CHAPTER - VIII

Mother's perception of the child:

Frame of Reference in the Interview situation:

The following questions provided the frame of reference for mothers to talk about their children in a general way:

Q.2 What are the difficulties which people like you experience in rearing children?
   (i) Any other difficulties?
   (ii) How can these difficulties be overcome?
   (iii) What can you personally do to remove these difficulties?

Q.3 What difficulties did you specially experience in bringing up your own child (of pre-school age between 1½ to 6 years)?
   (i) What difficulties were your biggest headache?
   (ii) How did you overcome these difficulties?

Q.4 What is your notion of a well-developed child?
   (i) What else?
   (ii) Why do you think so?
Q. 5 What can a mother do to secure optimal development of the child?

(i) Are you able to do all that ought to be done for the child?

(ii) Why do you think that way?

Spontaneous remarks about children made by mothers during the course of the interview were also considered for determining their cognition of the child.

Mothers of children less than six years of age but above 1½ years from workers homes, middle class and upper class homes were chosen for interview through non-directive technique.

Workers' Families:

Workers' families interviewed in this connection were recent (within the past 5 to 10 years) migrants to the city from the rural areas of Gujarat, Saurashtra and Marwar. They had been driven to settle in the city through famine, unemployment in the countryside or through attraction of better wages in the city.
These families are settled on the vacant land (either belonging to the municipal corporation or to private owners) in and round Ahmedabad. They pay a monthly rent of Rs. 10 to 17 for the ground over which they have built an improvised shelter of some sort for themselves. They live under constant fear of being evicted from their temporary habitat as they know that the ground may be required any moment for building purposes. The families interviewed pursued the following occupations: cleaning buses of the municipal transportation system, scavenging, plastering of walls, employment in factory and domestic service. Families belonging to the same occupational caste and hailing from the same rural background usually settle in the same neighbourhood though other castes having friendly ties with the influential members of the neighbourhood are also accepted. It is not uncommon therefore to find a Gujarat, A Saurashtra or a Barwari village right in the middle of the city.

Social atmosphere of a workers' colony:

Women-folk of a workers' colony do not fully accept their new urban surroundings. The city appears
to them to strange place. The anxiety caused by the new is assuaged through their idealizing the 'pure' air, 'pure' water and 'pure' food of the countryside as nutritive and revitalizing. Articles of food available in the city are looked upon as adulterated and debilitating. Nor is their perception of the city people any better who appear to them as irritable, short-tempered and void of humaneness. The following are their stock comments about the middle class:— "The rich woman for whom I work uses filthy language to which we are not accustomed". "The city women are void of decorum and moral integrity", "they are guided by no set principles, no ethical code". The same attitude prevails towards civic amenities provided by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation such as the school and the hospital - "We are afraid of our children being taken to school or hospital or our women-folk being given birth control pills". The availability of the cereals which form their staple diet in rationed quantity is a strain on them and adds to their adverse perception of their urban surroundings.

Thus their living conditions in the city make for all these tendencies which make for group cohesion in under-privileged groups. This means a fear of the new
social surroundings promotes regressive trends and the aged members of the colony (women in particular) insist on every member's conforming to the traditional code and their sticking together. At the same time the younger and the more adjustable members try to make a positive adjustment to the urban society through subtle defiance. Superficially the social atmosphere is dominated by the aged.

Attitude towards the interviewer:

The interviewers for collecting data on child rearing were women graduates in sociology and social work hailing from middle class families. Their mode of contact with the working class homes was the following:

On the first day an interviewer would contact a mother alone in a colony. This mother appeared for all intents and purposes a cooperative and polite individual. The next day the same mother would become cold, reserved and even hostile to the interviewer. The interviewers met similar treatment in all the colonies they visited. A woman who would agree to be interviewed on
the first day would be surrounded by the women of the colony after the interviewer had left the colony. Collective effort will then be made by all of them at guessing the motive of the interviewer's visiting their colony. May be she is a spy from the rationing department to check on their bogus ration cards or to spy on the illicit means used by the colony people for procuring the rationed cereal. May be the interviewer is collecting sick children to be taken to the hospital or the illiterates to the school. Some one would draw attention to the fact that the middle class woman is an unmarried person and all the suspicion entertained about post-adolescent unmarried women would be projected on to the interviewer. Thus on returning for continuing her work on the following day the interviewer would meet coldness and reserve from the same mother who had agreed to sit for an interview. Women in sympathy with the interviewer would reveal the way colony regarded the interviewer and interviewing.

Reasons given for avoiding the interviewer and the interview situation throw light on the way children are perceived by mothers, the man-woman relation
in the colony and the mode of resistance to the inquiry. The following extracts from the diaries of the interviewers are relevant in this connection:

(1) The male chief said, "The people here do not trust you. Some say you are an spy from the police".

(2) An old woman suddenly interrupted my interview with a mother by shouting loudly, "If we don't meddle with your affairs why then you (meaning the interviewer from the white collar class) people come and molest us by asking all kinds of questions about children. If any of these prostitutes (referring abusively to the working class women from her conduct) you (referring to the interviewer) reserve your questioning to your own kind".

(3) 'G' - working class woman said, "My husband objects to my talking to you. I can't afford to be beaten by my husband for revealing to you all about my child. He was very much upset about my talking you about our child yesterday. He said that I (his
About a dozen men met the interviewer and told her to direct her questions not to their women-folk but to them. The interviewer then asked them "when do children start growing their first tooth and by what age do they have all their milk teeth?" To this one man replied, 'I tell you the correct reply. How can my foolish and ignorant wife tell you about teething. Children have their first tooth at the beginning of winter and grow all their teeth by the beginning of summer'.

Men-folk strongly advised their women-folk against talking to the interviewer if she happened to be an unmarried girl but accept her if she is a married woman.

Many women jocularly remarked "sister why don't you get married, have your own children and then know all about child rearing".
one woman said angrily, "Children are plucked out of our genitals as anywhere in the world and that is all that I have to say on the subject and nothing more".

perception of the child amongst mothers from workers' colonies:

(1) These mothers showed a tendency to think of the child much younger and more immature than the child they happened to be nursing at the moment. One of them when asked to comment on the difficulties she experienced in rearing children (her child was four years old) referred to birth pangs as the main difficulty. Another one started answering the same question by the remarks "Sister; child is a part of myself and there are difficulties and more difficulties from the beginning to the end". The word 'difficulty' meant to them bodily pains, difficulties of pregnancy, confinement, etc. Here are the remarks of the mother of a two years old child from the colony - "If I take butter milk he becomes ill. If I take raw vegetables like onion, leafy, vegetables, etc., he gets stomach trouble". These mothers usually quote a number of restrictions they put on themselves to keep
the child healthy and fit. If a mother eats bread prepared out of currently harvested wheat, or drinks water standing after returning home from outside, her child is bound to fall ill of ulcers, gastric trouble, etc. It was not possible for her to think of the child having difficulties by himself and in his own right. She put herself in the centre of these difficulties and the child appeared to her suffering on account of her lapses. Here are further remarks about the future of a child perceived by one of them. "Children are a burden now but they will be a support to us in old age. My son will earn and I shall be fed by him. I shall have him betrothed to a beautiful girl." The child is perceived by her from birth to maturity as a part of herself and not as an individual apart from herself.

To perceive the child as much younger than it is, is certainly determined by the working class mother's tendency to view the child as a part of her anatomy. Her connotation of the word child is fused with her memory of the biological processes such as sexual act, pregnancy, etc., involved in child birth. Their witty suggestion to the interviewer to get married,
bear children and thereby know all about children shows how child and the biology of sex are intermixed in their perception. Again the old working class women's angry outburst "Children are plucked out of our genitals" indicates her equating the child with genital activity.

(2) The mere suggestion of an interview about the rearing of children released complex emotions which are difficult to comprehend and much more difficult to explain. Secrecy about the child, anger at someone probing into the secrecy, evasion of information, inability to recall details, bashfulness while talking about children appear to be some of the ingredients of these emotions. Roots of these emotions lie in the way the mother perceives and reacts to the changes in her own anatomy in the process of her becoming mother. The child provides a basis of her project these emotions outside herself. An important clue to the functional value of these emotions is to understand them as part of the activity of the mother to achieve harmony with the child - and thereby with her primal narcissism. These complex emotions also hold a clue to the working class woman's fear of the hospital and the school for her child.
(3) The philosophy that the child grows naturally is deeply ingrained amongst the working class mothers. "We don't bother about our children" is the crisp remark of one of them. "You rich people pay too much attention to children and thereby spoil them". The middle class mother takes notice of many details of her child's behaviour which bore a working class mother. To give good food and plenty of it is what interests the working class mother the most about her child. For its diseased conditions, etc., she looks to herself or her Gods. "Gods give these children to us and if they are not pleased they take them away from us". For an individual mother to look for the conditions of disease in the environment leaves a working class mother cold. She must look to her Gods. "How can we individually meet our difficulties? Can we avoid unhappiness? These are determined by Gods". In spite of this resignation to forces outside the individual control the working class mother has three criteria of a well-developed child—

(i) He must eat and sleep well, (ii) he must be able to exercise his limbs well in play and (iii) he must be able to use words at a certain stage of his development.
The working class men's resistance to interview and their threatening their women-folk against revealing anything about children to strangers show a certain kind of emotional involvement in their children. This is in contrast with the practice of the middle class fathers who do not bother much about the pre-school child. This seems to be related to the children's role in adding to the income of the family at a comparatively early age in working class families in contrast with the middle class practice where the usage of delaying children's taking to gainful occupations has found currency. The value of this emotional involvement for the men-folk's acquiring a kind of intra-psychic balance cannot be gauged with the help of the available data.

Problem of education of the working class children:

The working class mother's attitude makes sense if she could be viewed as part of a group engaged in a particular trade restricted in its locomotion and therefore tied to the same surroundings. The harmony between the mother and the child is extended to the dwelling place, the neighbourhood, tools, place of work, fauna and flora.
of the surroundings. Thus a harmony between the mother's attitude towards the child, family's adjustment to a traditional occupation and a fairly stable human and natural environments is discernable in small occupational groups in the countryside. The original surroundings are no longer favourable for taking out an existence for the group and the harmony of the group with the surroundings has been disturbed, while adults make a limited adjustment to the urban surroundings through their occupational relations the mother-child relations continue on the old pattern which creates handicaps for the child. To send children to the school for example has become a religion with those who have accepted the urban mode of life. The school does not create the same enthusiasm amongst the new entrants to the city from the village as it does in the urban population.

The following questions have to be answered in this connection:

(1) Should the new migrants from the countryside be allowed to adjust themselves to the urban situation in their own hit and miss way or a planned education and adjustment is the desirable way?
(2) If a planned approach seems to be a reasonable approach what should be done to promote harmony between the home and the school?

The specific issues that arise in this connection are:

(2-a) Has the social structure of the school for their children to be materially altered or shall it remain the same as for the middle class? If it has to be altered what should be the special features of the schools for them?

These questions refer to very vital and practical issues on national importance. For example the tremendous drop in the number of scholars in the primary schools, which is an index of the lack of coordination between the school and rural communities, means, that the money spent on primary education does not yield proportionate results.

About the middle class mothers contacted in this connection:

The term 'middle class' is used in the present context to refer to those people who use more brain than brawn in their occupational pursuits. Besides
other skills the effective use of language and dexterity in handling numbers are an essential part of their preparation for earning their livelihood; clerical work, managerial work, retail and wholesale trade, share brokerage, owning small manufacturing plants such as grain grinding, ice plants, etc., and employing manual workers to run the plants, teaching, legal work, medicine, engineering and civil service are considered by common consent as middle class occupations, and, carry a fair amount of social status and prestige. A bulk of middle class is composed of the people who took to the occupations in government service, banking trade, and other developments made possible through the impact of the west, and, a part of their prestige comes from their closeness with the ruling elite. Most of them entered these occupations due to their uncertain status in the traditional social hierarchy, through personal merit and competition. Hence, this class is characterized by a faith in rising high in social status and prestige through personal merit - a faith which is not a marked feature of the old aristocratic families. Keeping themselves well informed of current events through the newspaper habit, sending their children to school, and preparing them for competitive examinations are the
essential features of the middle class. For them there is no looking back to their traditional occupations for support in times of crisis. Another article of faith with them is their unlimited faith in new opportunities for themselves. This faith persists inspite of the rebuffs they meet. The middle class has accepted and owned certain standards in residential accommodation, hygienic living and certain luxuries, which are cherished by them. There is comparatively more leisure available for middle class women than there is for the working class women, though, that is not true of the families with large number of children. At least the trend towards cherishing leisure is there. None of the middle class women are found to be totally illiterate, and they prefer living out in the suburbs of the old city.

Mothers chosen for interview hailed from the background detailed above:

Attitude of the middle class mothers towards the interview:

Whereas the working class mothers as a rule showed a tendency to be 'interviewer' conscious, the middle class mother on the other hand made an effort
to fall in line with the purpose of the interview. Most of them volunteered information and were gratified at the idea of research in child development. Inquiries of this kind will certainly contribute to the improvement of the education of the next generation was the comment of one of them. No interviewees from the middle class however read hostile designs in the interview situation. Of course some of them were sceptical of anything coming out of research in child development. These new ganged ideas work well in America and not in India was the cynical remark of another middle class mother. While many mothers talked freely about their children they did not want to be quoted by name in the reports. The working class husbands had showed marked anxiety at the thought of information about their children being revealed to unmarried women interviewers, and threatened to beat their wives if they participated in the interview. Fear references to husbands were singularly absent from the mental horizon of the middle class mother interviewees. This fact is of more than passing interest and the husband's emotional involvement in the child reflects a particular kind of social climate obtaining in the working class homes. There was a good deal of resistance by the middle class mothers to the T.A.T. because they could not connect the inquiry on child rearing with their making a story about the bizarre scene of a T.A.T. card.
The middle class mother's perception of the child:

References to the child as "a part of my being" causing pain at the time of delivery and during confinement, and other comments on the biological relations of the child with the mother were singularly lacking in the middle class mothers' statement about their children. At least these biological references were not verbalized by them. Middle class mothers however did make references to their selves when talking about their children. These references are indicated by the following statements culled from their recorded interviews:

(i) To bring up a child is the primary responsibility of the mother and her whole time occupation.

(ii) What does a father know about the child? It is the mother who has to suffer while tending to the child's needs.

(iii) I am very much confused about what to do and what not to do about the child.

(iv) I am a careless mother and my child got burns.
(v) I am not much educated and am not quite competent to bring up the child.

(vi) I am always worried about the health of the child. He may suddenly fall a prey to illness.

(vii) I cannot bring up children in the absence of a nurse, good food that ought to be given which I cannot buy, and expensive toys which are beyond my financial resources.

(viii) I live in a joint family and my mother-in-law is an interfering type. So many men and women in the joint family take upon themselves the task of guiding me. That is the biggest difficulty in my way to handle my child's problem.

(ix) The neighbourhood is dirty and the child can catch any disease at any time.

(x) It is good to live in an independent home free from my father-in-law or mother-in-law interfering with my child.
(xi) Children are a burden. You cannot move freely. You cannot devote yourself to the hobbies you are interested in. Luckily there is a Bal Mandir (nursery school) around the corner and I pack them off to the school for at least four hours of the day.

(xii) The child needs adult help which we cannot afford. Children want to go out. They can't do that alone, and where is the money to engage a nurse or a baby-sitter.

(xiii) The middle class mother is bothered about economic difficulties.

(xiv) Can't afford good food for my child.

(xv) It is natural that parents should suffer.

The above and many other similar statements made by the middle class mothers bring home the impression that a sense of inadequacy looms large in their minds with reference to themselves in relation to their progeny. The working class woman on the other hand lives in a world of unverbalized harmony with her child.
She hails from an occupational back ground in which wife and husband work in the same place and cooperate in doing various jobs related to the same occupation. Again, children in the working class families go to work at an early age. Thus a mutuality of relations, and an intensive mutual participation is build up in the family relations in the working class families, and the school is looked upon as an interfering agent, and is dreaded as an insecurity releasing institution. The working class women is thus supremely non-self-conscious of the child because of this harmony, she is not bothered about the details of the up-bringing of the child which are conveniently left to God, or to the wisdom the female has acquired in adjusting herself to the tasks assigned named is forces. The middle class woman on the other hand lives in a world in which this naive harmony is not possible. Her husband works in an office or a shop far removed from the house which she seldom visits. By convention the families of the employees of an office are rarely invited to the socials. Again men in middle class homes are most often carried away by their aspirations to make a mark in their career so that the home remains for them a place to change clothes and sleep at night. The day is completely taken up by the work. Then the husband lives in a joint
family and thereby he is not able to live at a personal level with his wife. Decorum requires that he should not be seen with his wife and he must surrender his ways to the scrutiny of the elders. Very few women are able to live in perfect harmony amongst a hierarchy of elderly females, when their education has promoted in them a desire to live life at a personal level. Her inability to live life with total mutuality with her male partner is a frustrating for her. This disturbed harmony makes her very insecure, which produces a sense of inadequacy. This is projected on to her own capacity to bring up the child, grouse against her husband, economic conditions, the lack of material goods necessary for bringing up children, the joint family system and to the very fact of her belonging to the middle class.

The way the middle class woman perceives the child is very strongly coloured by the insecurity she is faced with, as the following statements culled out of the recorded interviews show:

(i) Children are a liability. They cost too much.
(ii) I cannot go out and I cannot hang around with the whole day and I can't afford to have an ayah or a nurse for him.

(iii) Children are obstinate. They insist on having what they see other children carrying with them. Only the rich can help children through satisfying their greed. What can a poor woman like me do to face the child's greed.

(iv) Children's health is a problem. Thank God I have a doctor cousin.

(v) Children cry a lot.

(vi) Children are very much more disease prone than adults.

(vii) If I let the child go out he will learn all the bad things from the neighbours.

This feeling of helplessness in managing the child is a tremendous barrier in the way of a middle class mother becoming truly efficient and creative in her relations to the child. Lacking the religious fervour of a puritanical mother she has no devil to
drive out of her child. She is confused on the
notion of a well-educated child and has nothing much
to say except that good health and adequate physical
development are the criteria of a properly educated
child. In fact her worry centres too much round
health alone.

(2) A working class mother blames the world
of the supernatural for any adverse happening to her
child, and therefore has very few verbalized grouses
against the society around her. In sharp contrast
with this the middle class mother is convinced that the
omission and commission of certain social agencies,
certain social and political conditions are responsible
for the plight her child is in. "Nursery schools are
money making concerns, they receive aid from the
government and charge high fees". "Nursery education
should be free". "The government is doing so much
for the workers. The upper class have no problem, and
the middle class is crushed". Hence she seeks this
harmony with her primary social ties, through a number
of subsidiary chains having their interlacings with
the social and political institutions surrounding her.
The working class mother has no clear idea of these subsidiary chains and hence these relations remain unverbalized for her.

A noteworthy feature of her perception of these social and political institutions subsidiary to her biologically determined social ties is her marked passivity towards these institutions. She thinks of the school, the government, etc., doing something to her child. Her struggle against her inner passivity is matched by her relation of passivity with these institutions.

Upper class families:

The term "upper class" has been used here for the people whose income is more than Rs. 3000/- per month who are either self-employed or employ others. They have the good things of life available in abundance and can have all the worldly means at their disposal to minister to their children's needs, such as nurses, maid servants, parks, toys, best food, ideal home and furniture. Very few mothers from this class so far been interviewed. Women in these families are relieved
from many of those worries which make life of the middle class mothers a drugery. Hence mothers in upper class homes can devote themselves to cultural pursuits and personal hobbies of their choice.

The perception of the child in mothers of the upper class status:

The following questions from the interviews indicate the major pre-occupation of these mothers with their progeny:

"I do not want all those restrictions on my child which made me feel miserable in my young days. Take food for example - my child must be fed on a diet which is medically suitable for him and not what religious injunctions ask him to avoid. There are so many other restrictions".

"One of the major problems about my child's education is to strike a balance between liberty and license. He must have all the freedom to develop his talents. But he must not have the freedom to 'not to grow'. To strike a balance between the two and to develop a correct judgement on these issues is my personal problem and there is no other problem I have to face in the rearing of my child."
"I have often worry about my child developing pathological repressions and inhibitions. The other day my child was annoyed with her brother. She sulked alone. Will this sulking do her permanent injury? How can I avoid her doing permanent harm to herself?"

The data from the upper class is still scanty and may not be representative of the upper class as a whole. The following constructions on this is tentatively suggested:

What are known as the upper class to-day are composed of persons who do not belong to the traditional aristocracy. They rose to eminence by dint of their personal initiative, foresight and other qualities of character. Hence the ideology of unlimited faith in individual making or marring his own destiny finds currency in the upper class thinking, and hence this emphasis on individual development. This ideology by implication depreciates the role of the social and cultural climate in a group as a factor in promoting a particular kind of personality. There is a fair amount of confidence in the upper class in their making a society and a social climate to order and a confidence that a superior and a gifted individual can deliver goods on this score. This confidence is reflected in the ideology on education current
in the upper classes. Emphasis on individual growth with fewer inhibitions abundance of opportunities and a carefully planned education are some of the features of the upper class thinking on education.

Indications for education:

The above analysis lends support to the following approaches to a planned education on mother-child relation.

(1) Establishment of children's play centres for working class families situated in the close neighbourhood of their colonies where parents should be free to come in and go out is indicated. These play centres should accept the mother's involvements in the child and exploit the same, both for adult education of the children. The programme of education should be dictated by the local conditions, particularly by the kind of the interest shown by parents and children in this situation. The institute will undertake experimenting with this approach.

(2) Conventions of buying material equipment such as toys, outdoor play equipment, etc., on a cooperative basis are lacking in the middle class. This equip-
ment has to be used by a single family for a short period and most people cannot invest heavily on the individually own it. The best way is to buy this on cooperative basis, so that certain toys can be owned by a child as such for a couple of weeks. Similarly women from middle class homes can take turns in managing children of the locality, times releasing same to spend their time in their own way. Besides this steps have to be taken for educating mothers to achieving inner poise, because anxiety looms large in the middle class mother's mind.

(3) The dominant problem of the upper class is to acquire a perspective.

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