

Growing up in an Urban Family: Soliloquy of a Child

Prof. Rishi Ram Singh¹

INTRODUCTION

While teaching social casework, I read a short poem by Helen Harris Perlman on Ego which presented in a lucid manner the functioning of personality and the inter-relationship between Id, ego and super-ego. Social work educators and practitioners have been using creative literature in different languages to enrich teaching and practice. I have had an opportunity to observe a growing child for a year and how he is being reared by his parents lovingly, angrily, irritatingly and exhaustingly. After another year, I plan to write another part to follow the process of growing up and growing out up to three years. As a participant observer I have tried to interpret the meaning of his behaviour-crying, reaching out, body language, curiosity, frustration, sense of wonder and so on with joy. I have been trying to intervene and neutralise the harshness of parenting through soft talking, lifting him, and taking out, showing birds, animals, seasons, flowers, fruits, tending plants, allowing him to use my study table, etc. Since he has picked up a few words and mostly guides me to see and show his toys, the way he plays, and engages me to join. He heartily enjoys my clowning and foolishness and makes new games out of toys, waste materials, touching flowers and leaves of plants, and watering of plants. It is part of his preparation for his pre-school experience, and also to address later such problems as social inequality, discrimination, disadvantage and segregation through play way. Selection of stories and telling them will sensitise him. I am assuming that I am a child of two years and act accordingly to the extent possible in spite of limitations of age and physical movement. This experience blends the personal and the professional roles.

Parenting as Perceived by the Child: SOLILOQUY OF A CHILD

Thank you dear parents for bringing me to this world and I legitimately deserve your love and nurture. I am physically helpless but am learning fast to overcome it.

I think that I am able to learn, play, speak, and reinvent which is appropriate to my age.

I need your kindness, nurturance (and of others in the family) to survive, 'thrive', seek your protection to develop and participate as a child citizen of India and the World.

I have been conferred above rights by my government and under the UN Charter, and when I grow up, I will appreciate your loving care to help me enjoy these rights and discharge my duty to you and society.

I have limited vocabulary, but I approach you through gestures to fulfil my needs. Allow me to grow in a conducive environment through your love so that I learn to love others when I grow up.

I enjoy being carried in your lap when I insist, I get warmth, love, security, and look at things from a height and beyond to widen my horizon.

¹Late Former Professor and Head, Delhi School of Social Work, Delhi, and former Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

I like human relationships more than electronic toys and TV. They stimulate me more. I feel, experience, and play under your care, and denials frustrate me and deprive me. Altercations, shouting and threats (mock and real) disturb me.

I fail to understand all this, as to how I am responsible. I feel upset. I beg of you not to do it, I am inquisitive and feel good in exploring in the kitchen, indoors and outdoors with you and enjoy other's praise about my actions by clapping and laughter.

I cling to you for sustained care and play inspire of being dirty. I am hungry for food, love, care and nurture. I want to be lulled by stories and songs which do not scare. I feel, find and step out under your oversight.

I get up at night at times to ensure that you are with me as this ensures my safety. My cries do irritate you, but being too young, I am helpless.

I fall, get burnt, and injure myself because I do not yet know the consequences. That is why I engage in action which may be tiring to both of you. I seek, find and step out which makes demands on your time, but am I not justified to do so? For your investment of time?

Please do not separate me from you prematurely, for it may damage my instinctive action. Keep on encourage me. I shall be grateful.

This will build my confidence to face the world. I am lucky to have both of you, my dear parents.

When I ask for lap to lift me you say, "NO".Dadu cannot lift me for long, but I do want to see the world. When I cry, you say keep crying; I feel unheard. I keep swallowing it because I depend on both of you first. Toys and toffees are alright, but you are more sweet to me dear parents, Please listen to my sign language.

Through your bonds, you can build bridges in my life. What are the prospects for an unfeeling person? I wonder. You can help me being creative, consistent, joyful and also remain like this in future. Your cheer cheers me, therefore please remain cheerful.

Frowns, shouts and indignities hurt me, and violate me. Please save me from these, dear parents. I want to learn from your actions, not words. What I see, I repeat, rehearse and carry out.

I want to grow emotionally, physically, socially and culturally. I beseech your help and care to avoid hatefulness, revengefulness, and denial of breast feeding during anger.

Negativities will make me negative. I seek your and others help to avoid it. I may be dreaming or fantasising, but I am too young to say. Please laugh with me as I like to laugh- not sulk. Rude and crude behaviour is too harsh for my tender age. Please empathise with me. I am keen to learn better ways to live and love. I will ever remain grateful.

I touch, reach out and fiddle with objects, I fall and get injured, because I am learning by doing. Allow me to keep doing it. I am yet to learn to use potty. All this is a role rehearsal for my future which will satisfy you. I am luckier than children in the make-shift dwellings. I am sensate and need your sensitivity. I am too tender for crudity and cruelty.

No sooner I am rebuked than I forget it and speak softly and lovingly with you. I do not know tricks or games which are played. And I do not even want to try it. You are my first teachers before I go to play-school. I will cry on separation but seeing that you like this and I should do it, I will adjust, make friends due to your caring efforts and warmth.

But allhurts remain in residual form. No parent is perfect, this I will realise with your help. But I see that you are omnipotent. Your listening and reaching my heart, will assure me that you are doing your best for me. I prefer your loving care than my constitutional rights.

I only listen to you, but due to WhatsApp and Computer games, you only hear me. Your attention is divided, but my attention to you is without distraction. May I crave for full attention: After your return from work, the time left with you is mine? But I may be wrong. I love to do errands, follow your instructions with full attention even though I do not get yours; this is what I feel. For instance, when you took me to monkeys to feed them bananas, I was overjoyed.

My silence is eloquent which I have tried to say in this soliloquy. I have all the good wish for you. Parents treat each child differently. Please do it my dear all, so that I can experience love and give it to others. I will continue to share my upbringing with you and others including my aspirations when I am able to speak.

I want to play in the sunshine without minding tanning of skin, come with me and help me. The questions- what, why, how, who, and where cannot be answered by me- find the answers through my behaviour and its meaning.

No! Don't touch and such admonitions frustrate me. Kill my curiosity; then how do I grow? I can read face and emotions; you also do it by coming to my level. Since I see meals, drinks etc. taken to the bedroom where we sleep, oil-spill was not such a crime to be shouted at. I was taken aback. This will make me look at the world with scare and close my doors for future. I beg of you not to be so harsh. I trembled. How can I face a violent world when I see violence in my room? Please make me a child citizen and feel proud of it.

I rearrange things inside as I see others around and as I like: Dadu's books and flower pots. Dadu allows me to do so. Am I a nuisance to you? You have to find answers by yourself, and steer me. Your poise will make me poised. This is my feeling. Your discipline, patience and sacrifice will be an investment in me and society. What time I

sleep, eat, play, run errands, go out- I have yet to learn, before you put me in a play-school. Believe me, I will not fail you. But a child alone is not responsible for failures in future.

I am intuitive, sensitive and observant and I know who should be contacted for which particular favour. I also know that outdoors are restricted now for good. I feel it, and seek to find my way. I know only this way to express. There may be better ways. I will learn as I grow up.

I am called “father of man” because I may be having at least some qualities. Discover it. Before I end, I want to learn respect from you to respect others and develop. God bless you dear parents. Whatever I do, I do it for satisfying my curiosity. This is normal and appropriate, and not to make you angry or cause irritation. Your patience will help me learn patience for my future life in this violent world. Anger, shouting, mock threats, calling out others to control me is not needed, because I do learn when I see. Allow me to frolic and teach me patience without being impatient.

Help me shape my dreams and guide me to realise them. I look at the world, the sky, wind, rain, plane and mobile, with a sense of wonder. You help me to know it with songs and stories.

I loved Dadi and she loved me. I will ask her to bless us from afar. God bless you dear parents. Thank you and best wishes. Please excuse me if I have hurt you. May you live long to nurture me and others.

Use of Creative Literature in Social Work Practice and Education

The Association of School of Social Work in India had organised a Zonal Seminar at Lucknow decades ago where the use of creative literature was discussed taking examples from the works of litterateurs. The Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai has published articles in the Indian Journal of Social Work occasionally in English and Marathi. Similarly, this has been attempted in other regional languages. This is a powerful medium to sensitize teachers, practitioners and students. If such literature is one's own production based on life experience and field practice, it will augment contextualization, sensitivity, empathy and identification. If those who have benefited from social work intervention share their experiences, it will enhance learning and practice. The above soliloquy can be used in teaching the process of child development, life cycle approach, parenting, interaction within a family (its dynamics), child psychology, education and therapy in foundation and domain (professional) courses, as also other forms of teaching and learning, specially emotional development. This soliloquy is an effort in this direction. Similar attempt can be made to portray children at work or girl child based on observation and action over time. It is in a way mirrors parenting in an authoritarian society. During COVID-19 pandemic times, studies have brought out (The Times of India July 3, 2020) that COVID-19 pandemic is playing havoc with children's mind, Childhood is under suspension. Quarantined children are more troubled. To them stepping out is death, anxiety and irritability. Play regulates emotions and stress. Friends therefore are as important for peer interaction as family

Perlman's emphasis on relationship and individualization, Towles 'emphasis' on age-appropriate behaviour, especially “child-adult” stage, English and Pearson's emphasis on

“growing up and growing out”, and this soliloquy highlighting a segment of “growing up and growing out” are that relevant for practice. All these combined will be an example of integrative learning. My role is only of a neutralizer, stimulator, buffer, clown, player of new games, feeder of flour to ants, gardener, observer and encourager which is being played with all my physical limitations. I act as a fool at times and spring surprise to enhance curiosity and imagination. All this gives joy of being together.

During The International Year of the Family (1994) declared by the United Nations, a National Seminar was held under the auspices of the Ministry of Welfare, Tata Institute of Social Sciences and the UNICEF. Several papers (N:19) were acquired by the Associations of Schools of Social Work in India then and distributed among member schools of social work for reference. One paper described family as the nucleus (heart) of democracy. The other referred to partnership and democratisation of family. These are yet to be put into practice. The “Soliloquy of a Child” only undercores the need for practice in family social work ranging from forms and functions to situations. Apart from families, neighbourhoods, Self-Help Groups, Mahila Mandals, Mahila Panchayats, family welfare agencies, Child Guidance Clinics and NGO’s may provide opportunities for practice to enhance child development. The need to help vulnerable groups will require special attention. Group songs, art forms, and use of clay to enhance creativity and bring out frustrations and deprivations may also be tried. Disciplines of social work, humanities, education clinical psychology and child psychiatry as a team can make a creative contribution in different situations, and address stress and crises in the families to foster positive child development and family empowerment.

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