



THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTING ON BALU IN THE FINANCIAL EXPERT – A PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

People are the products of their environment, and their values, beliefs, attitudes and worldview would greatly be influenced by their environmental factors such as, parents, friends, family, education, employment, religion, culture and socio-economic status. Parents are in the immediate environment, or in the microsystem of the children and they would determine the formation years through attachment type and parenting style. Balu, in The Financial Expert resembles a typical boy who represents children who are spoiled by excessive love and pampering from their parents. He was spoiled by the parenting style and his father's obsession to accumulate wealth in numerous ways. This work looks at events that led Balu to emerge as a spoilt child who doesn't only bring himself down but also his father. Margayya gave all the material things his son wanted without care, guidance, motivation and this analysis is made from a psychosocial development perspective with special emphasis on parenting style on children's development. It also evaluates Balu's character in the light of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory which brings out the importance of the child's immediate environment in its development.

Key words: Financial Expert, Balu, Margayya, Psychosocial, Parenting, Micro-environment, Bronfenbrenner.

Introduction

Balu is the son of Margayya, the protagonist, and Meena, his mother. Margayya engaged in a petty financial business in front of the Cooperative Bank. When he was asked to move away from the bank and insulted by the secretary of the bank, he started his own business and became madly obsessed with his business and wealth. Balu was his only son and as in any normal family, he got everything he wanted but there was no parental guidance and care after he joined the school. His parents adopted a permissive parenting style at times and negligent parenting style at other times. The fact that Margayya was a typical Indian father, made it difficult for his son to adopt a healthy attachment style. Margayya wanted to be a loving father by giving everything the boy wanted without ever saying no, which led the boy to take advantage of Margayya's love. Besides, Margayya was not stable in his love, demands and responsiveness.

This work examines the development of Balu in light of Ecological Systems Theory, formulated by Urie Bronfenbrenner which brings out the importance of one's environment at five different levels such as, Micro, Meso, Exo, Macro and chrono systems.

Application of Psychosocial Development

Micro-environment revolves around one's parents, friends, family, religion, education etc. These factors are in the immediate environment of individuals, especially children. Meso Environment refers to the interaction between the micro-environments that may occur between religion and parents, education and parents and one's friends and parents. Exo environment refers to the economic and social institutions that are not directly connected to the child but to the child's parents or others in the society which may influence the child. Macro environment refers to the cultural and political ideologies that would have an impact on individuals. Chrono environment refers to important events in one's life such as, marriage, loss of loved ones, loss of employment, childbirth etc. that may have an influence on individuals.

Bronfenbrenner argued that "human development takes place through the processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as proximal processes". (Bronfenbrenner 160). In this quote, he suggested that proximity and continuity with one's environment are the primary determinants that are necessary for the development of individuals. The closer individuals are to their environment and the frequency at which the interaction occurs are more important for their effects to be on the individuals. One of the most important factors at the micro-environment, parents and parenting style would have lasting impact on one's life when one grows. This work focuses on the influence of parenting on Balu's character development in R.K.Narayan's 'The Financial Expert'.

Four Parenting Styles

There are four major parenting styles such as, authoritarian, authoritative, negligence and permissive (Baumrind) When parents are loving, caring and motivating, children would develop as healthy individuals and achieve secure attachment that would help them respect the norms, parents and the society. Secure attachment would help children become healthy adults when they grow but if they fail to develop healthy attachment, it would have a lasting negative effect when they become adults. Similarly, when parents do not provide a healthy environment in terms of physical, psychological and emotional well-being, children would develop lots of difficulties such as, developing mental disorders, behavioural issues, lack of resilience and poor academic performance.

Authoritarian parenting style is more demanding but less responsive. This would mean that parents who adopt this style of parenting would demand more from their children in terms of their academic and other performance, but they wouldn't provide any guidance, motivation or support. They would also be punished for their mistakes severely. Children who grow under such parenting style would have a hard time and develop a submissive mindset.

Authoritative parenting style is characterised by high demands and high responsiveness. Parents who adopt this parenting style would not only demand better performance, behaviours and relationships but also would be motivating, loving and caring. Children who grow under this parenting style would develop as healthy adults which would help them develop meaningful relationships, career and behaviours.

Permissive parenting style revolves around more responsiveness and less demanding. The fact that children would be pampered and provided with more facilities and benefits without placing any demands would spoil the children and would make them incompetent. This would mean that parents who adopt this style of parenting would provide everything that the child needs without placing any expectations.

Negligent parenting is characterised by less demands and less responsiveness which would mean that the children would be left on their own to decide what they want to do. They would struggle without any guidance, motivation and the necessary support even if they wish to start something. Children who are brought up under this style of parenting would lack self-confident and self-esteem.

The Beginning of Balu's Fall

From his childhood, Balu was very demanding and Margayya fulfilled all his wishes without any question. The novel brings out this at the beginning, "His little son immediately came running out from the kitchen with a shout: Appa! -" and gripped his hand, asking: "what have you brought today?" (The Financial Expert 16). Although it's common for the Indian parents or any other parents for that matter to provide things to children in order to keep them out from disturbing them or show their love and affection, Margayya was of the former type who wanted to shut his son down all the time from disturbing him. When Balu hurt his fingers while trying to light a paper from the lamp, he was demanding his father which is brought out in the novel "Will you buy me a little elephant tomorrow," the child asked, his cheeks still wet with tears". (The Financial Expert 19). Margayya wanted to make his son feel good all the time and he was uncomfortable whenever his son didn't feel well or unhappy. At times he was moved with pity and at other times he was motivated by his annoyance in providing material things to his son.

The boy knew that Margayya would give anything that he wants because whenever he comes home, he would look for his son which is brought out by the novelist, "**when he came home, he could not bear to be away from him even for a moment.**" (The Financial Expert 18). Although he is an affectionate father, he is not a demanding father because just like any other parent, he also thinks that demanding his son would force his son out of his life. The fact that Indian parents depend on their children in their old age force them not to lose their children by demanding more from them.

He felt guilty when Balu hurt his finger and he was always contemplating on satisfying his son's material needs without really taking his psychological and emotional needs into account. "**Do you know - poor boy! I could have prevented Balu from hurting himself. I just stood there and watched.**" (The Financial Expert 20). Although he was present while the boy was playing with fire, he was lost in his own world because he was always thinking about improving his business. He wanted to spend time with his son, but he would do anything to avoid him and get lost in his own world as he wouldn't be able to bear all the mischiefs the boy does.

Going to school is a normal event but Margayya wanted to show off his rich and pride by organizing a procession. Narayan brings out this pampering through the procession which Margayya arranged for his first day in school, "He took the Youngman in a decorated motor with pipes and drums through the Market Road: the traffic was held up for half an hour when Balu's procession passed." (The Financial Expert 105). He also send his son to get the blessings of his brother. "After all, he is his own uncle, his own blood, my brother. Unless he blesses the child, of what worth are all the other blessings he may get?" (The Financial Expert 86). Up until that moment, he was not in good terms with his elder brother who were living near his house but when he wanted to send his son to the school, he wanted to make it a grand event and show off his presence. He also thought it was one way to connect with his brother. He never made his son realize the life of ordinary people but spoiled his mind with money, wealth and status and this procession to the school is a classic example.

As P. S. Sundaram suggests: "The parents take turns in spoiling the child, and on rare occasions, when both of them think he deserves punishment, total strangers interfere and read them a lesson." (Sundaram 61). Both the parents blamed each other for not taking care of the boy every now and then while at the same time leaving the boy to choose whatever he likes. Since Balu was their only son, he was never allowed to experience any hardship.

The Progress of Balu's Fall

Jayant K. Biswal brings out the attitude change that Margayya undergoes: "He realizes the vanity of this gross materialistic world. Like Krishnan and the headmaster in *The English Teacher*, Margayya seeks an emotional refuge in the innocent world of children. He had neglected this joyous aspect of existence, being

blinded by the glitter of money.” (Biswal 44). The fact that Margayya was guided by his obsession on gaining more wealth blinded him and forced him to neglect his family affairs, especially, he failed to be in the life of his son to guide him. It led Balu to become an unwanted personality in the family and in the society. When Margayya’s pride was offended by the secretary of the Cooperative Bank, he felt that it was money and social status that’s important for self-respect. This event forced him to move away from the family and become obsessed with the thoughts of money which led his son’s involvement in unhealthy behaviours and poor performance in academics.

William Walsh explains the result of such negligent parenting on Balu as he comments: “The boy hates school and turns out to be a wretched, glowering misfit. His incessant troubles with his son naturally have their effect on his relations with his wife. In the end the boy, having failed more than once to get into the University, runs away from home.” (Walsh 82). When children are not attended, guided and motivated, they would build new connections in the external world that may mislead them and force them to engage in illegal and immoral activities. Balu doesn’t only become a misfit in the academic institution but also in the society.

Nazar Singh Sidhu argues about the ill effects of parental pampering along with the material things that children receive without any expectation as: “A bit of pampering combined with the effects of his riches makes Balu indifferent to studies. His progress report brought zero whose effects were sought to be decimated through Margayya’s power and status. He felt impelled to be on the governing council of the school so that the teachers could help Balu improve academically and push him into positions of official status.” (Sidhu 74). Since Margayya was busy building his image in the society, he was concerned with his son’s results in the school. So, he planned to bribe the officials by gaining a powerful position in the school administration. Instead of demanding his son to improve his academic performance, he looks to influence the school board with his wealth. This is brought out by P. K. Singh as he comments: “Margayya’s son, Balu, is not good to his studies. But Margayya hopes to pass him through Matriculation without much difficulty by his wide social contacts. Narayan here shows us that how the examinations are influenced by the people of high social status in our society.” (Singh 35). This is one of the most common occurrences in rich families whose children do not fair well in education. There are people who are rich and influential and they use them to influence authorities to give into their demands. When their children know that they would be supported and backed by their rich and affluent parents, they wouldn’t worry about working hard enough to achieve anything in life.

Margayya’s confidence in his wealth and power continued as his son grew because he developed a materialistic mindset and believed that his father would be able to save him from all his miseries through his wealth. He developed many bad habits such as, smoking, drinking and even going to prostitutes as Harish Raizada explains: “Narayan has given a very realistic picture of this boy as he grows up into a full-fledged man. He tells us how Balu refuses to pass S. S. L. C. examination, becomes addicted to smoking, runs away from his house and on being traced out devotes himself to the art of cultivating leisure, takes to drinking and whore-keeping in Dr. Pal’s company and finally brings about the downfall of his father and ruin of his family.” (Raizada 108). When children are not demanded, they would turn their attention to negative and unhealthy habits because their parents would always cover their negative habits from others.

When it comes to the immediate environment of the child, Dr. Pal played an equal role in misleading Balu into what he became as a dysfunctional adult. Although Margayya knew that his son was misled by someone who was close to him, he was not able to do anything about it except acknowledging it which is brought out in the novel, When Balu tries to stop Margayya by blocking the door, Margaya slaps him by saying: “You are being misled by someone, probably a lawyer, who wants an occupation. Don’t listen to such people. Here I am, your father, ready to do anything for you: only ask what you want.” (The Financial Expert 206). Margayya feared that he would lose his son forever which forced him to promise anything that the boy wanted which added to further development of the boy’s character as a drunkard and chain smoker. The novel further brings out Margayya’s helplessness and created a guilty feeling that he didn’t care for his son enough or fulfilled his parental responsibility.

The fall of Balu

Balu finally ran away from Malgudi to Chennai in order to enjoy life away from his traditional mundane life. He also wanted to escape from his exams, school and responsibilities as he strongly believed that his father would bend to his knees to listen to his only son. Lakshmi Holmstrom brings out this mindset of Balu as he comments: "Balu grows up into an insensitive and stupid boy, who, in a final attempt to be free from his father's ambition, runs away to Madras. He is brought back; he knows now the extent of his emotional power over his father, and uses it as an access to easy money." (Holmstrom 57). Balu was Margayya's emotional weakness as he continuously exploited his father's love and kindness while Margayya was overtaken by his pride and wealth that he accumulated by believing that money will buy everything. Indian parents, unlike the parents in the Western countries, develop deep emotional connections with their children that if not balanced would bring their own downfall as Balu did to Margayya.

It's Indian tradition that whenever boys are irresponsible or engage in unhealthy behaviours to get them married which people believed would change them. Margayya believed the same and married him to Brinda without foreseeing what was in store for him or her. His hopes came crashing when Balu went bad to worse by engaging in more smoking and drinking while also beating the girl badly. Brinda just like any other girl in India at that time, kept everything to herself. It's explained in the novel as: "His lips were black with cigarettes which she knew he smoked: he often smelt of them when he came home.... But she kept this secret knowledge to herself since she didn't like to set up her husband against him." (The Financial Expert 137).

The final blow came when Balu wanted his share of the property while most of Margayya's wealth belonged to the depositors. Jayant K. Biswal brings out this scenario by commenting: "It is thus no wonder that Balu comes late at night drunk and beats Brinda. To add to this, Balu demands his share of the paternal property." (Biswal 18). Margayya never stopped spending for his son as he was blinded by his love and emotion which slowly emptied his wealth. When people started sensing that something is not right and their deposits may not be safe, they started asking for their deposits back. Thus, Margayya's tragic end in the novel was contributed by his permissive and negligent parenting style.

Conclusion

People's lives would be determined by their environment, especially the micro-environment in which parenting style, attachment style and socio-economic status of the parents would have great impact on children. Although parenting styles and expectation from the children differ from culture to culture, children would learn their values, attitudes, beliefs and worldview which would form the basis for their adult life in terms of their relationship, character and productivity. The fact that Margayya developed a great consideration for his only son forced him to think that the child would develop well if he satisfies all the material needs of the child which in turn spoiled the character of the child. Most of the time, parents who are too busy making money would be guided by their money and power rather than basic parental instinct of preparing the children for the society as healthy and contributing individuals. Balu exemplifies children in the society whose parents run after wealth and social status which would have lasting negative effects on them.

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