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India touched the one billion population mark in 2001 and has the largest child population in the world. India is home to 414 million children and 26 million more are born every year – more than in any other country (UNICEF, 2004). Kerala made a remarkable achievement in the demographic transition within a short period of time. The crude birth rate was 44 per 1000 population in 1951 – 1961 and declined to 18 per 1000 population in 1995 – 2000. The fertility rate also declined from 1960’s which was 5.6 per woman to 1.8 in the 1990s. Along with these demographical transitions the State have the obligation to provide better care to the child. The constitution of India in its Directive Principles of State Policy ensures that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity so that childhood is protected against exploitation and moral and material abandonment.

A child’s first line of protection and care should be the family. As the World Summit Plan of Action states, “For the full and harmonious development of their personality, children should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. Accordingly all institutions of society should respect and support the efforts of parents and other care–givers to nurture and care for children in a family environment” (Annan, 2001).

Under the traditional view, children originally were considered the virtual property of their parents, the position eventually evolved into a presumption that
parents are the natural protectors of their children and act in their interests (Hegar, 1989).

During the early childhood period, the child is completely cared for by the parents. The child cannot develop automatically into a full blown human being. She/he is to be provided planned care and adequate socialization opportunities in order to attain human status. Effective role of parents during childhood provides a child the best possible inputs for maximum development of its potential as a human being (Senthil and Shanmughavelayutham, 2008). She/he is vulnerable to environmental threats and so their survival and health needs and safety must be met first. His/her cognitive and emotional development has to be strengthened with stimulating surrounding, love, affection and warmth.

A traditional family unit consists of mother, father and children. It provides physical and emotional security and a sense of belongingness to its members. The family extends the widest and most comprehensive protection and assistance to its members for their mental, physical and psychological growth. Even though some functional and structural changes happen in families, it continues to provide emotional, financial and material support to its members, which are essential to the growth and development. Kumari, (2005) has observed that “The family is a group defined by a relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children”.

The various functions of the family include reproduction, socialization, nurturance and emotional support. Among these functions, reproduction is an important function. Procreation is the core process on which the survival of the species depends.
Survival happens mainly through child rearing. The human infant needs intensive care till it reaches late childhood. In complex modern societies, the need for child rearing is stretching beyond childhood. Child rearing is the critical medium for the growth of infant into effective citizens.

The ways and ideas of parenting function and child rearing by the parents differ across nations. Some of the child rearing practices are altered as cultural prescriptions change. Parents, in addition to researchers, are influenced by theories of child development. However, parents in higher socio-economic strata change more rapidly in response to theory changes than parents in lower socio-economic strata.

The family in contemporary society has undergone change in its functions and in structure. One important change in the Indian family is the increase in the number of nuclear families, while the joint family system still prevails. The process of industrialization and urbanization has led to the migration of young men and women to the cities to earn their living. Thus, a new type of household consisting of husband, wife and children has emerged (Iyer, 2004). Historically and across the globe parents have to cope with the threats like poverty, ill health, dispersal of support networks, conflicting demands of dual career, increase influence of peers and media and these threats potentially undermine their effectiveness.

The economic and social context is now more complex and opaque than before and meeting the needs of children has gained a higher legal and social priority. Recognition of child abuse and deficiencies gave particular thrust to formation of laws and policies. Most national laws recognize that children should receive culturally assigned minimum level of care and positive developmental opportunities and freedom
from abuse. This is now enshrined in the United Nations Charter of Children’s Rights. Parents are regarded as agents of these rights with the state in supportive back up role. There is a gradual cultural shift in most developed countries towards recognizing the qualities of child rearing as the major shaper of children’s state and prospects.

The need of clarifying the process of upbringing a child at home by parents to that of formal education of a child at school has made childrearing a hot topic for discussion. The important role in child rearing is providing physical and psychological security and to protect a child from dangers. Effective parenting has never been felt more important than now, to shape the coming generations affecting the world around them (Raja, 2009). Raising children serves many purposes like producing healthy and well adapted children, ensuring support for parents as they grow older, providing protective social environment, transmission of values and skills and to find meaning for their own existence through having and bringing up children. Children can develop their potentials only through proper child rearing. Therefore, the parents should be more aware about the importance of child rearing.

1.1. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The child’s biological, psychological and social growth takes place within the home at the start of its life. The family is the major environmental influence and remains throughout the child’s life pervasive of all influences. From the home arise the child’s feelings of adequacy and security, concept of self and the world around.

The young parents who have no training will have to depend on their own ways and means to find solutions to the problems they face in child rearing. The most
important asset of a child as it begins life is to have emotionally healthy and confident parents. With the advent of the nuclear family, the child is compelled to spend more time with the parents alone and so parents have now got a more significant role in upbringing and educating the children. In nuclear family, the family size is very small and the influence of parents becomes more intensive. Hence, the role of parents and family in the development of the child has become more important.

In Indian culture, a strong attachment exists - between parents and children. Majority of Indian families involve the coexistence of three generations under one roof. The industrial revolution provided work outside the home and farm for women and children as well as men. When the economy began to change from agriculture to industry, there was some change in roles of the parents. Industrialization provided an opportunity for expansion of women’s roles but only few jobs were open to women initially. Today, more than half of all mothers with children under 18 are employed outside the home, occupying work roles similar to men. In 19th century families, mothers assumed more child rearing tasks. Today, the role of father is being redefined by technological and ideological changes in our society. Today most families require the economic contributions of both parents in order to afford food, clothing, shelter, services and other goods needed for themselves and their children. Mother’s employment - always improve the economic wellbeing of families. But along with this, it creates problems in child rearing.

The commitment towards children was enshrined in our constitutional provisions. Our policy ensures that every child in this country should have the
environment that gives it opportunity to realize its inherent physical and cognitive potentials (Sharma and Bangar, 2005).

A survey of studies in this field shows lacking relationship between parent and child, gender differences in child rearing, impact of dual carrier on marital and family relationship and children’s perception about parenting style (Belsky and Fearon, 2004; Bhogle, 1991; Kunwar et al., 2006; Ashok, 2008; Sachdeva and Misra, 2008; Sinha and Mishra, 2007; Aleem and Danish, 2008; Kapil and Sonawat, 2002; Jekielek, 1998). Many studies have not been conducted in the field of child rearing in India, particularly in Kerala. A study like this is expected to throw light on the different parenting styles and the role of marital satisfaction on child rearing. Based on the findings of the study, programs can be chalked out to educate parents by whom a change in their practices can be brought about. It is also expected to give insight to all those concerned with children, the family and child welfare agencies, social welfare organizations and the government to develop programs for the benefit of children.

1.2. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Children are the future of a nation and they constitute the most important section of society. Child rearing is a skill which is very essential for the parents to acquire and it depends on various factors like parental relationship and family environment. Parents have the most potent effect on the personality development of their children. Children learn a lot from them both in a formal and informal manner through imitation, suggestion and identification. Parent’s marital relationship and family environment have an important role in the development of behaviour and
formation of a positive attitude in the child (Mcneal and Amato, 1998; Baharudin and Luster, 1998)

Transition to parenthood is a challenge and dramatic experience for every couple. The qualities of parents affect their children’s cognitive and social competence. The negative home environment and marital conflict between parents can seriously affect the development of a child.

In Kerala, the pattern of urbanization is distinct and bears no comparison with any other state excepting adjacent parts in Tamilnadu and Karnataka. By going through the census figures, one gets the feeling that the rate of urbanization is speeding up in this state (CENSUS, 2001).

The preadolescent periods are the most impressionable and crucial years in the life of an individual. The overall development is most rapid in this period and it is the base of later development. The children in these years absorb everything from their environment and keep it in their memory. Children in this period need good stimulating home environment.

In researcher’s work experience, as a teacher for four years and as a psychiatric social worker in her counseling sessions, she came across a number of children’s behavioural problems. Majority of their problems have root cause in upbringing of their parents. Overprotection or rejection from the part of parents may lead to deviant behaviour or withdrawal of children (Overbeek et al., 2006). Most children who express behavioural problems have some relation with the problems in their home
environment or marital relationship of their parents. So the researcher had interest to find out the various patterns of child rearing in Kerala and conducted this study.

1.3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The approach taken by parents in raising a child has been long considered a major influence on the child’s later development. Child rearing practices are a complex set of behaviours influenced by a wide range of factors including cultural and religious background, parent’s personality, gender, marital satisfaction (Belsky and Fearon, 2004) and child temperament etc. The relationship between these factors and child rearing examined by any previous studies are rare (Kendler et al., 1997).

In Kerala, there existed joint family system which gave a healthy atmosphere for children’s development. From 1960’s the population rate started to decline. The total fertility rate was 5.6 per woman in the 1950’s declined to 3.7 in the 1970’s and reached 1.8 in the 1990’s. It declined both in urban and rural area (Census 2001). Then started the existence of a nuclear family system. From seven offspring joint family system, there start to take-up a family of three or four members. Such kind of family system was new during that period and parents did not have much training and support system for child rearing. They were the first generation of nuclear families in Kerala. They did not encourage a value-oriented child training. The size of the family is becoming smaller and smaller to the extent of being reduced to one child couple and in some case childless families (Iyer, 2004). In joint families, there existed a sharing mentality and happiness and stress were shared. Therefore, they had the mental ability to face problems. They saw their parents solving problems by discussing with other family members. But at present parents are staring at problems. They lack proper
problem discussion with other family members and problem solving situations in their families. The children have no such role models.

Now a days the development of children is not value based. People are giving more importance to money and fame. Students select careers according to the scope for job. Today’s children have opportunity for education but it is only job-oriented education, it only instructs them to become best in their career. In western countries, this trend started in 1920s as part of industrialization and there it reached its peek now, with lots of crime by children indulging in criminal activities including murder, their teacher or classmates in class room. The Ministry of UK and US have started to introduce new parent education programs to help the parents for the holistic development of children. In India, the juvenile crimes are increasing. But even now the importance of child rearing is not recognized as a need and not much child rearing education programs have been started. So this study will explore the current rearing patterns of the families and by identifying the problems the researcher can suggest better ways to start such programs.

Although the family structure exists throughout the world, research indicates that child rearing practice is different in urban families. However, the current empirical literature on child rearing in urban families lacks framework, which incorporates the relationship of marital satisfaction and family environment on child rearing.

Indian society is in a face of transition, there is likely to be a conflict between the traditional and modern values. The defects in our child-rearing system are the root cause of most of our society’s most pressing social problems. Majority of the
behavioural problems in childhood have relation with child rearing practices of family
(Biglan and Taylor, 2000).

If the parents can provide the best child rearing practices that will improve the
children’s academic performance, reduce the proportion of children and adolescents
aggression and social rejection and in that way decrease the incidence of crime, school
drop-out, smoking, other substance use, and high risk sexual behaviour. Then
developing an effective analysis of present child-rearing system and its suggestions
could be of very high priority. Research on child rearing for children’s development
will continue to contribute to our understanding of how to improve outcomes for
children behaviours. Scientists and policy makers would do well to recognize how
much is known about how parents influence children’s successful development.

The study aims to find answers to the following questions:

(a) What is the socio demographic background of the urban families?

(b) What are the different child rearing practices adopted by the urban families?

(c) What are the different parenting styles of the parents in urban families?

(d) Is there any relationship between parenting style and child rearing practices?

(e) Is there any difference in child rearing practices of father and mother?

(f) What is the level of marital quality in spouses of urban families?

(g) How conducive is their family environment?

(h) Is there any influence of marital quality and family environment on child
rearing?
It is hoped that the study will add more clarity and strength to the need for understanding the child rearing practices of urban families and its relation to marital quality and family environment. It is also hoped that the findings will help the Non Government Organizations (NGOs) or policy makers to form parenting education programs for the welfare of the society.

1.4. CHAPTERISATION

The present study ‘Child rearing practices in Urban Families of Kerala’ is presented in seven chapters.

A brief introduction to the study is given in Chapter 1. It includes the background of the study, the statement of the research problem and the research questions. An extensive review of the conceptual and empirical literature relevant and related to the research study is given in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 presents in detail the research methodology adopted for the study. The research design, objectives of the study and the hypotheses to be tested, the universe of the study, sampling procedure adopted, the tools used for the study, and the limitations and ethical considerations of the study are presented in this chapter.

Chapter 4 deals with the analysis and discussion. It includes the profile of the respondents, the various dimensions of child rearing practices and its relation to various socio demographic factors are also discussed.

Chapter 5- The relation of child rearing practices with parenting style, marital quality and family environment are discussed in chapter 5
Chapter 6 includes the parenting styles of the families, marital quality of the parents and family environment and its relation to socio-demographic factors is described.

Chapter 7 consists of the major findings, conclusions and the suggestions put forward in the light of the study. Bibliography is given after chapter 7

Appendix is the support document to Chapter 3 and they enumerate Tools of Data Collection.