

Youth and Their Concerns

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Introduction

In the previous four chapters, we have discussed issues related to human growth and development. We paid special emphasis to the stages of adolescence and youth, since that is the time when the maximum number of changes take place within an individual. A person matures, biologically, intellectually and socially, and gradually his/her dependence on his/her parents and elders decreases. Though individuals face a lot of hardships and problems in this process of growing and evolving, they try to manage their lives on their own and thus, learn the art of living by 'trial and error'. There are a wide array of issues which gain precedence during this period and are a cause of serious concern for the general well-being and healthy all-round development of youngsters.

In this chapter we will study the concept of 'youth', and various ways in which one can perceive and explain it. We also discuss the personal and environmental factors which are a cause of concern with regard to youngsters, and the challenges faced by youth in the changing society. As we have read in the earlier units, sex related issues gain a lot of significance in this phase of life and so we will also pay attention to various such issues. Apart from this, we will study how youth have been and are being exploited in various sections of society, and finally suggest certain strategies to deal with these significant issues in order that the youth can live in a healthy and worthwhile society.

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Concept and Meaning of Youth

Youth is a time of search for meaning, for belonging and for achievement. It is a key stage of intense discovery of oneself and of one's qualities and capacities. It is point of decision-making about one's career, one's partner, and one's direction in life. Youth is phase for accepting, rejecting or reshaping one's values and beliefs, and one's stance towards status and authority. Youth has a tremendous potential that can be harnessed to bring about a creative transformation or enormous destruction.

According to the United Nations Organisation (UNO), youth is the period between 15 and 25 years which may differ from country to country e.g. 15 to 30 years, etc. However, you would agree that youth is vital transition period from childhood to adulthood, from dependence to interdependence, from being protected to being protective. It is also a time of curiosity, learning and experimenting, when special skills are acquired and mature habits are formed. As we have already discussed in the earlier units, youth is also a stage of important physical and psychological changes as well as of the evolution of the being or the individual.

Youth has always been the major concern of every society, therefore, empowering the youth for the betterment of the society is one of the most vital challenges for any country. For this purpose, it would be appropriate for us to define youth. The concept of youth can be perceived in different forms i.e.

- As an age category
- As a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, and
- As a social construct

i) Youth as an Age Category

Youth as an age category is the most convenient, popular and common sense way in which youth has been defined. It is argued that this category defines youth more significantly than any other category. The experience common to all young leads them to defining themselves in certain ways as sharing the same fate.

ii) Youth as a Transitional Stage from Childhood to Adulthood

Mitteraeur, a social scientist, identifies four significant happenings that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. He maintains that these transitional markets have remained fairly stable over time. They are:

- Leaving home
- Finding employment
- Setting up home
- Marriage

Mitterauer, however, points out that these transitional markets have limitations in helping us to define who youth are. The timing of these aspects of transition, their meaning, their order of occurrence differ for young men and young women, and from one region to another. For example, some transitional markets are traditionally applicable only to young men. Until recently, in many societies or cultures, recruitment into the army was for males only. Also, the very concept of youth is embedded in the practices of patriarchy— the use of the term youth usually brings a mental image of a young man. Thus, we need to, sincerely, broaden our outlook.

iii) Youth as a Social Construct

Each and every society has its ways of seeing youth. These social constructs are not necessarily true, nor

do they always show youth the way they really are. One of the best ways of understanding the social construction of youth is to study how other societies construct views of them. These views differ from society to society. A comparison of different views can help us to understand our own views.

Youth can be an astonishingly brief period in some societies such as those where people live by hunting and gathering, because the skills required for survival are usually acquired in childhood itself. These skills are usually needed as early as possible in adult roles. In other societies, particularly late capitalist economies such as those of present-day Europe and the United States of America, the concept of youth, or at least young people, is being stretched further and further. The reason for this can be found in structural adjustment. As structural adjustment continues to create extended periods of unemployment, especially for school leavers, people tend to remain longer in the category of youth. Today, in many western countries, the category of youth even seems to include people in their early thirties.

Primary Factors Causing Concern

Whenever we talk about youth, we discuss issues which are usually acute problems related to youth, like unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse, juvenile crimes, vandalism etc. These perceptions of the youth present them more as a challenge than an asset to any society.

We ought to remember that youth are the most dynamic part of the society. To develop is their basic demand and main trait. The path for their development depends on the selection and the integration of the social goal of youth development with personal ideas and aspirations. Youth problems in the modern society and social problems with which youth are concerned are closely related to the subject of youth development. During this process of developing and evolving, the youth

go through a number of changes, which affect them in various ways. They might not be prepared to accept these changes very easily and may react in different ways. Therefore, rather than perceiving youth in a negative manner we ought to pay appropriate emphasis on the factors which are a cause of concern in this regard. We can divide these factors of concern to the youth into personal factors and environmental factors.

Personal Factors

Personal factors are those which, in general, have little to do with the environmental conditions of the individual. They are in many instances related to the behavioural, biological and economic dispositions of the individual himself/herself. We are already aware that the process of growing up is a very difficult phase for all adolescents. They are not prepared to see and experience such drastic changes in their physiques. Emotional disturbance accompany these physical changes in their physiques. Emotional disturbance accompany these physical changes because of hormonal changes and they generally become irritable and uncompromising. It is in this period of development that youngsters tend to get very concerned about the normalcy of their physical characteristics. They are very conscious, all the time, of their appearance and sex-appropriateness. Based on these feelings about normalcy and sex-appropriateness, they develop 'Self-concepts' and hold to them for a long time. Just like acceptance of the changed body, the desire of acceptance of sex-roles causes the youngsters to play 'near adults', and this is one of the major developmental tasks of this age. Because of the advantages and prestige associated with the traditional male sex-role, most boys are not only willing but also eager to play it. This however, is not often true of girls. They often enter youth with a somewhat blurred concept of the sex role they will be expected to play as adults, and are now confronted with the problems of accepting the traditional stereotype of the female. For

some girls who have learnt to play the traditional female sex-role throughout childhood, it will not be a problem. But for others this may be a major psychological hazard to good personal and social adjustments. As adolescents attain legal maturity, they are anxious to shed the stereotype of teenagers and to create the impression that they are near adults. They often discover that dressing and acting like adult is not enough. So, some of them begin to concentrate on behaviour that is associated with the adult status – smoking, drinking, using drugs, and engaging in sex, for example. They believe this behaviour will create the image they desire.

Role of Family

Family also has an important role to play with regard to the personal factors in their development. First of all, a child's parents are his/her first role models. He learns initial behaviour by merely imitating them and later, it develops into a habit. Also the values and moral that the family members inculcate in the child affect his/her life in a big way. Often in single child families, the child gets all the attention at home, and therefore, he/she is likely to become more demanding in other social settings, in terms of relationships and even material gains. Therefore, such parents should make a conscious effort to teach their child attributes like sharing, respect for others etc. On the other hand, in families where there are two or more children, there are chances of sibling rivalry. One of the children might feel that the other gets more affection and favour from the parents, and therefore, become stubborn and rebellious in nature. It is the hands of the parents to handle these circumstances carefully and also make the children realize their mistakes and rectify them.

Another very important role of family, especially parents in a child's life is their expectations from him/her. If the parents are very ambitious for their children, they might directly or indirectly pressure them to perform well, some times even to over perform, unrealistically

so. When the child is not able to meet the expectations of his/her parents, he/she might begin to lose his/her self confidence. Therefore, it is always advisable for parents to know the aptitude and capacity of their child and encourage, and not push him/her to work hard in order to achieve his/her goals.

By the time children reach adolescence, they tend to take their own decisions. Most overprotective parents stop them from doing so, thinking that they are not mature enough. But, the right approach would be that of 'permissiveness'; and then guiding them from time to time. This will encourage them and boost their self-confidence. They will learn how to be independent, from their own experience.

There is another section of children who have been rendered homeless and familyless. Their families have a negative role to play by their absence in the children's life—orphans, destitutes and street children who have practically nobody to guide them live their own life from one day to the other. At times, some anti-social elements with vested interests take advantage of their situation and involve them in crime, violence etc. of which they become a part very soon. In order to prevent this, governmental and non-governmental efforts are crucial.

Environmental Factors

The most significant impact on a child's personality, after family, is the educational institution. In schools, the teacher's role is the same as that of parents at home. They help in building a child's personality by guiding them and even by reinforcing their behaviour with rewards and punishment. That is how a child learns that he/she is not supposed to do something for which he/she is rewarded for. In co-educational schools, children also learn gradually with the process of growing up what their relationships with members of the opposite sex be like. In segregated schools, they

deprived of this aspect of socialization. But, in any case, peer influence is very strong, particularly during adolescence, when children tend to identify more with peer group behaviour. Such behaviour continues till college age.

This is the time when they start thinking seriously in terms of their careers. Once they have chosen their direction, they strive to achieve their respective goals. Much depends on their aptitude and interest so it is advisable that parents do not expect their children to choose a career according to their parents liking. Once they get into employment, life changes drastically: they are no longer students. They are now expected to behave as responsible adults, and they often make conscious efforts to live up to this expectation. Another important factor regarding employment is job satisfaction. If they are satisfied with their jobs, the results show in their work.

Another important factor is that of religion. Right from childhood, we see our religion has different ritual and festivals within and outside the family. These experiences and the fact that they are born in a particular family, give them the identity of belonging to a particular religion. This religion should inculcate in them spiritual richness and rather than closing them down to narrow thinking. For example, acceptances of inter-caste, and inter-religious marriages, even if a little reluctantly, point out to the gradual lowering of the religion bound walls.

Media has an important role to play as well. With the sudden influx of satellite channels, the adolescents and youth are, on the one hand, flooded with information to their advantage. On the other hand, there is some information that can be quite misleading. Also, with the strong impact of western culture and life-style, the adolescents are driven towards it without much forethought. Also, certain forms of media such as

cinema and T.V focus more on affluence and western life-styles, which are then imitated by our youth. Perhaps media should not mislead the youth by making them run after affluence rather than values and morality.

Often, when in search of a life-style that the youth cannot manage to get, they get frustrated and take up improper alternatives available to them. A burning example of these can be the militants who have joint organizations like JFLF, ULFA etc. It is a very sorry state of affairs when we lose so much of energy, in the form of youth in appropriate steps in this regard. Also it is the duty of the government to make amendments in the existing system through better policies and programmes to make youth development their prime agenda.

Various establishments, whether Governmental bodies, Non-governmental organizations or community based organizations can contribute in their own way at the local and national levels. Organisations like the NCC, NSS, YMCA, YWCA, Nehru Yuvak Kendras etc. help a lot in channelizing youth power in the correct direction.

Realities in a Changing Society

Among the indicators of the changing society visible around us are access to information technology, satellite communication etc. On the one hand, this opens up innumerable avenues for the young generation. But on the other hand, we cannot refuse to see the 'turbulence' in the changing society. As well all know too well, the youth of today is exposed to all kinds of information and knowledge which is crucial for his/her healthy growth and development as an individual. But we should always be ready to accept that as a transitional stage to adulthood, adolescence seems a particularly vulnerable period for such exposure. This is of specific significance in a country like India where

the society itself is undergoing major transition due to influences from the west, particularly in this era of liberalization. We are fast turning into a consumer society where the influence of sex, violence and materialism is only too evident. The circumstances thus created, besides being highly stressful are continuously posing a vital question: Does our young generation know how to face and adapt to these changes?

A sizeable number of educated Indian youth find themselves being along by the tide of fast growing consumer and materialistic culture. They are caught in the race for jobs and success in a world little concerned with values and morality. There is also a growing number of youth in our towns and cities who are unemployed and marginalized, and consequently at high risk of being trapped by the communalism and crime promoted by various vested interest. Many young people are also victims of sexual abuse, oppression and violence. They struggle to cope with such situations, but they also show tremendous resistance. There is also a whole category of working youth who are occupied in menial jobs; they live on the streets or in dingy places, are exploited by others, and have little or no security. In our villages and slums, where live the vast majority of the youth of our country, the general picture is one of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. But, there are sections of the dalits and tribals who are beginning to assert their identity. Their young people are engaged in a struggle for their self-identity; they are beginning to demand – forcefully, and at times, even violently their due share of the benefits of development. We cannot also forget the present day scourge of the evils of alcoholism and drug-addiction afflicting many of our young people.

Many young women are in the process of undoing, the victimization, discrimination and injustice to which they have been subject for a long time. They are

discovering the rightful place for themselves that was hitherto denied them in the family and in society.

Against this backdrop of the youth condition in India, it is somewhat heartening to find a small but significant section of youth committed at various levels to socio-cultural and political change and the welfare of the community. The many social movements, organizations and processes that have emerged in recent years have been successfully tapping the generosity, dedication and professional skills of these sections of enlightened and committed youth. These youth have been contributing in the struggle for the rights of children, of women and of the marginalized, as well as in the campaign for a clean environment, democracy and human rights. This is indeed a sign of hope and a pointer to what the young generation, if given the proper guidance and encouragement can achieve.

The grinding poverty and socio-economic inequality prevailing in India are a depressing reality for most of the younger generation. Seriously lacking in resources and opportunities, millions of youth all over the country face unemployment and oppression, and as a result their creative energies are simply underutilized or destroyed. While there is need, therefore, to provide avenues for employment to the extent possible or to assist young people in securing good jobs, they themselves should also show a creative, enterprising spirit and face up to the risks involved in taking the initiative to devise ways of self-employment. With regard to those who are victims of sexual abuse, trafficking and exploitation, the country needs to reach out to them and work for their liberation and rehabilitation in a more active manner than has been done hitherto.

Communication and fundamentalism of a militant kind are increasingly taking hold of various communities, and threatening to destroy the very fabric of the society, which is characterized by a plurality of cultures and by

mutual respect and acceptance of others. We have also witnessed, in recent years, a systematic and large-scale mobilization of youth on communal planks, based mainly on an appeal to their individual and collective fears and insecurities.

An atmosphere of brutal competition and corruption leads to the narrowing down of the individual's quest for a 'better life' in materialistic terms. The result is a crisis of cultural identity as well as clash with the tradition and values. They experience identity crisis in the face of an increasingly consumer and materialistic society. They often feel confused as to where to draw the line between consumer values and human values and human values, between 'having-more' and 'being-more'.

Those who migrate to towns and cities face considerable difficulties arising out of regionalism and ethnicism. They sometimes feel lost or neglected; they may tend to form cliques according to their language or place or origin. It is even worse when one group tends to treat another with indifference: the result is unnecessary tension, clashes and disharmony. Young people, therefore, should experience the joy of companionship and of collaboration with the peers.

There are many other young people who are caught in the shackles of various other kinds of oppression. In education, at workplace, at home and at various settings in the society, women face discriminatory behaviour. Even after having ensured 'equal wages for equal work' in our directive principles of state policy, it is not really put into practice.

We ought to help bring such oppressed young people together as a group, a movement or an organization where through the very process of sharing among themselves they will already experience a great freedom from domination, and find encouragement and support in their endeavors to break their bonds and so recover

their freedom and dignity as individuals. They need to take up responsible leadership and activity take part in the formation and organization of youth who are poor, voiceless and marginalized.

Challenges to the Youth in a Changing Society

The society today is becoming more and more competitive in all aspects. A mere academic qualification does not take anyone very far; one is asked to prove his/her calibre in getting things done, in working together with others, in increasing productivity and wealth. This competitive atmosphere is also visible in the personal life-styles of people – in the way one tries to present oneself to the public. We shall discuss some of challenges that the youth are faced with in this section.

i) Self-confidence

In this context, one of the first challenges before a young person is one of self-confidence. A growing up young person is trying to find his/her feet amidst the turmoil of the physical and emotional changes that he/she has to deal with. Added to this is the external pressure to perform and to prove. Very few young people get the kind of support and guidance to grow in the kind of self assurance and confidence that is needed to see them through this high pressure. The fear of not measuring up lurks deep within. Parents today add to this pressure on the young forcing them to take up various programmes of study and exams that would ensure that the wards stand a chance in this highly competitive environment. The surge in the number of suicides among the young is part of the expression of the exasperated ones who feel they cannot reach the high expectations of their dear ones and are made to feel that they are a failure.

ii) Family Relationships

Relationships with family members is another challenge of the young people. They are more and more pulled towards their peer groups and friends with whom they would like to spend most of their time. Suddenly, the doting father and the ever attentive mother may be considered a bit of a nuisance. The young boy and girl can do with some support and guidance in balancing their affection towards their parents and the external pull towards their peer groups.

iii) Idealism of Youth

The young person is highly idealistic. He/she is angry at the exploitation, injustice, corruption, discrimination, poverty, hunger and other evils that threaten the harmony in society. This idealism is easily manipulated by vested interest groups that spell out their agenda in the most romantic terms. The young people are swayed by forces that would like to tap into the unselfish, impulsive energy of the young people for their own end. Communal forces, militant groups, political parties, and religious groups play havoc with the idealism of the youth, and leave them frustrated in the end.

iv) Risk Taking

The young are willing to take risks and to experiment. They look for exhilarating experiences and accessories that are “cool”. The media has understood this well. The media is out to sell glamour and happiness to the youth. “Have and be happy” seems to be the underlying message. Relationships, happiness, satisfaction, success, everything depends on what you possess and how you appear. The number of young people who do get caught up in this world of glamour and consumerism, forgetting the deeper realities of life is not small.

v) Rural Urban Divide

The rapid changes in technology has made the world smaller and brought people closer. The process of

globalization aided by the power of technology opens up new opportunities and avenues in employment, business, travel, health care, education and a host of other conveniences thought impossible a couple of decades ago. To reap the advantages of this progress, one needs the capacity to tap into its potential. It is here that the rural youth are at a tremendous disadvantage compared to the urban youth. The urban youth are in a way highly influenced with choices of opportunities and possibilities, while the rural youth are often left with no choice other than to take what comes their way. The kind of facilities and infrastructure development to keep pace with and take advantage of the progress of technology is denied to millions in the villages. As a result the gap between the rural youth and the urban youth is widening. Things like electricity, communication links, flow of information, financial support, training and education institutions of quality that are taken for granted in the cities are far from satisfaction in the rural areas. While some have all the advantages, others are left to struggle with very little. As a result, thousands flock to the cities in search of the “dream” life, making our cities crowded, with all its disadvantages. Some very smart ones make it big in the cities. But majority of these young men and women who flock to the cities, with little support and guidance, end up being exploited and manipulated. Our villages should become attractive enough for our young people to find a reason to stay on.

vi) **Professed Values and Lived Values**

Another aspect of grave challenge to the youth is the evident dichotomy between professed values and lived values in the public sphere. Whether it is in politics at various levels, in religion, business, administration or in education, young people are bombarded with contradictory messages from those who are supposed to be leaders. The public pronouncements on honesty, transparency, communal harmony, etc. do not find

actualization in deeds in day to day life. The number of public scams that are increasing day by day is a clear indication of this. What message do young minds gather when those they consider role models flout the law with impunity? What lesson does a young person get when the guilty are shielded by the same authority that is expected to render justice? The messages that our young people get from the so called “teachers” are very contradictory and the young minds are confused as to what is right and what is wrong. The message that goes out very often seems to be ‘everything is fair as long as you do not get caught’. There can be no message more damaging to young minds than this.

vii) **Health Hazards**

Health hazards facing the youth are much more than ever before. The threat of HIV/AIDS, the dangers of drug addiction, alcoholism, smoking and chewing pan, the increasing number of road accidents, adverse effects of environmental pollution, and the build up of stress at all levels claim more young victims each year. At the same time, the access to correct information on these health hazards and to affordable and quality health care, and counselling and guidance services is very limited to the youth. This is a cause of major concern in this present age.

Young people are eager to make their mark on the society. They need the space and the opportunity to do it. They also need guidance to make positive contribution. Adults, who are concerned for the young would ensure that the youth play their role responsibly, and walk with them to the mature adult world. Youth can do it. The society should not adopt a negative attitude towards the youth by “under estimating them”.

Youth and Sex Related Issues

As we have discussed in chapter 10 and 11 a universal phenomenon particular to adolescence and one that

never occurs again in the life of the individual is the process of developing –sexual maturation. Biologically, this is a totally new experience. Its significance is due both to the pervasiveness and to each society's expectations. It creates in the adolescents a great wonderment about themselves and a feeling of having something in common with all human beings. It influences all their relationships with each other, male or female. Boys begin to perceive sexuality essentially as a way of achieving fun and pleasure. This is partly explained by the fact that their genital organs are situated outside the body where they can be seen and touched. Girls, on the contrary do not experience this stage as a very pleasant one. Their sexual organs are within the body and therefore, they cannot be seen and touched. The beginning of the menstrual bleeding can be a frightening experience.

By now, we know that sexuality is a gift intended primarily to foster and strengthen the bond of love between a man and woman united in a life long commitment. To understand this sufficient degree of maturity is essential. In order that young people can attain this maturity, providing them with appropriate sex education at the appropriate age is very important. Mostly, issues relating to sex education and HIV/AIDS do not have immediate and easy answers. Educating young people on these topics gives an opportunity to clarify their own questions and to think of some strategies to overcome the difficulties.

Adolescents experience conflicting pressures from a variety of sources in relation to sex, which are often contradictory. There may be a desire to explore sexual identity and experiment. This may include exploring masturbation, same gender affection and a variety of other sexual activities. Along with this desire, they may also become concerned with what is okay, acceptable and permissible from the point of getting infected with sexually transmitted diseases or becoming pregnant.

Many youngsters are prone to desires for short-term relationships. The messages and pressures received from the media and peer group often install in them this desire for experiment. Those who succeed in their attempt are likely to seek further opportunities.

When we are talking of sex related issue, there is a need to discuss certain aspects, or rather behaviours, which are not necessarily limited to young people, but nevertheless, young people are in the picture in a big way. Hence, in order to provide you with a better knowledge of several issues, we will discuss 'alternative sexual patterns' and 'maladaptive sexual behaviours'.

Alternative Sexual Patterns

You should note that the sexual patterns or styles in this general category are usually considered by many to be acceptable alternatives to traditional sexual patterns. Though often subject to social disapproval, there is a lack of conclusive evidence that these patterns are necessarily maladaptive, nor are persons engaging in them ordinarily subjected to legal sanctions.

i) Masturbation

Masturbation is defined as self-stimulation of the genitals for sexual gratification. It has been traditionally condemned on religious and moral grounds, as well as for its allegedly harmful physical effects. It is taught that masturbation is a vile habit that can be prevented with a little self-control. Many sexologists emphasize that masturbating as practiced by the average adolescent has no known harmful physiological effects and is actually a normal and healthy sexual outlet for young people. Children particularly boys who feel unhappy, lonely and unwanted may centre too much of their activity around masturbatory practices in an attempt to compensate for their frustrations.

Usually, the undesirable features of masturbation are the worry, guilt and self-devaluation that may be

associated with it. Young people need to learn self control. Masturbation if carried over to marital life can have negative consequences. Sex is primarily for sharing and expressing love between a husband and wife. Excessive masturbation can lead to developing less interest in the heterosexual act in marital life which can cause strain in sexual relationship between a husband and wife. Mutual masturbation among peer (of same sex) can lead to same sex relationship which will leave its impact on one's personality. Among the Catholics (the largest denomination of Christian) masturbation is still considered a sin.

ii) **Pre-marital and Marital Patterns**

Traditional sexual mores in Indian society have emphasized abstinence from sexual relations prior to marriage and fidelity in one's spouse following marriage. However, we can notice that these mores have been increasingly challenged and threatened over the years.

Although there are reports that premarital sexual relations may be on the increase, there is no evidence of widespread indiscriminate sexual activity. Even among persons who, perhaps, do not consider marriage a prerequisite for sexual relations, emphasis is usually placed on some kind of loving relationship or mutual commitment before sexual involvement.

In this context, it is important for us to note a form of non-marital relationship which is gradually emerging in our society which may be called as cohabitation. In cohabitation, the person lives quite openly with a member of the opposite sex on a relatively stable basis. Such a phenomena can be noticed especially in urban India.

iii) **Prostitution**

Prostitution is defined as the provision of sexual relations in return for money. Technically, there are four types

of prostitution, the most common involving heterosexual relations for which the female is paid. There is also heterosexual prostitution for which the male is paid by the female; male homosexual prostitution for which a male provides sexual relations for another male and female homosexual prostitution for which a female provides sexual relations for another female. The last three types appear to be relatively are throughout the world.

iv) **Homosexuality**

Homosexual behaviour is sexual behaviour directed towards a member of one's own sex. It is generally referred as 'lesbianism' for female relationships. Homosexuality has existed throughout recorded history. The ancient Greek, Roman, Persian, and Muslim civilizations all condoned a measure of homosexuality. Later in Greece and Rome, for example, homosexual prostitution existed openly. Most contemporary cultures, however, have condemned homosexuality as socially undesirable. Homosexuals may, nevertheless, be well adjusted, well educated and highly successful in their occupation.

Contrary to the popular opinion, it is not possible to divide people into two clear out groups, homosexuals and heterosexuals. You may find certain individuals whose experience and desires combine both heterosexual and homosexual components. Homosexual behaviour is considered a sin by some of the world religions, particularly the Christian.

Exploitation and Oppression of Youth

Over the ages, our society has been witness to various forms of oppression and exploitation directed towards certain section of the community, or at certain communities in general. Now, we are trying to break these shakles of oppression and come out to stand together. But still many groups face oppression,

including working class people, women, adolescents, scheduled castes and tribes, certain religious groups, people who are differently labeled like eunuchs, lesbians and homosexuals, people surviving with HIV, drug users, single parents, unwed mothers, street children, devadasis, blood, semen and milk donors, people who have used the mental health system etc. Though all these kinds of oppressions exist for different reasons and social practices, they share certain features. Some of the shared features of oppression include exclusion from the mainstream process of decision making in the society, social and financial injustice, misinformation of facts which distorts one's perception of life and keeping one's group bound to the status quo.

People of the working class are oppressed on the basis of their position or designation nature and position of work, place of work—public versus private sector, hours of work, poor pay and perks, poor housing and opportunities for education, and limited access to lawful means of improving these needs and conditions. Women on the other hand are oppressed on the basis of their gender, discrimination in pay, limitation in opportunities for education, political participation, religious participation and job opportunities, perpetuating of unpaid care work, limitation of choice regarding pregnancy and abortion, limitations in decision making and instilling a sense of inferiority and lesser worth in comparison to men.

Young People

Also, there is a different kind of stress that youngsters have to undergo. As we have already seen the chief task and problem of adolescence is growing up to be a mature adult. The young persons feel that they are not longer children and yet, they are not grown up enough to be adults. The adolescents want to have a place among adults and yet feel inadequate in the task. They attempt to push away all parental props and take their

first steps alone and unaided, and at the same time, they feel the need of their parents more than ever.

Now, that they are trying to become more and more of themselves, and less and less of their parent's children, home pleasures tend to have less appeal. The world around them seems to change everyday, while their viewpoint changes even faster. The more the adolescents feel that their maturity is underrated, the more rebellious they will be and the more awkward will be their attempts to prove how grow-up they are. This is their way of rebelling against the circumstances that cause them so much stress. At this stage, it is important to give the adolescents, adequate freedom to do their own experimenting without oppressing them. Only with freedom one can learn to be responsible. Certainly, this freedom entails risk; but the only alternative to freedom is 'overprotection'. Overprotection can render the adolescents incapable of developing their self-confidence, sense of responsibility and social judgment. It is, therefore, essential that while providing freedom, instead of oppression, they should be guided and helped to become responsible, capable and self-dependent.

The HIV Infected

Persons living with HIV are also exploited. Often, they are not treated properly or refused treatment. They are socially ostracized; they are unwelcome in their own families. Provision for their social security, like insurance, is not available. They are being thrown out of employment. Given the present situation in India, if individuals are found to be HIV positive through a chance test they are not informed about their HIV status.

Other Groups

The drug addicts are another lot who face oppression. There are thousands of drug abusers in India who hail from every stratum of society. Millions of street-children and children of prostitutes are introduced into drug

use before they reach their teenage. Unemployment and frustration have forced many youngsters from middle class families to seek the help of drugs. Affluence, bad company and lack of love and care from parents compel many people adolescents to take to drugs. Once addicted, the family, society, religious groups and the legal system look down upon them. Similar is the plight of unwed mothers, single parents and the devadasis who are despised by our tradition bound society in spite of all the advancement in knowledge and development of science and technology. Professional blood donors, semen donors and milk donors are very much in demand. They are important as long as they can supply their precious human tissue. They also face oppression in the society by way of poverty, financial deprivation and subjection to misinformation, which distorts the perceptions of their lives.

In the light of this discussion, we are led to pose questions to the society and to ourselves. Where will all this exploitation and oppression lead them? Is society not responsible if these oppressed groups take up just about any alternative, violent or illegal, to express their anger and dissatisfaction?

Strategies and Suggestions

After having discussed the problems faced by the youth, we ought to think and work out strategies and suggestions to deal with the concern of youth. Let us classify our strategies into three – Prevention, Protection, and Participation.

Prevention

A host of considerations arise in relation to the preventive strategy. The most obvious is the satisfaction of basic needs, such as food, water, shelter, health and education, which may enable people to exist without having to suffer from the pangs of insufficiency leading to social deprivations and dislocation. These needs are

closely related to the fact that a majority of the nation's population still lives in rural areas, thus calling for priority allocation of resources and decentralization of power to proper rural development.

Preventive education has an untapped and unlimited potential. Its long-term effects are vast. For instance, environmental education can help to prevent environmental degradation from having negative impact on children and youth. Similarly, education against drug abuse and sex education may both have positive consequences for the physical and mental welfare of children, youth and their families. For this purpose appropriate emphasis at the governmental, community and family level is required on family education in general, and on providing knowledge about HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and drug abuse, alcoholism, smoking etc. Also, at schools and college proper facilities should be provided for counselling and guidance.

Youth development should not be seen as totally independent from the other core concerns of development particularly family development. It should thus, be integrated into the planning process as one of the components calling for immediate attention.

Protection

The role of laws, policies and measures to protect children and youth holds great importance. It calls for action at national and international levels. At the national level, the existing laws and policies should be scrutinized to assess their efficiency. In this regard, much depends upon the integrity of the law makers and law-enforcers themselves.

Various discriminatory laws exist against children and youth on grounds of gender, race and social origin. Female youth are not treated universally at par with male youth in many areas of law and practice.

Nationality questions, access to schools, children born out of wedlock and employment potential are some widespread examples where the legal framework stumbles. These laws should be identified and reformed.

Various laws particularly on social welfare and social security, exist only on paper. These should be seen as ways and means of alleviating the plight of many youngsters and their families. A lot depends upon how the state will utilize these laws to reallocate resources to guarantee social justice and equity.

Participation

Youth participation is not a new concept, but it has yet to become a reality in several areas. There are many countries, where youth groups operate constructively to promote the interests of youth and children in many fields e.g. the National Service Scheme, National Cadet Corps etc. The current challenge is to uphold the structure of participation without allowing it to be manipulated. On another front, the activities of the youth groups and other NGOs promoting child and youth development should be better integrated in the whole process of developmental entities which may be instrumental in making the development strategy effective, especially as the latter also hold a plethora of resources and powers. Just a simple glance at the children and youth on the streets and in the villages anywhere in the developing and developed world will reveal the true motivation for action.

Participation of the mentors of the youth—their parents and teachers in all such actions is very significant. Participation of youth should be highlighted in the media to send the message across to as large number of people as possible, particularly, issues which need widespread attention should be propagated.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we studied the concerns of youth. First of all you were familiarized with the fact that youth as a concept can be perceived in three different forms. Then we went on to discuss certain primary factors which determine the behaviour of adolescents and youth.

A very important aspect related to youth is the issues regarding sex. We discussed under these, the alternative sexual practices as— masturbation, pre-marital and marital patterns, prostitution, and homosexuality.

We also discussed how youth along with several sections of the society are exploited and oppressed, not only at the hands of the privileged class, but also, at times due to the administrative system. This affects them in more ways and in a severe manner than we can imagine.

Finally, to wind up our discussion we suggested strategies to deal with these issues and problems. There were classified into three – Prevention, Protection and Participation.

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