

# PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN IN RELATION TO WILLIAM BLAKE'S *SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND SONGS OF EXPERIENCE*

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**Abstract:** *The general perspective about children is quite positive as they really are away from the negative and tainted vices of every kind. Though, when it comes to talk about the grown up people, we become curious. We are always skeptical in their walk and talk, in every step of theirs. These grown up people were once upon a time among those children who were liked by everyone for being pure-hearted. Now the one who has always been known for his goodness, how come people turn a blind eye to his goodness and become skeptical without a reason. The changing mentality of a person from his fairy-tale world to real life experiences can be fantastically evaluated through William Blake's collection "Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience."*

**Keywords:** interaction, beliefs, observation, materialistic attitude

## INTRODUCTION:

Children are generally considered as the form of God- the one with incarnation of innocence and pure values in heart. But there comes a point when this form of meek and humble incarnation of god turns his principles and makes a change in itself. Now the question is what is it that marks the difference between these two images? Where is the change made? At one, we have a child from first collection of songs of innocence who is as said as above is the real incarnation of pure heart and innocence 'lamb'. He is the one who knows to love. He is the one with his simple and naïve heart overwhelms at the dreadful features of tiger and questions in surprise whether our same loving god has made such a dreadful, destructive thing. It is the same child who marks his amazement on guessing that the same creator who made all the beautiful things made this. So far, the child is not aware about the realistic facets of the world. He has not experienced any negative facet of the life. For him the world is full of enjoyment and happiness. It is a place where all are being loved. Now on seeing such a destructive and bloodthirsty animal, his question is not invalid. In both the collections, the central character is a child, but what is it that marks the difference between these two characters? – a psychological development! Here as if to distinguish, we have two figures of human mind. First is a pure image – 'a tabula rasa' as is considered by John Locke while the another one is the image of a developed mind. The image of the first child is totally pure, innocent while the another one's is a bit more analytically crucial.

One of the greatest writers and poets of the time, William Blake was a great socialist also. In his collection of *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, we get to see the importance and impacts of social theories in relation with an individual development. From songs of innocence to songs of experience, we get to see a child with a developing mind through observation and experiences. It is a journey from 'tabula rasa' to awareness (consciences). Throughout the collection, we can thoroughly probe the psychological area of children. A mind that is as pure as a distilled water and as innocent as a form of god itself. The way a child reacts later in his life, is the result of his mental development in relation to society.

**I-CHILD IN SONGS OF INNOCENCE:**

Songs of Innocence exhibits in itself an imaginary world of a child that is full of joy, happiness, freedom, security and all the positive aspects. It is the world where a child can enjoy his life to the fullest with all the security and safety. He can be obstinate and moody at the same time. In the collection, songs of Innocence, William Blake has highlighted the innocent and pure-hearted image of a child, where he doesn't have any fear of getting kidnapped or getting killed as is the situation of the real materialistic world. The primary reason is that the child is not fully aware of his environment. So far he has upon him the imprints of positivity and all the moral aspects. Child kidnapping, child trafficking, child labor, sexual abuse to children and like these are the many other social issues those are widespread in world. These children that Blake has depicted in his collection are just careless about all these worries. They are free from all kinds of malpractices. They just possess a pure heart like an angel. A world of fairy-tale exists in their mind and thoughts which is far different from the realistic world.

Here the psychological level of the child can be compared to a baby angel who is quite innocent and relaxed. He does not hold any negative thoughts. He is not having any awareness about the negative aspects of the world. His thoughts are as pure as distilled water opposed to the children and other people who survive in the actual world. On the contrary we have a companion piece to the songs of innocence that is songs of experience, which depicts the factual image of the real world which possesses malpractices, kidnapping, robbery, and murders, child-trafficking. Moreover the development of one's mind depends largely on the co-existing factors like society, culture and surrounding.

**II- JOURNEY FROM INNOCENCE TO EXPERIENCE:**

Both the theme of innocence and experience are put forth with contrary visions. It traces a child's mind from the innocent and lovely selfless world of the childhood to the adult world of selfishness, cruelty, treachery, sins, corruptions and all the evils present in the society. It is a journey of the mind from purity, innocence and love, happiness to disillusionment and disappointment. The analytical study of Blake's child in his collection songs of innocence and experience finds much parallel with Sigmund Freud's concept of psychoanalysis. The image of a pure and clear mind is presented in the songs of innocence like the conscious mind that one knows all about and can explore all the sides/phenomenon of it while the mind of the child from another collection is little more sharpened. It is aware of a conscious mind as well as subconscious whose activities are shaped and operated in relation to his society.

“What is commonly called self-knowledge is therefore a very limited knowledge, most of it dependent on social factors, of what goes on in the human psyche”. (Jung)

In songs of innocence and experience, one can figure out two characters of human personality simultaneously. The character as a public figure which is a part of the multitude itself, and which can be described with objective vision. The kind of person one actually is and another whose mind is affected and manipulated with collective movements. *In Echoing Green* the poet enjoys the merry vision of small playing children. The joyful atmosphere enthralled his mind and heart and thus he indulges in their activities as a silent observer. So as we can see the mind of a person finds comfort in the imaginary and superficial talk of society and its beliefs in the poems like *Little Black Boy* and *Chimney Sweeper* from songs of innocence. Although the child in both of the above poems finds himself as the slave of his situation, but his heart still sticks to a hope, the kind of hope which evoked as a result of social concepts and beliefs. *Little Black Boy* illustrates the pangs of boy who belongs to black race. Racism is a concept in human world, which overpowers white complexion over the one who is comparatively darker in tone. The objective belief of racism is on the other hand challenged by another belief of justification of god. Even though, the child gets bullied as a result of the first belief of racism, at the same time, he seeks comfort in another concept that no matter what caste, creed, race one is born in, god's justification is equal for everyone just as the blessings of god which is never distinguished and so he will at last be compensated with his shortcomings.



The subjective attitude thus collapses with the objective attitude of social beliefs. Subjectivity clashes with objectivity. Similarly, in *Chimney Sweeper* the most random scenario of child labor is presented. The agonies and the expectations of small children are put forth with a realistic view. The scenario is widespread and can be seen anywhere in the society. The unjust and wrong treatment towards children is not something sought out in the society where children is regarded as the epitome/form of god for having the qualities of a realistic heart and pure intentions. The kind of status children owe in our society, on coming through the negative image and treatment towards children. The child in it thinks about positive concepts that is widespread in it and likewise his positive concept clashes with another social belief that is too known in the society.

### III-SOCIETY AS PRIME FIGURE IN MENTAL DEVELOPMENT:

A belief of justification- both the concepts are objective and experienced with objectivity. In all the above poems, the action and imagination of children are a result of objective evaluation of society as a genuine, innocent person who went after its genuineness and thus believes everything and does not in any way engages individual contradictory activity. The purest soul of the child is presented here as the first and the purest form of the god. Later on which comes in contact with society and thus stresses to observe everything not as a multitude but as an individual. And here is what the difference is marked.

At one hand we have a pure image of the child who is born with a blank sheet (tabula rasa) and so whatever he gets to hear and see, he embraces it wholeheartedly without any doubt. He does not question about the genuineness of it. Because that is the only impression he has at the time upon his mind. He is purely blank to put a counter question about it.

While on the other hand in songs of experience we have yet another image of the child that has some impressions upon its mind is not purely blank. Here, this type of child does not easily relate things and instances of his life. Now as he already has some experience and knowledge, his experience clashes with his prior knowledge which in future gives birth to new unknown reactions in his life.

On talking about the poems like chimney sweeper from songs of experience we can figure out the mind of a child that is developed though not fully but still in the process that urges him to think, to contemplate over the situation. He is able to take it subjectively and respond it by himself. In the next part of the chimney sweeper the child no more dreams of an angel to release him. Neither does he dream of getting any help nor does he hope for a happy vision of carefree life. Because, he is well aware of his situation and understands the realities of the materialistic world. So he rather talks with a realistic view. He depicts his sorrowful condition as a slave (chimney sweeper) and depicts how his own parents sold him just for the sake of some money without taking care of him. And as soon as they made money out of it, they have turned a blind eye towards him. They have forgotten that they have done anything wrong to their own child. Here the practical view of parents can be seen which is evidently understood by the child himself. It is the realistic outlook that makes them neglectful to ponder over a hellish condition in which the child is compelled to survive in turn. The daily countenance of the child with the sorrowful condition at his workplace is all neglected. They are just happy with the amount of money they got in turn. Here the materialistic view of society is reflected. Here the child is compelled to grow before time. He gets to see the predominance of materialistic values over emotional values. These are the practical impressions that the child gets on his mind at the very early age which results in acknowledgement. The purest moral values that is inherent in him. That's how we get to see a change in his mind which ultimately has to yield to the reality and succumb to the materialistic attitude.

*The Nurse' Song* on the other side successfully puts the two facets of human mind. The nurse in the songs of innocence is merry making. She keeps herself bound with the joys of children and so allows them to have more fun as it is their age of enjoying. The children here are presented without any responsibility and are free to fun and playing. While in the companion poem from another collection of experience the nurse thinks from a viewpoint of an adult. A realistic view of life is presented here which considers a playing of children as a time pass and expects them to understand their responsibility in early age.

A close comparison of these two facets can be found in Robert frost's famous poem *Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening*.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep but I have promises to keep.

And miles to go before I sleep

And miles to go before I sleep. (Holt)

Though the poem is a very good piece of philosophical note in it is always eligible in presenting the upheavals in human mind. While go through the life, human mind is enchanted by various things (the immature mind) but at the other side, a developed mind seeks to understand its duties and responsibilities. So the immature mind of a child always wants to indulge in the activities that please them. Playing, games, merry making in the first poem while the parallel piece that is a realistic world stresses on the realization of duties and importance of time.

If we are to show the two states of human psyche, we can do this easily by putting together two of his poems from both collections. *The Lamb* and *Tiger*. While the poem *Lamb* portrays an innocent child whose world is as pure as his heart and thus he himself is the form of lamb which is a symbol of love, purity and simplicity like his thoughts. On the other side we have a realistic view in the poem of a *Tiger* which is furious, hard to deal with and dreadful. In this poem the child astonishes over the birth of such a ferocious thing and wonders how come the same god can make him. For children, god is one who showers love and grace to his children. It is the one who is the generator of all the beautiful things. He made lamb, he made butterflies and all the beautiful things.

Here his imaginary, naïve concept collapses with the materialistic reality.

He is meek, he is mild.

He became a little child. (Erdman 9)

Developmental psychology of children examines and traces the incidents and its impacts related to children and in response the changes that occur in its mind. The present paper is an analysis of the mind of a child at birth that is pure and totally vacant as is defined by John Locke to which he termed as a *tabula rasa*. The kind of pure mind is delineated in the first division of Blake's poetic collection as songs of innocence.

In evaluation of the second part of songs of experience, we get to see how pure, vacant mind of a child is filled with experiences and the changed attitude and responses of the same child. There has been a controversy in people's attitude while talking about the mental development of a child. Some leave their children with all freedom and pamper them in every way considering the child as being incapable to understand their restrictions. While there are some other also who wants their child to mold in their particular ways as the mind is having no preconceptions, they want to fill the mind with particulars of everything.

Here the natural simplicity of the child makes him wonder at the unruly experiences. He who has no idea about the cruelties in the world gets amazed seeing the fearful eyes and structure of the tiger. When he gets acquainted with such crucial factors, his loving and adoring nature gets a threat.

"Psychological functioning and development depends on the conceptual and methodological means for exploring the links between social interaction and learning as they occur at the local level of observable behavior" (Ellis A. Forman 13)

## CONCLUSION:

Throughout the collection, we get the idea of a developing mind of a child and an evolution in his personality. At first he is just a child without flaws and negativities. Whatever he encounters, he deals it with his first-hand knowledge. But later on he intermingles with society and tries to observe the customs and norms of society and then as a natural instinct begins to imitate it. The experiences he gets and the responses he gets in turn, make him the person he is. So as to sum up, we get the idea that mental development of a child is the result of his interaction with the concepts and practices widespread in the society through his own observation.

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