

CHILD-REARING PRACTICES IN THE TURKISH VILLAGE AND THE MAJOR AREA OF INTRAPSYCHIC CONFLICT *

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Introduction

Turkey's vast historical background and its numerous contacts with various major cultures of the Old World are well known. Since the beginning of history, Asia Minor has been the cross - roads of ancient migrations, as well as an attractive land for settlers of many different ethnic origins. The material relics of ancient civilizations of the Hittites, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Persians, Arabs and Turks are still extant. In addition, common beliefs, values and behavioral patterns as vestiges of ancient cultures are found, e. g., village administration and agricultural techniques, the weekly village market, annual district festivals, folk interpretation and treatment of illness, circumcision rites, rainmaking rites, etc. Paganism, Judeo-Christianity and Islam have all deeply influenced the societies of this area at various stages in history. The present ethnic group in Asia Minor is predominantly Turkish and the religion of the great majority is Islam.

The Turks had accepted the Moslem religion before their migration from the East to Asia Minor, between the 8th and 11th centuries A. D. Since then, Arabic and Persian cultures have greatly influenced Turkish society in the economic, political, scientific and esthetic spheres. Until the second decade of the twentieth century, the Moslem religion was the major force of order in society. The whole structure of the state in all hierarchical layers was based on the Islamic code. The power of the Ottoman sultan, administration, property distribution and penalties all followed Islamic principles dictated by the Koran. The individual life plan such as marriage and daily work activity or world-view (e. g. surrender to God, concepts

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of life and death and life after death) were also structured from the precepts of the Koran. Until the end of the 19th century, educational institutions (medresehs) taught only the Arabic alphabet, theology and jurisprudence (Islamic law). For many centuries, the Moslem religion remained as an «unshakeable» dogmatic force in society.⁷

«Westernization», that is the acceptance of western science, modes of living, world views and philosophies, started with hesitant and meek attempts in the mid - nineteenth century. However, it was after the fall of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War and with the establishment of a new Turkish government that radical attempts were made to change the social structure toward a modern direction. Many religious and educational institutions and the caliphate (the religious leadership of the Moslem world) were abolished. The universities and schools were reorganized. The civil and penal laws were made entirely secular. Polygamy was out-lawed and women were given equal legal rights including the right to vote. However, in spite of these serious strivings, a considerable portion of the population is still somewhat untouched and unchanged in their beliefs and patterns of living. About 80 % of the total population live in the villages. Sixty percent of the total population and over 70 percent of the rural population are illiterate.² * The majority of the people, the rural segment in particular, is devoted to the Moslem religion and applies its principles and laws as it has done for centuries.

A Turkish Village

A typical Turkish village has a population of about 200 to 1500 people and about 24 million people live in such small, isolated communities with limited contact with urban centers.* A village is essentially a cluster of farm houses made of mud-brick, plaster or wood depending on what is available in the region. The typical villager is a peasant who makes a bare living by tilling the soil with a plow, threshing with a sled and carrying the crops in ox carts.

The administrative organization of the village consists of a village head-man (muhtar) and the council of elders who are elected by the villagers. The head-man and the council of elders act as agents who give advice, handle all sorts of administrative and economic problems of the villager, settle disputes and arguments and act as interpreters between the villager and the government.

* The total population of Turkey is about 30 million with a high annual increase of 3 percent. There are over 40,000 individual villages.

The family structure of the village is described as being «extended, patriarchal and patrilocal».⁸ The villager lives a rather isolated life within the boundaries of his village and land. The family unit is extremely compact and the members are strongly tied to each other. It is not uncommon to see a whole family, including members belonging to three generations, all under one roof.⁹ ¹⁰ ¹¹ ¹² The father represents the typical traditional concept of a patriarchal father. The woman has a very low social position and her work includes heavy farm activity as well as house work and child-rearing.

The primary interests of the villager are his land, his crops and religious activity. His thought content is predominantly determined by agriculture and religion according to which his concepts of time and space, his social and work activities are shaped and timed. For example, the seasons of the year are known according to agricultural activity (e. g. reaping season, hazel-nut gathering season, etc.), and the months according to religious holidays (e. g. so many months or weeks before or after Ramazan). Daily work routine is also arranged according to the special hours of worship determined by the phases of the sun.

The existential world of the villager, which is greatly shaped by the agricultural and religious traditions, is essentially authoritarian, stable and unchanging. The stereotyped and monotonous relations with the soil and God and their extensions constitute the major part of the phenomenal field of the villager. The dogmatic interpretation and practice of the Moslem religion with its monocausalistic and fatalistic approach, attributing all power and will to one supreme force, has played a significant role in the establishment and maintenance of this stable world. Superstition, magic and religion have common meeting grounds in this rural community and hence there is considerable evidence of religio-magical practices used for the interpretation and treatment of illnesses.*

Child - Rearing Practices

Child-rearing practices are not uniform throughout Turkey. Certain fundamental and common aspects of child-rearing practices of the villagers will be given here briefly. We have already referred to the social role of the woman which naturally determines the type of child-rearing. In spite of their legal equality with men, women are literally exploited, suppressed by and subordinate to men. In our

* These will be dealt with in another article.

opinion, time, energy and security needed for «healthy» child care cannot be adequately provided by her while she works continuously in the field, cares for the farm animals and does the housework. Conception, childbirth and child death are believed to be inevitable phenomena determined by God.

In general, babies are swaddled until about the ninth or twelfth month and are breast fed for at least a year and not uncommonly for two or three years. Prolonged breast feeding is not necessarily an indication of maternal generosity in love. In some areas it is practiced for economic reasons or for the belief that birth control is possible by continued breast feeding. It is our impression that in many areas children are seriously deprived of adequate mothering during the first year of life mainly due to the woman's social position. Poverty, infectious diseases and malnutrition are also additional important sources of deprivation on a biological level. Mortality during the first year of life is 16.5 percent according to the Government Planning Committee Reports of 1962 and 26 percent according to a more recent survey.⁸

When the child reaches the developmental stage of walking and talking, the characteristic style of training can be described as coercive and constrictive. Those who are obedient, compliant and silent are rewarded. To be active, mobile, curious and talkative is discouraged and even punished. During the stage of autonomy as formulated by Erikson,^{9, 7} although no rigid toilet training exists, autonomous will and autonomous activity are discouraged. The child is preferred and rewarded if he behaves as an extension of his parents. During the stage of initiative or the phallic stage, curiosity and aggressive intrusion in play and in other life situations are inhibited by the above-mentioned expectations of the adults. Beating, threats of castration and frightening tales about the jinns are among important methods of punishment. Religious and mystical tales filled with jinns, fairies and superstitions enter the fantasy world of the child as soon as he begins to comprehend. His fantasies become easily identified with those of the adults.

Circumcision of boys is done without anesthesia during this or the following period, usually between the ages of four and eight. As if the society knows the potential traumatic effect of the experience at this stage, it provides many compensatory and counterphobic devices such as verbal preparation ahead of time, ceremonies, gifts, masculinity status, etc.^{13, 14} It is to be emphasized that the societal treatment of boys and girls is extremely differentiated from very

early childhood. This is not only seen in later training patterns, but also in early feeding and caring patterns. For example, in certain areas boys are breastfed beyond age two or three because of a belief that they will grow stronger with mother's milk. In addition, boys are specifically required to be courageous, not in the sense of aggressiveness, curiosity and work, but in the sense of physical strength, endurance of physical pain and frustration. For example, a boy will boast of not crying during circumcision. Boys and girls start working with the parent of the same sex around seven years of age and even earlier.

The «Constricted - Self»

Naturalistic observation of the life-style of the villager and some statistically meaningful studies^{8, 11} indicate certain common personality characteristics of the Turkish peasant. These characteristics are condensed in the term «constricted-self» which refers to a lack of curiosity, initiative, empathy and changeability. Recent studies^{8, 13} support this concept of the «constricted-self» and also add to it the characteristic of passive-dependent-expectation within the core of the villager's ego. This latter characteristic can be seen in the peasant's attitudes towards the father figure, the elders, the government, God, and in the beliefs pertaining to many natural phenomena like birth, death, illnesses, and the catastrophies of life. Now, this passive-dependent-expectation and the characteristics of the «constricted-self» seem to have almost an identical meaning with lack of autonomy and initiative, two basic psychosocial needs to be acquired during the course of healthy ego development. Therefore, in conclusion, we wish to formulate the development of the peasant ego and the conflicts therein on the basis of these concepts described by Erikson.^{6, 7}

Conclusion

In this brief presentation of the historical and socio-cultural background and of the specific conditions of existence and child-rearing, recognizable traits of a traditional people can be seen. Children apparently can learn to adapt themselves to many modes of traditional care and to be limitedly satisfied with what they are given by their earliest providers. It can be assumed that the village child learns to modulate his needs and frustration thresholds and learns to live with what can be given. However, this view should not prevent us from formulating certain essential personality characteris-

tics and areas of conflict, although they may be culturally determined and traditionally established.

We suggest that, in the Turkish villager, religion and tradition play more a compensatory role than a reinforcing one in the establishment of internal security or «basic trust» which is essentially a sense of trust or security derived from and toward the self and the environment. A high degree of passive-dependent-expectation in adult life is not compatible with the presence of adequate «basic trust». Therefore, we assume the existence of a nuclear deficiency in «basic trust» as an outcome of the obviously frustrating aspects of child-rearing during the early phases of life. In the adult, the manifestation of this deficiency is seen in the pervasive passivity, that is in the feeling of helplessness and dependence. In other words, what is not provided adequately by the human and the natural environment is provided or is hoped to be provided by the authority figures and by faith and conviction in what is beyond the human and the natural. Neither the human nor the natural environment can be considered trustworthy. Besides, such a situation in child-rearing would necessarily lead to the accumulation of aggressive impulses in accordance with the frustration-aggression rule.⁴ To be more specific, acceptance of helplessness and passive-dependent-expectation on one hand, and accumulation of aggressive drives on the other, become inevitably rooted during the oral-incorporative stage. These become further reinforced by the training attitudes and adult expectations during the following stages of childhood. In these training attitudes and expectations, we see predominantly a severe and diffuse suppression of behavior modalities of «autonomy and initiative». These suppressive measures would not only mean an inhibition of autonomy and initiative, and hence a «constricted-self», but also a further increase of aggressive drives due to the continuous frustration of such needs as autonomous will and activity, independent vigorous motility, intrusion and curiosity. Granted that all of this suppression is carried on in a «traditional system of child care», the increase in aggressive drives in accordance with the frustration-aggression sequence still persists. In brief, then it can be said that the passivity, the inhibition of autonomy and initiative, the accumulation of drives, and an ever-increasing social need and demand for powerful mastery over one's own drives become essential areas of conflict within the villager's ego.

These characteristics of passive-dependent-expectation, constriction and the accumulated aggression all find suitable culturally sanctioned areas of expression. In another article, we shall try to

describe these areas of expression, such as the beliefs in the evil eye, certain interpretations of illness and other beliefs utilized for purposes of projection and displacement of aggressive impulses.^{9' 10' 16}

Summary

In this article, Turkish rural life and child-rearing practices have been described briefly, and an attempt has been made to formulate their relationships with the ego development and the intrapsychic conflicts of the traditional peasant.

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