

Child rearing and clash of cultures

By Mohan Ramamoorthy

Bringing up children has never been easy; and modern life has made it more complex. Already, India is grappling with increasing media reports on children in distress — particularly suicides due to educational stress and failure, or corporal punishment in schools and homes. To make matters worse there have been reports about violence against children — ranging from ‘torture’ by ambitious and demanding parents and stressed out teachers to abuse by adults.

As if the complications were not enough, cultural differences between the developed west and the developing east add to the confusion. In fact, the recent controversy surrounding the Norwegian government’s seemingly drastic action against parents of Indian origin in two different cases has started a new round of debates.

Parenting and Norway Law

The first case related to a Norwegian court order that separated two children from their Bengali parents and sent the infants to foster homes. The shocking case that separated children from each other and their parents took a few twists and turns.

It all started in late 2010 with the Norwegian government child care service accusing Anurup Bhattacharya, working as a geoscientist in Norway, and his wife Sagarika of failing to bring up their children — a boy and a girl aged less than four and two respectively — as per Norwegian law and standards. One bizarre charge was that the boy slept with his father and not on a separate bed. Lack of space in the living room and the absence of toys, loud arguments and fights between parents in front of children, “force-feeding” the boy instead of convincing him to eat, were other charges. Finally in April 2011 the children were sent to the Indian home of their uncle (father’s brother).

In the second, more recent, case, an Indian software engineer and his wife — both from Andhra Pradesh — were sentenced to 18 months in jail for “abusing” their seven-year-old son in Norway. The child apparently had a problem of wetting his pants.

The government alleged the use of physical and mental violence, including burning the child with a spoon, hitting with a belt and threatening to send him away to India. The parents have denied the allegations.

The Debate

Parenting standards differ from one society to another. What is ‘abuse’ in Europe or America could be a ‘common and normal’ practice in Asian countries such as India.

Parenting is only now evolving into a science. In India it is based on culture and custom. In the west, it has become a science. In India parents pick up parenting from their elders, while in the west they rely more on child care books, guides and manuals.

In India, the joint family system was prevalent until recently. Here parenting was a collective effort — involving parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, teachers and even neighbours. In

the west families are disintegrating. There are single parents, divorcees, step-parents and child care social workers, counsellors, psychiatrists, paediatricians, and teachers. A second aspect is the method of parenting. In the West the use of force or violence to discipline a child is illegal and socially unacceptable. Urban Indian parents too are averse to it. But definitions and degrees of violence vary. For instance, Indian parents often use mild and subtle threats which may be construed as ill-treatment or violence in the west. There are many who believe that sparing the rod will spoil the child.

The third aspect is the impact of urbanisation and globalisation. Working, urban parents have little time for their children. Children no longer benefit from the care of grandparents. After liberalisation, Indian society has become extremely competitive. Parents are driven to use unhealthy methods to force children to achieve not one but many unrealistic goals — educational, sports, and cultural. With globalisation, more and more parents are emigrating to western countries where they find themselves torn between two cultures, two social and legal systems. No doubt, the use of force by parents or teachers is wrong. At the same time positive parenting needs a lot of time, energy and patience, which working parents may not have.

The need of the hour seems to be moderation — between strong punishment and extreme pampering, between reckless freedom and total control, between setting unrealistic goals and an absence of purpose and goals.

The well-being and all-round development of the child should be the most important criteria.

Source:

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/education/student/article1382419.ece>

4 Different Types of Child-Rearing Styles

by Christina Schnell, Demand Media

Parenting is challenging enough, but the battles you pick, the praise you give and the issues you feel are important help determine your child-rearing style, explains the New York University Child Development Center. Key factors associated with child-rearing styles include warmth, rules, behavior control, supportive responsiveness and expectations. Parenting styles affect children's traits such as achievement, independence, curiosity, self-reliance, self-control and friendliness.

Authoritarian

Authoritarian child-rearing emphasizes obedience above all else. Sensitivity to the individual child or circumstances is not part of the authoritarian approach. Authoritarian parents aim to control children's behavior through constant direction and swift consequences. According to Dr. Gwen Dewar of ParentingScience.com, children raised in this style are expected to obey parents regardless of the situation, and negotiation and discussion are not tolerated. This style is also characterized by rigid adherence to rules, regardless of whether those expectations are realistic. Dewar says children raised in this style tend to rely on authority figures to make decisions for them, and they also have higher rates of depression, anxiety and poor self-esteem.

Authoritative

Authoritative child-rearing emphasizes warmth and responsiveness to children's needs, but parents also maintain high behavioral expectations. According to Dr. Anita Gurian of the NYU Child Development Study Center, parents who raise their children in this style set limits and allow natural consequences as a means of modifying behavior. They are sensitive to their child's point of view and temperament, and they may adjust consequences or expectations accordingly. Parents also explain why certain rules are important rather than citing their authority as the reason why children should obey. According to Dewar, Gurian and most peer-reviewed psychology publications, authoritative parenting is considered the "gold standard" and typically produces independent, confident children who are well-adjusted, creative and cooperative.

Permissive

Permissive or indulgent child-rearing involves lots of love, support and sensitivity, but parents have few expectations and make few demands of the child. Limits and rules are poorly enforced, and children are given significant freedom to do as they like. Parents don't correct poor behavior through discipline or instruction, and they frequently indulge the child's demands regardless of behavior, Gurian says. Maintaining control over the child's behavior is not as important as it is in authoritarian and authoritative child-rearing. According to Dewar, children raised in this style tend to have very high self-esteem, but they are also less achievement-oriented and more likely to encounter problems with drugs and alcohol.

Uninvolved

Uninvolved child-rearing is most harmful, Gurian says. Not only is parental warmth and responsiveness absent, but few expectations or demands are placed on the child. Children learn not to rely on parents for anything; in extreme cases, this can include basic needs such as food and clean clothing. Parents remain unresponsive to their children, showing little to no affection or encouragement. The lack of limits also means children receive no guidance or examples of appropriate behavior. According to Dewar, such children are most likely to have poor self-esteem and lack the ability to cooperate. Most juvenile offenders were raised in this style of parenting, Dewar says.

Source:

<http://everydaylife.globalpost.com/4-different-types-childrearing-styles-1345.html>

Fusion Parenting: East Meets West in Child Rearing

Celebrating and embracing diversity may also apply to child rearing

Yale University law professor Amy Chua has certainly caused quite a stir with her newly released book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, which claims that Asian approaches to parenting, which are very demanding academically with high expectations for performance, are far superior to Western parenting approaches that are much looser, have fewer

expectations for performances, and are overly concerned with the self-esteem, happiness, and the emotions of youngsters. As she makes her rounds in her nationwide book tour, she seems to be softening her stance. Perhaps the change of tune has something to do with the backlash she's receiving from the public, which has come in the form of angry e-mails, accusations of child abuse, and even death threats.

Professor Chua is a law professor and not a psychologist or parenting expert. Yet her compelling book and particular point of view brings up many issues that most American parents chronically struggle with: How do we raise successful, competent, happy children in a modern, competitive, and diverse culture without driving ourselves (and our children) crazy in the process? Additionally, what is the best way to raise our children when parenting styles and experts contradict one another? Part of the answer to these and many other parenting questions are dependent on what our goals are for our children. What is the outcome that we want from all of our parenting efforts and how much control do we have in securing these outcomes?

As a parent of a teenage son myself, I certainly want my child to be an ethical, happy, content human being who has good relationships with others, a vocation and career that he loves, and habits of the mind, heart, and behavior that are healthy, gratifying, and sustaining. I'd bet that many parents want the same for their child. Some might also want him or her to go to an Ivy League college, be a professional athlete or professional musician, and maybe be rich and famous someday (in a positive way). Yet, these goals are likely to be just narcissistic desires for us, living vicariously through our children. Research also suggests that children will likely model the behavior of their parents and other important figures in their lives. So, the apple really doesn't fall far from the tree.

In my experience as a college professor and a psychologist who has been in clinical practice for more than 25 years, a blend of Eastern and Western approaches (high expectations with plenty of love and support) is likely the best way to go. Too strict and demanding and children will likely rebel against your demands, hate you in the process, and be grateful for the day that they can get away from you. Yet, too lenient and they likely won't succeed or accomplish much, as well as quit at the first obstacles they face that might frustrate them. There are risks at being too Eastern or too Western in one's parenting approach in our society and many of my clients over the years have struggled with finding the right balance for them and their families. Perhaps this is yet another reason why we have much to learn from those different than ourselves and why celebrating and embracing diversity may also apply to child rearing.

Professor Chua now admits that her parenting approach didn't work with her younger daughter, who rebelled, and that she ended up using a hybrid of Eastern and Western styles. In a more homogenous society such as China, Korea, and Japan, where most children face such pressures, anything less than an A and no TV may seem rather normal. However, when children are growing up with peers who are allowed to have sleepovers and who don't have to practice playing the piano and violin until mastering a piece, they immediately recognize that their world at home is different and perhaps unfair in their view, making it difficult for them

to understand the intentions of their parents. Maybe teenagers like Chua's younger daughter faced another kind of peer pressure of her own-to assimilate by being able to talk about the latest movie they saw over the weekend or by discussing the new video game their parents recently bought them.

While wanting children to focus on their studies is understandable, Professor Chua can learn a lesson or two about putting children in sports, scouts, and allowing them to play with friends, as many Western parents do. Being on a sports team or in scouts can teach important lessons about social relations, team work, responsibility, achievement striving, and mental and physical perseverance. Play time with peers can teach children social skills, nurture productive hobbies, and allow for useful stress management opportunities. So, in a nutshell, *fusion parenting* thus blending Eastern and Western approaches may be better than either approach in their extreme.

Source:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/do-the-right-thing/201101/fusion-parenting-east-meets-west-in-child-rearing>

Optional reading:

Swedish parents don't spank

<http://www.neverhitachild.org/haeuser.html>