

Rousseau, Where are You Now?

by Farah Ghuznavi

It seems to me that it is impossible to face down the children of today, since they have the strategy of how to deal with all varieties of adults down pat. One of the most interesting aspects of this is how they know how to adapt their behaviour to deal with adults who hold very different views on child-rearing. You can call me paranoid, but I admit to finding their arsenal of behavioural weapons quite intimidating.

There are the standard spoilt children (whose numbers seem to be expanding at a geometric rate these days), who get away with murder. Primarily because their parents have allowed them to do so for so long in the past, that they don't see why you, some puny adult with no power over them, should be allowed to hamper them in any way. To their credit, they also seem to judge quite accurately how much support they can enlist from their parents and other adults (particularly indulgent grandparents!) to fight off any bid to make them behave in any semi-human fashion. These are usually the offspring of parents whose ideas of child-rearing are culled from Rousseau's concept of the "noble savage". Except that the only thing noble about them is the self-restraint that other people have to exercise in order to not to commit either murder or suicide when these little savages are unleashed upon them!

I have always found it amazing how some parents allow their children to behave in such ways. I remember with horror one occasion

where an (ex) friend brought her three-year old over, and allowed her to toss the ornaments in the drawing room at the glass door. This went on for about fifteen minutes, with everyone else in the room holding their breath, and the mother saying languidly, "Don't do that, sweetie!" It was a miracle that the child got bored of this game before the glass broke and sprayed all over. I do, of course, acknowledge that parents have every right to bring up their children as they please, but do they have the right to inflict this type of behaviour on everyone else as well?

But if this sort of be-

haviour can be blamed on the parents of some children, there are others for whom no adults can be blamed. Between the influences of satellite TV and their native ingenuity, they now come up with new and improved ways of hurting themselves and others. Whether it is wielding the kitchen knife (can someone tell me how children know how to find the most dangerous implement in the house?) in an attempt to emulate the "American Ninja" or using more homegrown methods, the possibilities are endless. One example was a friend's little cousin, who went and peeled off some plaster from the wall. He

then approached his uncle, who was sleeping, and carefully inserted the plaster under his eyelid. When his uncle jumped up, roaring in pain, he asked innocently, "Oh, does it hurt?" The excuse of scientific curiosity ventured by his dotting mother was not enough to save him from a hiding on this occasion.

The type of child who is capable of dispatching an adult with a total verbal knockout, however, fits into neither of the categories above. My own eight-year old niece fits into this third category. A few months ago, when I was coming back from office too tired to play

with her, she suggested that I tell my boss that they were giving me too much work. When I told her that this wouldn't work, she argued that if I looked angry when I said it, it would. Finally, she said (in the tone of a mother trying to coax a recalcitrant child into eating her green vegetables), "Why don't you just try, okay? Just try it once."

A few days later, when I had forgotten about the whole thing, she asked me if I had done what she had suggested. Completely caught out, I said that I had done so (a lie, I know; yes, yes, I was setting a bad example!). If that wasn't bad enough, she looked at me clear-eyed, and said, "You never asked, I know you didn't", and walked off. I stood there reflecting that a B Sc and an M Sc had clearly left me unfit to outwit an eight-year old!

I felt a bit better a few days later, when my nine year old cousin came up to me and asked why, since she had seen her parents repeatedly do so, she herself wasn't allowed to lie. Once again I was silenced. To play for time, I asked her if she'd told anyone else about this, and asked what they had said. She said that she'd told her ayah, who "stayed quiet for a long time". Finally, she had pacified her by saying that once she was a grown-up, she too could lie, but that for the present, she should stick to the truth! With the wisdom of the ages that is vested in her ayah, if this was the best answer she could come up with, I comforted myself with the thought that I, as a mere amateur, could not hope to do any better....



Does Distance Lend Enchantment?

by Fayza Haq

THE separation can make them go apart for all time. Every one is not a Penelope or a Ulysses to wait for years on end and in the absence of the other one seeks for satisfaction and pleasure elsewhere. Safia's relations with her husband Ahad to whom she had been married for 12 years had been slightly strained of late. She hurried back after a holiday in Chittagong with her parents to make all efforts to win her husband's affections and devotion. "I want to remove ev-

ery stone in his path." I can only hope that my absence will make him value my affections she said with renewed hope and eagerness. However, within the three months that Safia had been away, there had been changes and developments in Ahad's life. He no longer restricted himself to his work in his office in the morning hours but took to visiting a pretty young housewife in his vicinity and who had her office in New Eskaton Road. The friendship

between Ahad and Manwara, his new interest, had developed so far the Zaman, the other woman's husband complained to Safia at a party that he found his wife's involvement with Ahad absolutely insufferable. He even threatened to horsewhip Ahad.

Safia, who had seldom been away from home for so long could not believe in the reports about her husband. However, she found her husband much more inconsiderate and selfish once she returned from her sojourn at her parent's home. One day he calmly told his wife how interesting he found the discussions on art and poetry with Manwara. "I find no mental rapport with you and your kind. Don't be flabbergasted if you get a *talak nama* in the next mail," the husband said coolly, and the rejected wife found the divorce statements of her husband in the mail one day. When Safia protested, she was physically beaten up by the ogre of her husband who destroyed the machine of the family automobile and removed the vital parts from the telephone receiver so the Safia would have no contact with the outside world. He gave her no money for her food and keep and sent all the servants packing home.

To make matters worse he took custody of their only child and spread malicious rumours about poor Safia. "He has never been so vicious and vile before," the wife commented. "I had hoped that after the holiday we would begin life afresh. Instead my absence proved fatal. Had I not left home I would have been able to nip Ahad's new romance in the bud. Now he is so desperate to get Manwara that he will destroy anyone who comes in the way." To escape from scorn and pity of her friends and acquaintances Safia has gone away to live with her brother in England and to do a three-year course of studies.

Safia, a mother of three little children, has had a similar experience of months of absence proving to be the fatal cause for her husband losing interest in her. A physio-therapist by profession, she had to leave her husband and home for six months training course. "I had naturally asked my friends to look him up while I was away at Copenhagen. I had never dreamt that any of my friends would want to steal my man who has his responsibilities as a father if not as a husband," she said. "When I returned from my trip, I found that Jallil, my husband, had coolly married Asma, a common shop-girl whom I had met accidentally and known for a few months, and who had taken to visiting Jallil in my absence. With the pretence of looking him up on my account, she started a

whirlwind romance with marriage vows as the culmination of the affair", she added.

"According to the reports of other visitors and neighbours, Asma had taken to visiting our home laden with packets of fruit, sweetsmeats and imported items which she picked up at the shop at which she worked Gullible and naive I had not seen through Asma's pretences earlier and had not recognised her desperate bid to tantalize and charm Jallil. Even at parties before I left home, she would giggle and chatter a bit too long with Jallil. But I had always ignored this and shrugged off. She would come to our house and not want to leave till midnight, and then too she would insist on being driven home by Jallil. She galled me with tales of how heartless her own fiancé was so that I would be patient and tolerant with her against all odds," Safia narrated.

It is not the woman alone who can have her life ruined and torn apart when necessity takes her away from her beloved one. Jawaid had given his girl friend a heavy brocade sari and a pearl ring. When he left for his study course in engineering in England he did not expect that anything could go wrong between him and the girl whose photograph he kept in his wallet.

However, he was in England only for a year when he heard vile tales of his girl's infidelity. Other young men were putting roses in her hair, ran the gossips as far as England. Jawaid had not the means to marry her just then but he put aside his books. He rushed his home his post haste only to find that the girl whom he worshipped had been talked into getting engaged to a prosperous businessman while he was away. "Love matches seldom work out in our country", was all the girl could say to.

It is commonly believed that writing letters between two persons will keep them together. But even letters do not keep a pair from drifting apart. Between one letter and the next, the following fortnight the man finds himself an attractive young woman to go around with and the wife who is minding the children and running the house can be conveniently forgotten. The wife, meanwhile, seeking some form of permanency on her own might take up a career and cultivate male friends who find her company as invigorating; just as her husband miles away may find the new young woman in his life all the inspiration that he could ever want in life. Thus going to work in another city for a while or having a holiday all by oneself may tear apart relationship for good and make a man and the woman he once adored go their different ways.

China Tries to Keep Street-Children a Rare Sight

by Paul Murphy

The problem of street-children in China is still relatively small, but there are fears that it may grow along with economic changes. Gemini News Service reports on attempts to nip the problem in the bud.



A rural migrant outside Beijing railway station

THE teenager stands by the side of the road in Beijing. Displayed on the pavement near him is a hand-lettered sign saying "Willing to do any kind of work." As he shivers in a threadbare jacket in below-freezing temperatures, he explains that he has just arrived by train from his home in a poor rural area of Shaanxi province, south of the capital.

"I'm from a poor farmer's family," he says. "There are more chances to earn money here in Beijing."

His move to Beijing was illegal: Chinese law requires everyone to have a residence permit. But lack of a permit is deterring fewer and fewer people these days, as life for farm families has become increasingly difficult.

Discontented farmers have rioted in rural areas of Sichuan and other provinces. Last year several hundred thousand farmers from Sichuan flocked to Shanghai in search of work but were moved out after failing to find employment, according to a report in the official *China Daily*.

In the country's more open climate, youth in search of better prospects find it easy to hop on a train. New arrivals can be seen hunched on the ground outside railway stations in most big cities, their possessions bundled into knapsacks. In Beijing they solicit work all over the city.

The government says the country has about 200,000 street-children, a small proportion of China's 300 million children. Although the extent of the problem does not compare with the troubles faced by other large countries, it may grow as the country's market reforms gain momentum.

Wang Daming, UN Chil-

dren's Fund (UNICEF) programme officer in Beijing for children with special needs, says UNICEF has been working closely with the Chinese authorities for the past couple of years to find ways of helping street-children.

Youngsters may see big cities, particularly in the booming southern coastal areas, as money-making meccas, says Wang. But they generally lack skills, and when they arrive they find that money is hard to come by.

As a result, they become vulnerable to the many hazards of street life, including crime. Chinese newspapers have reported cases of children being kidnapped and forced to work. This happens both in the cities and in the countryside.

"I know of cases where people have gone out to poor rural areas in Hunan province and persuaded children to return with them to Guangzhou to become flower-sellers," says Wang. Buying flowers in much of China is still a luxury, but some people can now afford them in the richer cities.

"Businessmen like to use children to sell flowers because they look appealing. But in some cases the flower-children were not well looked after and it turned into a problem."

Initial results from a survey of street-children in Shanghai by UNICEF, the local civil affairs department and the women's federation show that youth go to the cities because of broken families, poverty and lack of skills.

"Seventy per cent of the children are drop-outs from schools," says Wang. "If they can receive training, they are less likely to go to cities in search of work. Prevention is as important as helping those in trouble."

Governments in Anhui and Hunan provinces are now sponsoring programmes to train rural children. Youngsters aged 10 to 12 years are learning to raise rabbits, chickens and pigs; those 16 and older learn skills such as shoe-making that are needed in rural factories. More than 1,000 children have received training, says Wang.

China ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. A year later the country mandated care of children through the Law on the Protection of Minors.

In addition, the government is working to sensitize people to the needs of children. The Chinese National Committee for Care of Children prepared a one-hour television programme which called on people to help children with special needs, including street-children.

UNICEF is training local officials on the underlying problems of street-children.

"We held three major training courses for key officials, mainly from civil affairs departments, in nearly every province in China on how to deal with the problem," says Wang. Key officials were also sent to the Philippines to learn about the problems of street-children in another country.

Outside Beijing railway station, a teenage girl sits alone, sobbing, on top of her bundle of clothes. It is an unusual sight in China, and a crowd forms around the girl, who is obviously a recent arrival from the countryside.

As along as the problems of street children continue to receive attention in China, street-children will continue to be an unusual sight. *Gemini News*

About the Author: Paul Murphy is a British freelancer who recently spent a year working in China.

HOTEL McHOQUE

FASTER SERVICE THAN MCDONALDS



A riddle. What is the difference between a fastfood restaurant in the developed part of the world and a common roadside hotel in Bangladesh? No, mistake. The restaurant does not serve delicious meals, and the hotel awful ones. Your guts will protest at both stops. Wrong again. You do not enjoy yourself in the first, and have a bad time in the second. Both establishments make you scream.

Gotcha. There is no difference. Your eyes can tell you. You will find the fastfood restaurant on the corners of busy shopping streets. A giant clown or a homely old chap will inform you that you have arrived at just the right place. In Bangladesh you should get in under the standard sign-board with the chicken and the goat.

Your tastes can tell you. In the fastfood restaurant the menu list is very limited. French fries, McNuggets, Coke: there you, are. Your special wishes need a long

McHoque's

by Nico den Tuinder

preparation, and you might run away before they can be catered to. Now you can be served in no time. The staff does not need much training to make the items, and can therefore be easily replaced by other cheap labour. In Bangladesh you can only order *dal, bhut* and *mangsho*. Your dinner can be scooped out of a big cauldron. It is always ready. After finishing your meal you can quickly go back to work. Your hands can tell you. The yellow and red restaurant serves your meal without crockery. A napkin is cheaper. Just pour some water over your sticky greasy fingers in the dull grey or brown one; why should you bother about table manners? Your lips can tell you. The fastfood prepares your meal at just the right temperature. You do not have to cop it by blowing, and you can immediately start processing the

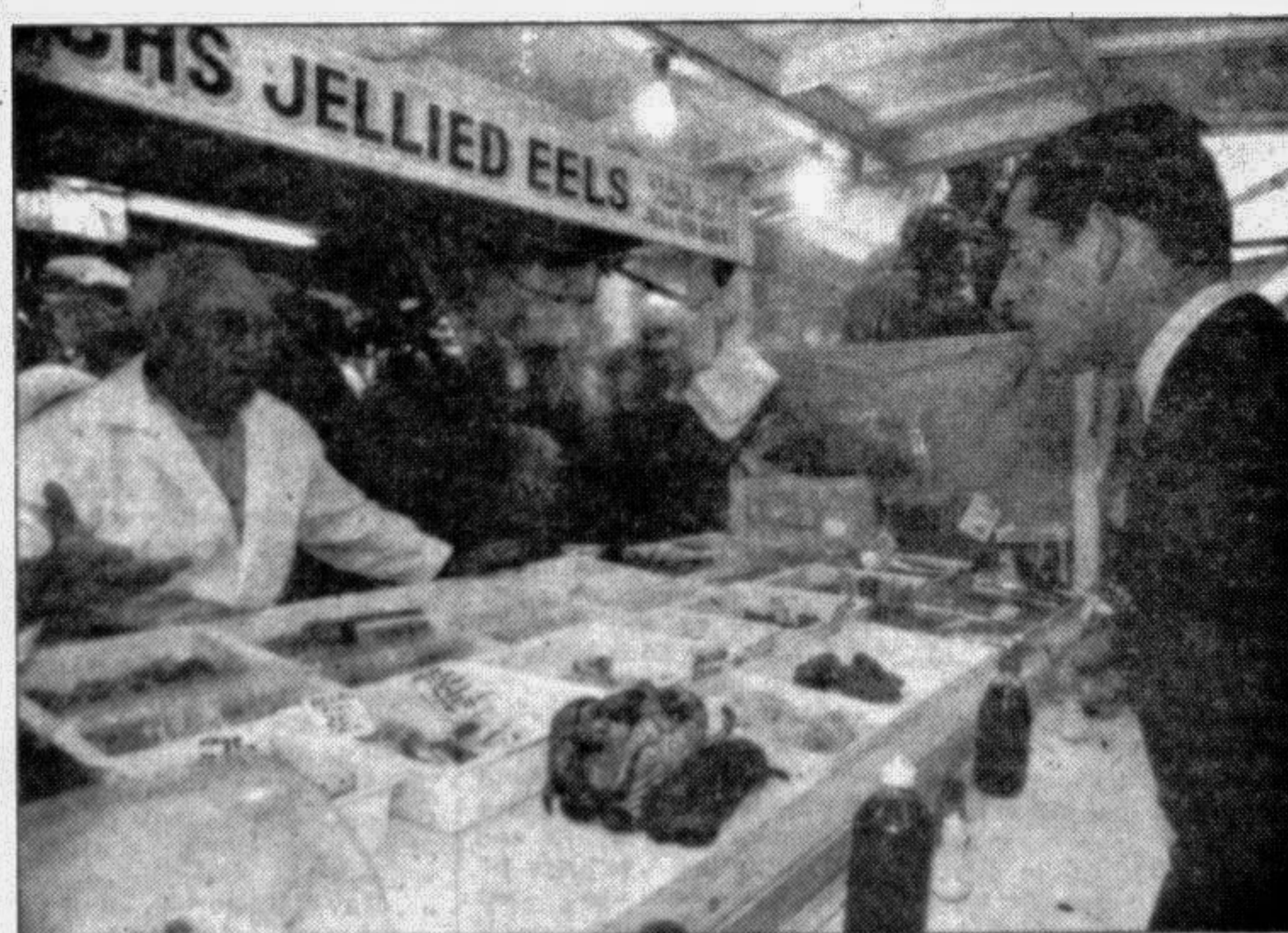
food. The fans over here have the same effect. Your lunch is cold before you can burp.

Your teeth can tell you. The hamburger is so soft your 80 year old toothless granny beats you in chewing it. You only need to swallow to get the rice down your throat. Your palate can tell you. The food will be as tasteless on Oxford Street as on Mirpur Road.

Your buttocks can tell you. The owners of both restaurants want to get rid of you as soon as possible. Other hungry stomachs need to be seated. Plastic or wooden benches are the solution. Your waiter can tell you. Right after your last gulp he will start cleaning the table, kindly suggesting you to move on. Your wallet can tell you. You leave the restaurants just a little bit poorer. The poor with poorly developed tastes frequent the places.

The restaurant business of Bangladesh is ready for the 21st century.

Royal Visitor at the Market



One of London's oldest markets, established in the 13th century, was recently visited by the Prince of Wales. It was the first Royal visit since the market, in Croydon, south London, was granted its Charter by King Edward I in 1276.

The invitation had come from the traders themselves, and the idea behind the visit was to allow the Prince to meet "the ordinary people that make Croydon tick."

The Prince strolled among the stalls, which were all decorated with red white and blue bunting, sampling foods such as that traditional London delicacy, jellied eels, as shown here.

He chatted to the stallholders, including "Marvin the Banana King", John, "the singing fishmonger," and "Jellied Eel George", and visited the market "pub", the Dog and Bull, which dates from 1595 and is the oldest in Croydon.

— COI London