

CHILD: A MAN IN MINIATURE?

KUM. V. G. KANITKAR, M.A., B.ED., Bombay

INTRODUCTION

A child of three or four years is narrating to the neighbouring children and their laughing mothers, "I saw a tiger yesterday. . . . He often comes to our backyard." There is an uproar at this.

The children have almost finished off a huge pack of biscuits—unwarrantedly, so it seems to their father. He tells them with 'fine' irony, "Now finish it off totally". And the children, happy at this unexpected bounty, obey him!—the father never repeats this mistake!!

Some children are playing. Suddenly there is an uproar and two children seem to be involved in a terrible tussle. Feeling they cannot cope with it, their mothers join the offspring. Soon, the mothers are fighting, the children have forgotten about it, and are looking on with interest.

We always encounter such situations. Usually we have a good laugh, and move on. If we but stop and think, we will find a meaningful pattern repeating. In all these, the adults are judging the children, and so interacting with them, as if the children are adults, only smaller in size. Is it so in reality?

In the above examples and innumerable others, the children are consistently revealing that they are *not* men in miniature. That the child is a separate entity, governed by different dynamics. That the same words mean different things for the children and for adults. How easy it is for children to swing from love to intense anger for the same person, and back perhaps to love and a warm hug.

This liability of childhood helps a child grow up. The phantasy in the first example, and the *naïveté* in the second, are normal and are helping the children get along.

But before proceeding to discuss the implications of this, we should briefly summarize the miracle that is the evolution of a child into an adult.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

In the process of maturation, 'growth' is the physical growth of a child, and 'development' is that aspect which leads the child towards its individuality.

When given proper food, care, exercise and sunshine, provided the child is not excessively troubled in the mind, the growth of a child takes care of itself. Development, on the other hand, takes place through constant and sensitive interaction with the environment, and is, to a large extent, influenced by it.

We can understand the development of a child better by considering the model of the Worlds of Man and how they evolve (Fig. 1).

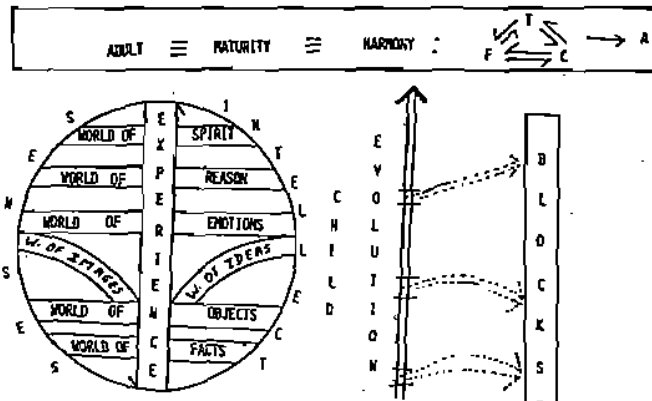


Fig. 1 Evolution of the worlds of man
 T = Thoughts F = Feelings
 C = Commitment A = Action

THE 'WORLDS' OF MAN

Man is a mixed bag of thinking, feeling and imagining. His perception of the external world is undeniably stamped by these. These three almost omnipotent forces shaping him, evolve fairly early in his life. They can almost be called 'worlds' by themselves, as they contain everything necessary for a 'world'—an internal and an external environment, people and things to populate it, and all these in a constant flux. Man functions harmoniously when these are balanced internally as well as with the outside reality. This equilibrium comes naturally when they evolve properly. Imbalanced functioning and the expressions it gives rise to demand considerable understanding on the part of parents, teachers and physicians.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORLDS OF MAN

Right from conception the fetus is interacting with its immediate environment. At birth, no longer encircled by the womb, he is delivered into numerous interactions in a widening world, starting with the family. All interactions bring experience, which is either pleasurable or painful. Pleasurable experiences are desired again, painful ones are avoided. The primary sorter of experience, the pleasure-pain principle, is thus inherent and will guide the individual through life.

The infant, with his limited powers of appreciation, comes to gradually recognise, not people, but functions—what is done to him and by what 'figure'. The mother is not a person yet, the concept of a 'person' being absent, but a figure with a certain touch, the relief of hunger, cuddling, and a range of voices. These various 'figures', and the objects within the reach of the developing senses of the infant, form the primary world of objects of the infant. These objects, by what they do to the infant, decide the world of facts of the

infant, also deciding the 'tone' of the infant towards the world—whether he will find the world a friendly or a hostile place.

These two primary worlds arouse emotive responses in the infant, and also imaginings. Thus develop the worlds of images and ideas. Images and ideas, when compounded with the increasing and repetitive experience of the world, evolve further into the world of emotions.

In the meantime, the sensory-motor apparatus of the child is also developing. Now he can *do* more things, and *remember* more things. He is also being trained in social behaviour, learning to play, and study. Gradually the world of reason emerges. Even after its emergence, the world of reason is very primarily dependent, for most of the adults, on the emotions, and on sensory impressions.

The world of spirit, has been enunciated in the writings of the Eastern and the Western philosophers, and thus we are led to believe in it. But since it is *beyond the sensory experience*, we shall not take it up.

This, in short, is the development of the Worlds of Man. It does not have a rigid time schedule. Each child develops according to his own differing capacities in various areas. He should not be pushed to move on at a rate beyond his means. This, then, represents the general mode of the evolution of the child's mind.

ATTITUDES

The child mirrors its surroundings. An environment which fulfils the needs of the child, produces a child who looks forward to the world. Harsh, rejecting, or insensitive surroundings produce a withdrawn, fearful, anxious child. An unhappy child tries to reduce the unhappiness by a futile attempt at replacing the real world through phantasy, or by shutting out the real world. The more deviant the environment, the more unhappy will be the child, and the more deviant he becomes.

The child in the first example, was obviously making vain attempts to fulfil a need she felt but could not express. The children in the third example, have had to get over the shock of the *mother's violent fighting*, and perhaps they are doing that by the assistance of each other's company.

A rejected child feels he cannot claim *any* love or acceptance from *anyone* and thus often unwittingly turns back from situations of positive *inter-personal relationships*. And so many children are rejected, perhaps because of the wrong sex, or physical unattractiveness, or a wrong time of arrival. Clever parents try to mask the rejection from the world, and from themselves. But children feel it intuitively and respond accurately to the situation.

The 'ugly ducklings' of the family—rejected, ridiculed, exploited—often turn antisocial or criminal, or over-shy and a fearful, depending on their basic disposition.

These deviations in children take on various expressions. These begin as

an exaggeration of a normal response of a certain age. A child may, for example, find that the home wants her to be the 'baby' of the house, that being 'baby' is the only safe posture she can take vis-à-vis the world. We find a child of 10, 15, or even 20 acting like a baby of three or four speaking in a babylike tone, and clinging to others in an infantile way. In extreme cases we find children regressing to the earlier level of development.

Or a child of three suddenly develops a stutter. Now, at around that age some amount of stuttering is a normal response of the still-developing vocal organs. Wise parents neglect it, and help the child by ignoring the occurrence. But here we find the mother extremely anxious, even ready to consult a psychiatrist for it—she has read they are useful people in removing 'complexes'! We enquire further and get the following history about the mother:

The mother, herself an insecure and exploited child from a maladjusted family, has married into a home which showers her with affection. Soon after marriage she conceives, quite against the planning of the couple. Unwilling to share the new-found intimacy, she tries every physical hardship, in a vain attempt to abort the fetus—her sensitivity prohibits her from 'killing' it with drugs. The fetus clings, and is a lusty girl after birth. The father is proud of the child, and through his love and assertion the mother goes from rejection of the child to acceptance. Now she swings to extreme affection; thus she remains, over-attached and over-anxious. The child and she have had a regular clash, about sphincter-control, and then about the emerging and normal assertiveness of the child. And then we find the child with the beginnings of a stutter.

The stutter stopped soon after the others persuaded the mother to neglect it. Once again the child is romping about.

However, this emphasises beautifully the importance of the attitudes of the significant others in the evolution of the child (Fig. 2).

NORMALCY

A normal child is bubbling with energy. Confident of the love of the others, dependent on it, he goes ahead with his own life, towards greater and greater autonomy. A block may occur, however, at any stage, due to the factors discussed above. A block always takes a person towards an imbalance in the dependency-autonomy relationship with the outside world—the person becomes either over-dependent, or too unwilling to maintain any reciprocal relationships, as they involve receiving affection from others, willingly and happily (Fig. 3).

The imbalance always begins because the surroundings are trying to stop the child arbitrarily and forcibly from a healthy enthusiastic expression of the 'zest for life' every child inherits. Or, in rare cases it can begin simply because some person very important to the child has a distorted view of the world, and passes it on to the child.

We can prevent these blocks. We can help children grow up normally.

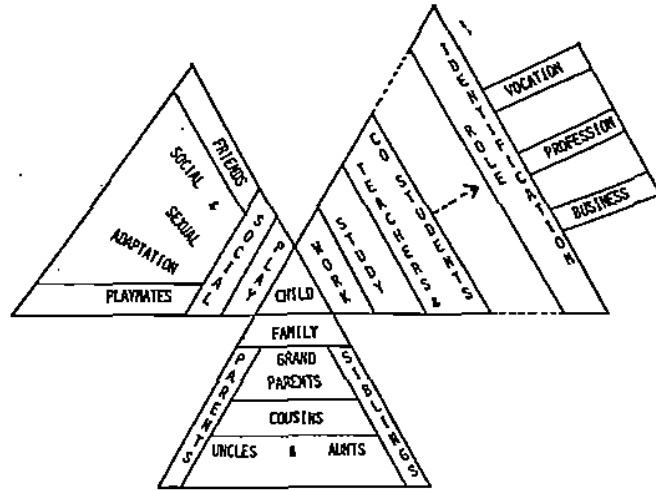


Fig. 2 Environment of the child

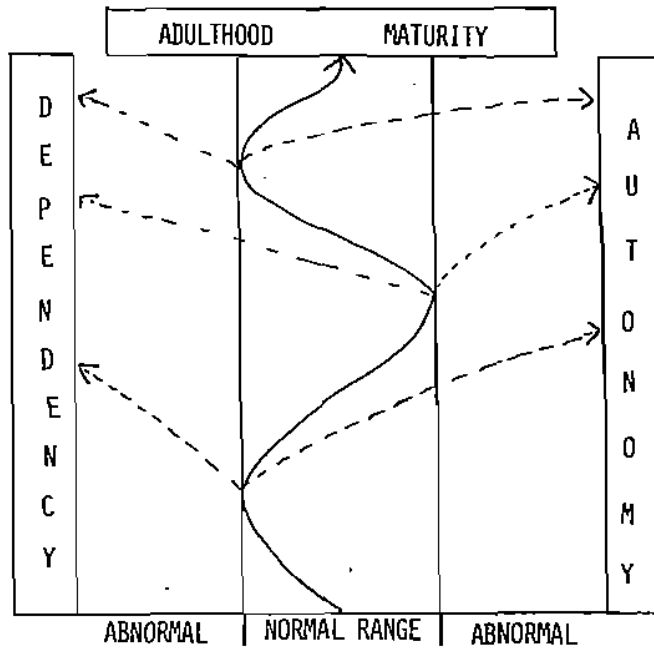


Fig. 3 Normality: Abnormality

A block can happen because of so many people in the environment, but it can always be recognized and removed. A wise parent, a teacher and when both fail, a wise physician can always accept the child uncritically yet without blindness. He can guide the child towards normalcy and love of life, through the love which allows freedom, yet insists that the fruits of freedom be accepted by the child, and accompanies the child mentally in this acceptance (Fig. 4).

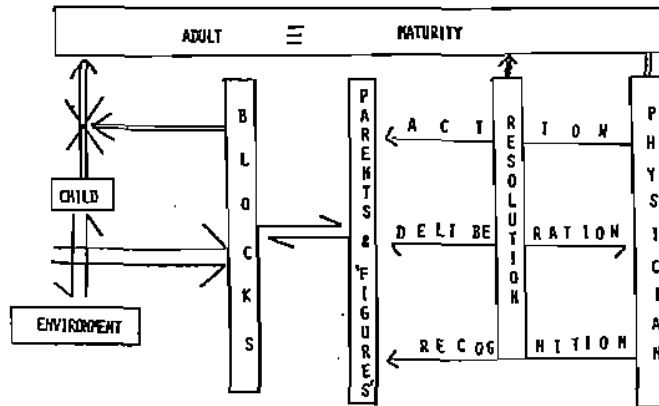


Fig. 4 The role of the physician

CONCLUSION

Thus, let us be happy if the child is noisy and engrossed with *his* life and pursuits. Let us not stop the child in his explorations always because it would suit our convenience if he is quiet and submissive and does not ask many questions. A happy child will evolve into a happy and confident adult who lives fully and vigorously, and enjoys meeting the challenges and responsibilities of adulthood. A child who is not too surrounded by touch-me-nots and don'ts and yet can always expect to be told and helped if he goes wrong, will be a happy, noisy, curious child, who bumps into everything, mostly life. If we know the joy he derives from it, and how much it is helping him, we will also enjoy it, and be patient.