

Historical Perspective of Childhood

By: Anamika Kumari

HOD, B.Ed.

TTC, Bhagalpur



Childhood

Childhood is a beautiful phase of life for most of us. It is a period associated with play, fantasy, and innocence. It is the crucial phase in life and involves important aspects of growth and development which are critical for the entire life span.

Historical Perspective of Childhood

There have been different ways in which childhood has been perceived in different times in the history of civilization. A French historian named Philippe Aries, analyzed how children were depicted in history. Using works of art, letters, and many other sources he explored how the meaning of childhood evolved from medieval times onwards to the present.

Philippe Aries wrote that childhood is a very new concept. It did not exist at all in the medieval period. There were no children depicted in paintings of that era. There were only young babies or adults. All those who were not babies were painted in adult dresses, with adult body language, and adult-like expressions. Most young people were apprenticed, became workers in the fields and entered the adult roles at a very early age. Even 'people' around seven years of age were seen as little adults, and not as children.

The medieval cultures lacked the concept of childhood. Childhood is a later historical creation. It came into existence among the rich people (upper class) in the 16th and 17th centuries. It further developed in the 18th century among the upper class. And it finally emerged on the scene in the 20th century in both the upper and lower classes. Once the institution of childhood began to emerge, the situation of the young person began to change in society. First they were named children. A theory of innocence of the child emerged. Children were to be protected from adult reality. The facts of birth, death, sex, tragedy and adult world events were hidden from the child. Children were increasingly segregated by age.

The institution of modern childhood, the attitude, customs and laws that defined and located children in modern life and determined, to a large degree, what their lives were like, and how we, their elders treated them. The ways in which modern childhood seemed to him be bad for most of those who lived within it and how it should and might have changed.

-John Holt (1974), *Escape from Childhood*