as an example of why girls should not be allowed to do this work:

She sells tea but look at her behavior. She doesn’t know how to talk properly. She thinks that because she sells tea she has become very important. She talks the way that we do, that’s why I don’t talk to her very much. Sometimes she jokes with me but I never joke with her. I have seen that there are some people on the ghats who misbehave with her and say “Do this with me, do that with me,” they shouldn’t do this. But this girl is also very wicked (harami). When she first started coming to the ghats she spoke nicely with people (prem se) and did good work. But when she started to make a lot of money her audacity increased. It is okay for one’s wealth to increase, but their pride shouldn’t. She misbehaves and uses curses. People talk carelessly with Anjali so this has become her daily habit. She doesn’t think, “I am a girl.” She thinks, “I am a boy.” I think that maybe if I were in her position I would also behave like this, but so many times I’ve told her, “Your head has gotten very big, I’m going to hit you today, you misbehave a lot, you sell tea okay but don’t trouble anyone.” Sometimes she calls me brother, sometimes she calls me baldy (takla), she speaks rudely.

Suriya was able to concede that Anjali’s “tough” and “boylike” behavior might be an adaptive, or perhaps, even contagious response to her working environment: to recall Jay Yadav’s comments, “as is the environment so is the intelligence that comes to one.” However, from his perspective, girls like Anjali, who talked “tough” instead of lovingly and who tried to act like boys instead of girls,
signified a disheartening deterioration of the normative codes of conduct that were supposed to regulate interactions between men and women, the young and old, and people who were either familiar or strange. Thus, although working on the ghats could provide the girls with avenues to prove their dedication and service (seva) to their parents (as “good daughters” are taught to do from a very early age), their presence in this public space also evoked anxiety from people in the community. This anxiety, moreover, was exacerbated by girls like Anjali who seemed incapable or unwilling to adequately perform feminine presentations of self. Malika’s younger sister Jaila was often cited as another example. Whereas Malika “won people’s love” with her compassionate and demure demeanor, Jaila was routinely ridiculed and scolded for her temperamental outbursts and for speaking rudely to other children and elders on the ghats. “With that temper and tongue, what kind of daughter-in-law will you be?” her mother often admonished her, “Look at how you behave!”

**Making Them Bold: Bad Families, Greedy Parents, and Foreign Money**

Although critical of their behaviors, people in Dasashwamedh also exhibited sympathy towards the “bold,” “arrogant,” and “demanding” children who worked on the ghats. They not only viewed them as victims of poverty but, in many cases, they also viewed them as victims of bad families and more specifically, greedy parents who were willing to “ruin” their children’s lives in exchange for foreign money.

Rani Goswami, for instance, was the mother of four. She and her husband earned their living by selling necklaces and beads at a small kiosk on the road above Dasashwamedh Ghat. Over the years, the couple had established a number of enduring relationships with foreign tourists who had helped them finance the construction of their new home. Our friendship developed when Rani and her husband began recruiting me to write letters on their behalf. I would be making my way along the main road to the ghat, and Rani would summon me over with an enthusiastic wave and smile. “Jenny, we got another letter, I have some work for you! Come! Come!”

At the time of my fieldwork, Rani’s children ranged in age from two to ten years old and they spent most of their time with their parents, either playing in front of the kiosk or nearby on the side of the road. Often, their beautiful faces and bright personalities attracted the attention of foreigners who were passing by. However, unlike many of the other children in the neighborhood, Rani’s children were forbidden from selling postcards or pursuing any other kind of business venture with tourists. From what I observed, they were never encouraged to try to sell anything from their parent’s shop, either. Both Rani and her husband hoped that their children would pursue a different line of work in the future, and they often spoke proudly and optimistically about the
academic success that their older daughter and son were already achieving in elementary school. When I finally sat down with Rani for a taped interview, we talked about the children who worked with foreign tourists, and Rani contrasted them with her own:

**Rani: (RG)** These children who work on the ghats are very bold and their parents make them bold in their childhood. They make them bold enough to go out, that is why girls are not afraid to do so, they do this work right from their childhood. For example, my daughter, I do not allow her to go into the business line to begin with, even if a customer were to come to the shop and if she is there alone she simply cannot sell because she is not used to it. She will be busy either playing or studying, she will not enjoy tending to the shop.

**Jeevesh: (JH)** Why?

**Rani: (RG)** Because if I had made a practice of scolding her or beating her or asking her to look after the shop and to sell stuff to the customers when they come and to call out to customers when they are passing by then this practice would have become instilled in her brain but it is just the opposite. Today, even if she wants to sell at the shop I tell her, “No, come with me,” so she has no sense as to how to do business.

Rani attributed the children's behavioral problems to pushy parents who were interested in producing offspring who earned rather than playing or studying. Echoing sentiments expressed by Etty (see chapter 4), she also suggested that the children's early exposure to commercial life had eclipsed the development of other important skills and attributes. She went on to say, “What kind of future will these children have? They have no education, their parents are always yelling at them, scolding them, they do not learn how to behave properly! They will do the same with their children. It is like this with these people from the Mallah caste. It is their way” (*yeh to unka rahan sahen hai*).

By emphasizing the way that certain practices could become instilled in the brains of children, Rani seemed to invoke a Lockeian model of the child as a blank slate. However, her remarks also allude to a culturally pervasive Hindu discourse, which posits “substantial” differences between people of different castes. The idea that people of different castes develop different temperaments and characters because of their environment or the “substance codes” they transact has been duly noted within ethnosociological models of the Hindu person (Daniel 1984; Marriott 1968, 1976, 1990). However, among residents in Dasashwamedh, this “fluid” conception of the individual actor who is made and remade through transactions with others was also qualified by the idea that people's dispositions are, in part, determined by the bio-moral substance codes they inherit as members of a particular caste, and as such are, to a certain extent, immutable.
Caste differences were often invoked as a way to distinguish one’s self and one’s family from others in the neighborhood. For instance, even though Rani and others self-identified as “poor people” (and in some cases were less financially secure than the Mallah families who worked on the ghat), in private conversations, they rarely let an opportunity pass to make note of their comparatively higher-caste status. Mohan and Jaggu’s mother’s Devika provides another example. She was particularly fond of reminding me that although both of her sons worked as guides, and although they too came from a poor family, there was a world of difference between them and, as she put it, “those uneducated Mallah boys who cheat tourists on the ghats.” “They are low-caste people,” she would remark, “This is their habit.” Similarly, on more than one occasion I was reprimanded by Mallah children and elders for eating at the home of a young boy named Raju who came from the Dome caste and who sold postcards near Manikarnika Ghat. “You shouldn’t go there and eat their food, Jenny! The people from that caste are very dirty! Chi, chi, chi!” And yet, although caste played a pivotal role in people’s attempts to achieve “distinction” (Bourdieu 1984) and jockey for bio-moral superiority, I also discovered that even among families of the same caste, this kind of moral one-upsmanship and “othering” was very common. With fingers wagging, I was often told, “Our children work because we have no choice, but in that family, the parents make their children sell on the ghats because they are greedy!”

In other cases, however, foreign tourists, rather than greedy parents, were held accountable for corrupting the minds and behaviors of these children. Vinod Pandey, for example, was twenty-six years old and had grown up guiding foreign tourists on the ghats. We first became friendly when I was living in Banaras studying Hindi, and I gifted him a bright orange-and-yellow Hawaiian shirt, which, I insisted, would help him attract more customers. When I returned to Banaras for my fieldwork, Vinod had just come back from an extended stay abroad and was recovering from a bitter breakup with his Norwegian girlfriend, with whom he had fathered a son. As Vinod frequently reminded me, he was at a low point in his life, and sometimes he drank in order to quell his pain and anxiety. I interviewed him one evening at my guest house when he was in a particularly irritable mood and clearly had been drinking. “You grew up guiding foreign tourists” I began. “What do you think this work is like for these kids?” His response was vehement:

**VP:** [In English] This is the worst, and I think, and I want to abuse at that moment, to the tourist who gives them money. I feel that sometimes I should abuse them or go up and hit them, I don’t care but what I am giving you is the real answer, I feel that I should abuse the tourist. [Then switching to Hindi] I want to curse them when they give money to kids.

**JH:** Why?
VP: [Back in English] Because this is the worst thing they are doing, because this happened in my life, because this happened in my life, how I came in this business, so if they give them money it means that they are going in the same direction, and always when the tourists are with me I explain to them, “You don’t have to give a single penny to children.”

JH: [In Hindi] So what about when the tourists buy postcards from these kids?

VP: [In English] That’s also wrong. That’s also wrong, because they are not looking, what is in the future, they are looking at the present and that present it makes them die in the future, like what happened with me now, I am uneducated, I am only educated till high school and that makes me sad because I am educated until high school and that’s not enough to do any work in this world. So I want them to study and do something, and get out of my face and do something. I don’t want to see them all their lives selling postcards, or do something worse.

Vinod was not alone in his opinions, nor did I suspect they were merely the embellished product of a few stiff drinks. Many others in Dasashwamedh shared his anger and resentment, and they too, claimed that Western tourists were the real problem in the children’s lives. As Avi Sahani, a former guide from Dasashwamedh, remarked, “The situation is such that these children have already become brazen (unka man bara hua hai) because of the money they get from tourists. Before, they did not used to be like this, and then if tomorrow they do not get this money, they will start stealing at home because they will need money regardless of how they get it.” Or as Sudesh, a middle-aged commission man who worked on the main road above Dasashwamedh, noted: “It is because of the coming of tourists that these children have become bad, this was not the case earlier. When tourists began coming here they saw these children and out of pity for their poverty they began giving them large amounts of money, and now you go see what the children do with this!” Finally, Rahul Sahani, who also grew up doing commission work, asserted, “The only way things will improve for these kids will be when tourists stop coming to Banaras!”

Precocious Children, the Ills of Modernity, and Degenerate Times

While Vinod and Rahul fantasized about the demise of foreign tourism in Banaras, many people working in Dasashwamedh feared this possibility. Indeed, throughout my fieldwork locals expressed profound concerns about the future of the industry. In some cases, they even suggested that the children on the ghats, particularly the “clever” (chalak) and “cunning” (chalu) young boys who worked as guides and commission agents, were partially to blame for its anticipated decline. “Tourists in Banaras must be careful,” I was constantly told, “These boys are very cunning!” Or as Rohan, an older commission man who mostly trafficked
in drugs, remarked, “These boys can make a fool (murk) of anyone! They can make anyone an idiot (chutiya)! With their cheating and swindling tourists will not want to come here! These boys give the city a very bad name!” Indeed, in January of 2000, when I interviewed the information officer at the U.P. Tourism Office in the Cantonment District, he echoed Rohan’s sentiments and noted that one of the primary reasons a tourist police task force was being developed in Banaras was precisely to make sure that foreign tourists did not fall prey to the chicanery of these young “touts.” Thus, instead of being interpreted as a promising sign of their budding business acumen, the boys’ cleverness and cunning was often cast as morally, socially, and economically problematic.

Moreover, people in Dasashawamedh explained the boys’ cunning in varying ways. Some reiterated the idea that it was a product of their lower-caste and lower-class habitus. Others interpreted it as an impact of foreign tourism. Vishnu, for instance, had started off working as a silk shop commission man in Godolia. Over the years his entrepreneurial interests had shifted, and at the time of my fieldwork he was making most of his money selling drugs. In our interview he reflected upon how the tourism industry in Banaras had changed and the effect it was having on these children:

VK: Since I started selling there are less tourists now. And in the future if tourists do come then they will be cunning. Before none of them were. If you just talked a little bit then they would believe you and go with you, give money, or go to buy something. They would buy with their eyes closed. And now, if you have something that is ten rupees and you say it is ten rupees then they will say “I’ll give three, four rupees.” There isn’t any profit in that, no commission.

JH: So how did tourists become cunning?

VK: From each other, they made each other cunning. For instance I talked to you, [in English] “Take care on the ghat, many boys talk to you.” What happens from this is that the tourist becomes wise and then if another boy comes he will say, “Go away!” [Back in Hindi] Five or eight years before there weren’t as many commission boys. Now there are a lot of boys doing commission work. Now since five years there has been bargaining and tourists have come to know what bargaining is. Before they didn’t know. Also now, from the minute they step off the plane in Delhi to the minute they get here they are approached by so many commission men that they don’t trust anyone. So now, in order for these children to make money from the tourists they have to be very cunning.

While Vishnu attributed these changes to an over-saturated labor market, others suggested that the boys’ precociousness was a more general consequence of “modern times.” The ills of modernity were a very popular topic among people
in Dasashwamedh. In fact, discussions about the children who worked on the riverfront usually provided a launching point for broaching this larger issue. As Avi remarked further along in our interview:

The environment today is very different from the environment before. Now, these young kids, they are no longer kids—that’s the first thing. You will see this small kid and you would love him like a mother or a sister would love a kid brother, you would view him in that light, but his way of looking at things would be something else, he will look at you with the wrong kind of love. Later on he will tell his friends “I kissed that girl. I touched her here and there.” Even small kids do that. You have no idea what these small boys are up to, what tricks they are up to. You have no idea where these small kids will take you. Because nowadays it is not possible to trust anyone anymore.

In many cases, the perceived changes in the social environment were explicitly attributed to the greater forces of modernization. However, as Sarah Lamb has noted in her study of aging in West Bengal, the ills of modernity are also frequently viewed as the “devolutionary” product of cosmic time (Lamb 2000, 94). Many of my informants insisted that it was not just Westernization or modernization or even foreign tourism that was wreaking havoc on the order of things. Rather, it was the degenerative age of the Kali Yuga itself, which is widely believed to erode the social and moral or dharmic order of society. As Diraj Sahani further observed:

Tourists see a young kid and they think that he is just a kid and he knows nothing. But the fact is that that kid is even more knowledgeable than we are. These small boys who are doing commission work they are our fathers (veh humare bap hain). These days you find ten-year-old boys in Banaras who can give you and me a lesson in how to do things and they talk like fifty-year-olds, so sharp are they in talking. Boys today are really very sharp. But also remember it is the Kali Yuga and within the next 100–200 years you will find small kids becoming even sharper (aur tez). The time will come when all sons will teach their fathers how to go about life.

As was the case elsewhere, Diraj also cast the boys’ intellectual precocity as a problem rather than a boon, and its deleterious effects were again registered in social rather than individual terms. In this case, sharp and savvy young boys led to apocalyptic visions of a world where sons (or juniors) prematurely displaced their fathers (elders). Indeed, in certain respects, this vision had already become a reality for Diraj and many of the older guides who were trying to hang on to their business. These fast-talking young boys were, after all, their competition and, like many of the other commission men I knew, for Diraj this
engendered both concern and resentment. As he put it: “These kids have a big advantage over us, they are cute. The tourists love them and trust them, but when you get older like me, and are not so cute anymore it is much harder to get money from tourists.”

**The Stages of Life, the Division of Labor, and the Value of Knowledge**

In addition to indexing the ills of modernity and the foreboding onset of the Kali Yuga, the children’s precocity was also elaborated through discourses regarding the stages of life. As many scholars have pointed out, the idea of “doing the right thing at the right time” has deep roots in Hindu cultural understandings of the life-course. According to Sylvia Vatuk, for instance: “the notion that life is made up of distinctive developmental stages, each with its own appropriate normative code for conduct, immediate and long-term goals, and suitable rewards, guides the thinking of Indians about how they ought to live and shapes their aspirations” (Vatuk 1990, 70). When people in Dasashwamedh assessed the children who worked with foreign tourists, such understandings of the life-course often provided an interpretive frame.

Arjun Pandey, for example, was a university student from a lower-middle-class Brahmin family and was working toward a degree in computer science. He ran the e-mail and Internet shop that was located beneath my guest house in Dasashwamedh. At the time of my research, the Internet revolution was still in its infancy in Banaras, and the shop was one of a handful that was offering Internet access in the city. As such, it was actively sought out by foreign tourists and by local young men who were just beginning to “surf the wave” of Internet porn. This particular mix of clientele and Internet usage rendered the shop an extremely interesting, though at times, profoundly awkward social space.

Because many of the boys brought their customers to the shop, Arjun had become familiar with the young guides working at Dasashwamedh, and for the most part he was on very friendly terms with them. However, when it came to divulging his private thoughts about the boys and their futures, he was more critical. In a tone that mixed genuine concern with obvious snobbery, he observed:

Look, if a person does any work without any education and before the proper time in his life for that work then he cannot succeed in that work. The boys who work as guides with tourists, they use the English language without having been properly educated into it. It is not a real education and when these kids speak English they do not speak flawless English, whenever they speak they will speak broken, flawed English. So they keep working as long as they find work, but in future they remain good only for guiding work, nothing more. They will remain stuck in that groove. But, if you study and get an education at the right time and you acquire
some degree like high school or intermediate, then you will have a certain tone, way of speaking, you will have a proper manner of speaking, you will know which word to use when and this will be instrumental in your success in later life. But suppose I try my hand at the computer without learning how to use it, simply by watching others use it for some time, then it is quite possible that I may ruin the machine. One should do the right thing at the right time.

As was the case with some of the Western tourists whom I interviewed, here again, charges of mimicry and the trope of “ephemeral precocity” (Cohen 1998, 22) emerged. By failing to follow the “proper” sequence and do the right thing at the right time, Arjun was sure that the children would inevitably find themselves “stuck” in a juvenile line of work and behavior. Moreover, in Arjun’s narrative, the developmental trajectory of the children was perceived as both temporally and topically skewed. The implication of his remarks was that speaking English, like operating computers, was not what “uneducated” people are supposed to do, and when they try, it leads to bad copies, or worse, to ruin. Arjun thus suggested that the “appropriate normative code for conduct” varies not only according to distinct life-cycle stages, as Vatuk has noted, but according to class. This notion was also expressed by middle-class residents who were both surprised and impressed by “how much English these uneducated children” knew. As one of my friends remarked, after attending the evening puja with me, “I can’t believe it, I am a university student at B.H.U. and these kids on the ghats speak much better English than I do!”

The idea that different sorts of conduct and education are regarded as appropriate for different classes of people, has been richly explored in Myron Weiner’s book *The Child and the State in India*. Weiner attempts to explain why the Indian government, unlike so many others, has failed to remove children from the labor force and establish compulsory education. In surveying other developed and developing nations, Weiner concludes that in India’s case, it is not a lack of resources that has prevented the state from developing better education and employment policies for poor children. Rather, he attributes this systematic and institutionalized neglect to a set of widely shared cultural beliefs that ultimately create a middle-class and upper-class public who are “remarkably indifferent” to the plights of the poor. As he writes:

At the core of these beliefs are the Indian view of the social order, notions concerning the respective roles of upper and lower social strata, the role of education as a means of maintaining differentiations among social classes, and concerns that “excessive” and “inappropriate” education for the poor would disrupt existing social arrangements. . . . The Indian position rests on deeply held beliefs that there is a division between people
who work with their minds and rule and people who work with their hands and are ruled, and that education should reinforce rather than break down the division. (Weiner 1991, 5–6)

At first glance, it may seem that Arjun’s comments are at odds with Weiner’s findings, for he was genuinely concerned about the boys’ futures and their lack of “real education.” However, part of what troubled Arjun, and many others with whom I spoke, was precisely the fact that these boys challenged the categories of “people who work with their minds and people who work with their hands.” Their broken English also bespoke an uncomfortable proximity to middle-class aspirations and life styles.

Alternatively, for others, the children’s lack of education was disturbing precisely because it suggested forms of institutional neglect that reproduced the vast distance between the rich and the poor. For instance, as Raj Yadav (the elder brother of Jay), commented:

Over here the government takes absolutely no interest in what happens to a kid, here the government does not give any money to the poor people to educate their children or to set up a small business to pay for their livelihoods. And what can you expect from kids who have never been to school? Kids who have never been to school are like a crazy man on the street who doesn’t know what he is doing, they live their lives exactly in the same fashion. They will do whatever would seem right to them and would quit whenever they feel like quitting.

Like Arjun and Vinod, Raj also suggested that the knowledge that children accrued by working with foreign tourists was in a sense counterfeit. It would not “provide the key to many other exchanges” and make a better future possible (Willis 1977, 64). And yet the children themselves, as well as their family members, often challenged this idea. They emphasized that in terms of getting a good job, a formal degree was useless unless one had the right connections, or was able to muster enough money to pay exorbitant bribes. Thus, in this regard, some people in Dasashwamedh suggested that working with foreign tourists could provide a more expedient and realistic way of moving up from the world of the ghats.

Conclusion: The Ways Children Matter

Lawrence Cohen’s work provided a departure point for exploring how people in Dasashwamedh assessed the children on the riverfront and articulated the impacts of foreign tourism through discourses about their minds, hearts, and behavior. As we have seen, locals’ reactions to the children were by no means univocal, and they reflected the different perspectives and experiences of a
varied “community of listeners and their interrelationships” (Cohen 1998, 179). Depending on the situation, the children could be praised for their compassion and obedience, criticized for their arrogance and lack of fear, or even admired for their outspokenness.

These assessments not only reflected the specific viewpoints of people in the neighborhood and their particular relationships with particular children. They also reflected a more pervasive, though by no means uniform, set of understandings about different kinds of persons. Gender norms and expectations clearly influenced the way the children were assessed and the ways their cognitive and emotional states were evaluated. Moreover, as Cohen noted in his research among the elderly, caste and class also figured prominently in narratives about the children on the riverfront, though they by no means fully “encompassed” them. In some cases, these “bold” and “demanding” children were viewed as the victims of poverty and oppression. In other cases, they bespoke the presence of greedy families who had been seduced by the influx of tourist wealth and were seen as willing to “sacrifice” their children in exchange for foreign money. Within the neighborhood of Dasashwamedh, therefore, the West did emerge as “a villain” and for many locals it was precisely the children who worked on the riverfront, especially the boys, who most vividly embodied this fraught encounter between the East and West.

This is also to say that although the children elicited powerful reactions from both tourists and locals, they did so in different ways and for different reasons. As I discussed in chapter 4, tourists’ reactions were in large part motivated by the powerful fantasies and persecutory anxieties that came with being a foreign tourist in India. In Gananath Obeyesekere’s terms, we might say that tourists related to the children not just as social or cultural symbols but as “personal” ones (Obeyesekere 1981).25 Their reactions were as much determined by “intrapsychic” conflicts and defense mechanisms as they were by the social and cultural significance these children took on. By contrast, and perhaps paradoxically, locals’ reactions were far less “personal” in this sense. For people in Dasashwamedh, the children had become public symbols of a rapidly changing and uncertain world, and what their narratives most forcefully communicated were anxieties regarding social roles, reproduction, and change. And yet, as will be seen in the following chapter, these anxieties were not always commensurate with the actions and behavior of the children themselves: for when it came to doing business, the children also reproduced traditional understandings and expectations. In many respects, the informal tourist economy was a moral economy that was “submerged” in sociocultural relations (Polanyi 1957, 48) and regulated by long-standing expectations of everybody’s “right to earn.”