INTRODUCTION

Human behaviour has ever intrigued the philosophers, educationists and psychologists and has led them to different paths to seek the answers to their queries. Behaviour is a complex phenomenon, determined by a constellation of internal and external conditions which surround the responding individual. It is explained as a function of the interaction of individual factors and the perceived environment of the respondent.

The internal or individual factors are determined by heredity, which are the sum total of the traits potentially present in the individual. It is the fixed element in the situation and sets the limit to individual growth and development. But hereditary characteristics may be modified by environmental conditions. Differences in physical or psychological characteristics may be attributed partly to genetic and partly to environmental variables.

Environment means certain physical and social forces, conditions and external stimuli which exert important influences on a person. Very few people can avoid or escape its effects and the total forces acting upon the individual is rather complex and difficult to isolate. Thus, environment is an inseparable variable for the individual. Whether it makes or mars the opportunities for his development, one has to live and interact with it.
Inherited capacities cannot develop to the fullest extent until and unless proper environment gives them adequate opportunities. It is the interaction of both the fixed and the flexible components that help the individual capacities to blossom in the proper direction and bring fulfilment and contentment to human life.

Environmental studies have gained importance since attention was focussed on the heredity - environment problem. Not every success and failure could be explained away by taking only heredity into account and leaving environment completely out of picture. Hence the concept of "nature-nurture" was added to various behavioural aspects and quantification of an individual's immediate environment was sought. The environment in the formative period of life was found to be more influential in developing personality traits, attitudes and values by providing learning opportunities. Thus the home environment of the child - the primary stimulus for his learning and development - came to be reckoned as a major field of study.

Prior to seventeenth century, no special emphasis was given to children. They were not regarded as a particular class of human beings demanding extra attention. After they attained minimum independence from maternal care, they were treated as miniature adults, spending their time with matured people.
Seventeenth century ushered in a great change in attitudes towards children. Scholars and philosophers became interested in children's development and encouraged the separation of the child from the adults for their spontaneous growth.

Towards the end of seventeenth century, Locke opined that the child's mind was a *tabula rasa* - a blank slate upon which impression was created by his experiences. He said that the child's behaviour was determined by his experiences, by rewards and punishments provided by his environment.

Towards the end of eighteenth century, Rousseau put forward the theory that education of the children should be based on their natural impulses and interests rather than being set by adult criteria. This naturalistic viewpoint paved the way for Pestalozzi who further elaborated Rousseau's idea by adapting teaching to the child's individual abilities and interests.

A little later Froebel stated that education should be based on the child's psychophysical and social needs and laid special emphasis upon child training.

A new trend was introduced by Galton. He believed that intelligence was related to the reaction time of the sense organs. But this approach failed to solve the burning problem of the day - the prediction of academic success of children through intelligence.
It was Stanley Hall who focussed attention to the relationship of intellectual maturity and academic achievement. His outstanding contribution to child psychology came in the form of developing the questionnaire method for investigation and this heralded the systematic and scientific study of the child in the twentieth century.

The viewpoints of the pioneers left an indelible influence on the present-day concept of the child and his education. Like Locke and Rousseau, some modern psychologists believe that development takes place as a passive response to pressures, while others see it as a result of the child's purposeful interaction with his immediate environment.

The experiences which the children acquire from environment are not identical for all individuals. Every culture provides a unique opportunity for those who live and interact with it. Thus, people from different parts of the world have different types of experiences, because educational systems, living conditions, child-rearing techniques and learning opportunities in one area differ sharply from those of other parts. An environment providing adequate and favourable experience may be considered as more advantageous one for proper cognitive development and adjustment of the individual. The extreme environmental forces have been found to exert great influence specially on the young children (between 5-7 years) because of their inability to escape the impact of overpowering stimuli, physically or psychologically.
Though environment has considerable effect in modifying human abilities yet neither all individuals, nor all potentialities are equally affected by it - because genetic endowment cannot be totally disregarded in favour of environment. General school achievement, out of many, is more clearly determined by environment. This area has been found to be particularly affected by school, peer group and home environment in which the children get the maximum opportunity to learn. There are some homes which encourage and reinforce school learning whereas there may be others indifferent to it. Within the limits of genetic potentials for learning, environment determines the extent and the direction in which learning will take place. Thus, the home became an important field of study as the source of knowledge about the child's early environment.

Different types of homes have differential impact on the child. The democratic homes, with permissiveness and affectionate parent-child relationship are considered as providing strong emotional support to the child. Children brought up in authoritarian homes with many rules and restrictions become inhibited, inactive, lacking in curiosity and creativity. Different gradations of attitudes towards the child and his needs may be found within these two extremes.

The course of the individual's life and outlook may thus be greatly influenced by the nature of his home atmosphere during the formative years. Much of the differences manifested in adulthood may be attributed to both innate and environmental differences.
With the new trend towards child-oriented culture, the education of children also gained new dimensions. As the child's position in the family and society took a new turn, the parents concentrated more attention on the education and development of his abilities. Mothers, always and everywhere, have been entrusted with child-rearing. A child is most helplessly dependent on its parents for the physical needs of food and shelter as well as the psychological need for love, affection and protection. The early parent-child relations centre on the mother for satisfying these basic needs. The child perceives the mother as providing the affection, care and emotional warmth. The mother is looked upon as more friendly than the father. She is usually the more favoured parent for these reasons and stands for need, satisfaction, pleasure and contentment.

The close and prolonged association of the mother and the child during the first few years of life lays the foundation of the latter's adjustment and development in the future. Hence mother's attitude towards her child affects the home atmosphere greatly.

In this study an attempt has been made to investigate the effect, if any, of some home factors on the academic achievement of school-age children. The data have been collected by means of a structured interview schedule constructed by the author. The Parental Attitude Research Instrument was translated and adapted for the same purpose. The collected
data have been treated statistically for determination of inter-group differences, the degree of relationship between the criterion and different home variables; finally, multiple regression equation was computed with the aim to determine the relative contribution of different home variables on children's academic achievement.

The study was confined within the city limits of Calcutta only, because the limited resources at the disposal of a single investigator hardly permit too ambitious a plan to cover a large sample in order to facilitate generalisation.

It is hoped that inspite of some shortcomings, this work will throw some light on the environmental factors conducive to children's education. Out of the two variables - heredity and environment - one can manipulate only the environment. If better environment can be created by guiding the parents to make better homes and give more facilities to their children so that their learning opportunities can be increased, then the children, the parents, the society and the nation at large will be benefitted by having greater number of better citizens.
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