

Youth Empowerment: Socio Cultural Perspective – Disorientation to Direction

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Abstract – Youth is the most powerful asset for any country, But this young population can become the most difficult asset to manage and their unique advantage will be lost if adequate attention is not paid to making investments for the development and nurturing of this asset. They know their rights but are oblivious of their duties. Empowerment refers to proper guidance including proper values, rational thinking, and decision making process and leading a satisfactory life. Society today needs empowered youth in all aspects to sustain its culture- social and emotional development. The youth today need a supportive society. The National Youth Policy, 2014 aims at empowering youth to realise their potential for the development of nation.

Keywords – Empowerment, Rational Thinking, Supportive Society, National Youth Policy

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INTRODUCTION

Youth is the most powerful asset for any country and especially in India which is home to a fifth of the world's youth. According to the **Annual Report of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports 2016-17**, India is one of the youngest nations in the World, with about 65% of the population under 35 years of age. The youth in the age group of 15-29 years comprise 27.5% of the population.[1] India is expected to become the 4th largest economy by 2025, only after the United States, China and Japan, contributing about 5.5%-6% to the world GDP¹. While most of these developed countries face the risk of an ageing workforce, India is expected to have a very favourable demographic profile with youth forming its largest population base..

This young population which provides India its unique demographic advantage, while being one of the most valuable assets of the country can become the most difficult asset to manage and their unique advantage will be lost if adequate attention is not paid to making investments for the development and nurturing of this asset and also understand, recognise and help reduce the challenges the youth of India is facing today. Youth is the major source of financial prosperity and social change in any nation therefore it is imperative that they be given proper guidance, channelized and empowered for better future. Youth empowerment is essential not merely for the sake of national development but for the personal development of the individual, family and the community as well.

Here empowerment refers to the proper guidance including proper values, rational thinking, and decision

making process and to leading a satisfactory life. Society today needs empowered youth in all aspects to sustain its culture- social and emotional development.

Youth is the most dynamic and vibrant segment of Indian society. **The United Nations Human Settlement Program (UNCHS)** has defined **youth empowerment** as the circumstances and factors which enhance the development of citizenship and productiveness among young people as they move into adulthood. It is concerned with the adaptation of government structure and institutions to protect and deliver children's youth safety and human rights including the right to participation.

PROBLEMS FACED BY THE YOUTH

While working with young generation over the last eighteen years, I have come across many challenges faced by the youth of today. To sum up a few of them are as follows:

Directionless:

Youth in India is full of energy and talent. They exist in one of the most exciting phases of history wherein they exist in a global economy and have the power of technology and internet to be able to lead the world and make a difference, something which our earlier generations did not have. Unfortunately a large population of our youth today has **no motivation or sense of direction**. They have all the tools and technology at their disposal but they do not know how to use them with a sense of purpose.

Youth of today want freedom and independence but are clueless about how to use this for their growth and development. They know their rights but are oblivious of their duties. They need guidance to meet their goals. They are clueless even after completing their graduation. They are not sure of their relationship in personal lives too.

This lack of a sense of direction has led to a **lack of vision and critical thinking**. Lack of a critical thinking process leads to confusion in taking decision and as a result they are not able to take charge of their lives and steer it in the proper direction. Since they do not take any decision or action they lose confidence in life which is not good for any family, society, economy or nation. Constructive thinking is necessary for taking any decisive action. Relevant thinking process always comes before action.

Materialistic orientation:

The measure of success in today's world is equated with money and material goods. This definition coupled with the pressure from peers, family and society to be successful tends to play havoc with the tender mind of the youth. In the absence of proper guidance and proper direction, to fulfil their aspirations to become successful financially they tend to follow shortcut methods. They are easily influenced by wrong examples as they seem easy to become successful and rich. Such examples can be both criminal as well as immoral. Such actions create a tear in the very basic fabric of our society.

One of the most important reasons for the creation of this materialistic definition of success is we adults who have created this definition by burdening the youth of today with the unfinished agendas of our lives. Nine out of 10 people just want to be happy. Happiness means having the right family, friends, partner, just having fun, travelling the world and just being happy.

Lack of Family Bonds

With the advent of industrialisation and the breakdown of the joint family system, nuclear families are the norm of the day today in the urban areas. This has brought about a drastic change in the manner in which children are brought up today. With the rising cost of living and the desire for certain lifestyle, both men and women today step out of the house to share the financial burden of the house. As a result the children are often left behind alone at home at a time when they need guidance the most. In this materialistic world when parents are busy with their jobs children are the most neglected ones. There is no communication or lack of communication with their parents so they start looking for emotional support outside and land into bad company and take to drugs, watching porn etc. to nurse their hurt feelings or fill their loneliness. Parents have no time for their children who need their love, concerns, counselling and guidance and advice all the time. The young children

are at times also humiliated and abused by family members leading to permanent scars on the minds of the young impressionable children. The young children are too confused to distinguish between right and wrong and with parents not being around to help them make the right choice they are totally lost.

Instead of being constructively engaged in their own skill development and building a bright future, youth today has become a digital addict and spends most of their time on the social media. This over dependence on the digital devices and social media further reduces whatever personal face to face time that parents and children can have.

Several times we also see that out of feeling of guilt parents seek to overindulge and pamper their children with material goods which can have a very negative impact on the psyche of the child who starts taking things for granted and does not have to work for it. Such youth in their adult life often fall into the trap of materialism and slip into bad habits to maintain their material lifestyles.

Parents do not need to provide only material comfort. They need to devote time for their children regularly and not step in only when things go wrong. They need to be part of the growth journey of their children, listening to them and behave like friends so as to ensure that children feel loved and not neglected or lonely. Parents can really channelize their energy and power into the right direction and boost their physical, mental and emotional strengths. These empowered youth can contribute to the national building process. Unfortunately, children from broken families having single parent suffer a lot having serious effects on their mental and emotional makeup.

The youth of today is also a smart and well educated, exposed to a variety of knowledge and while communicating with them parents need to also ensure that they do not force their opinions on them. In several of my conversations with the youth I have come across the common theme that my **"parents do not understand me"**. To give an example, it is not uncommon for boys and girls to mix freely with other. But most young children face restrictions in doing so from their parents. What is important for parents to do is to instil values in their children and then trust them to mix with each other. This actually allows young men and women to understand the uniqueness and strengths of the opposite gender and learn to appreciate each other leading to a stronger base for future families and hence the society and the nation. Secondly, the children feel that the pressure of **"Family expectations"** is also difficult to bear. To give an example, almost every child has gone through this statement from their parents when they are compared with the neighbour's child, or when they are expected to become an engineer or a doctor. Parents today therefore need to listen to and understand their children to be able to walk with them and help them

grow into assets for the family, society and the nation.

Drugs and Alcohol:

Drugs and Alcohol are another major challenge faced by the youth of today. Not all, but most teenagers today take drugs mostly under peer pressure and to boast amongst their friend circles. Whether failure or broken relationships or lack of proper support and guidance from parents in nuclear families, drugs are taken by youth as a means to escape the realities and problems of life. Even while celebrating success, drugs are considered mandatory for any party. Drugs are the biggest killer of our youth whether willingly or unwillingly.

Youth of today need to understand that life is not always positive and perfect. It has its challenges and we need to face these challenges and not avoid them with drugs.

Loneliness and Depression

This is another common issue being faced by the youth of today not merely in India but across the world. The most disturbing part of this problem is that it is something which we are not aware of most of the times and even when we are aware, we refuse to acknowledge the same. This disease is slowly making its way into the lives of our youth and will destroy them if not addressed on time.

Nuclear families, failure in relationships, unemployment, poor performance in academics, peer pressure, the desire to look attractive, unanswered questions around hormonal changes as they grow up.... All these factors and many more are contributing to increased cases of depression and suicidal attempts amongst the youth of today. Children of today do not want to share their failures and go in solitary confinement leading to depression. Attachment of family is weak, collective identity is missing among youth today. They consider themselves as separate entity from the family members and relatives. Family values are declining. High expectations, competitive attitude, ill-mannered behaviour are shaping the young generation. Inconsistency in behaviour and approach is also dangerous as they keep changing their opinions in personal and professional life putting careers and family at risk.

Another problem being faced by the youth of today is **FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)**. The young today are suffering from several forms of insecurities. With the easily accessible social media as Facebook, Instagram and others there is a constant peer pressure amongst the youth of today not just about their jobs but about how they look, what they eat, what they wear, places they visit, their partners, homes and the list goes on. There is a constant challenge to compete for these vis a vis others. The social media makes them feel that others are having more fun than

them and they are being left behind. Life then is a mad race to outshine the others and when they cannot it leads to depression and sometime suicidal attempts.

The absence of parental guidance and support to the young, blind aping of the west in the name of modernisation and unlimited and unfiltered access to visual and social media, has led to another major casualty, **the loss of moral values amongst the youth of today**. The basics of all moral education come from members of the family and in lots of families there is not time for the same. Even schools do not impart value education. In our quest to keep religion out of schools we have also **pushed value education out of the schools** which now provide purely academic education and do not concentrate on the wholesome and all round development of the youth.

The **youth today need a supportive society**. They want to be accepted and their opinions to matter as worthy and relevant. The elders need to understand them and give them the space, time guidance, counselling and the trust that they need. This will open up doors of opportunities for them and they will be more open to listening to and learning from the wisdom of their elders.

Quality education is another serious problem being faced by the youth today. In every nook and corner of all big and small cities we see education and coaching institutes mushrooming daily. But the question is what value are we adding to the youth of today. Education industry is no longer a noble profession and has actually become one of the most profitable industries. Generally, what colleges follow is the rote methodology and there is no focus on skills needed to survive in the world today as appropriate behaviour, healthy lifestyle, values, innovative and creative thinking and optimum use of technology so that the youth of today becomes a well-rounded personality who can contribute to the socio economic growth of self, family and the nation.

Another aspect of quality education is **providing sex education in schools**. During their growing up years, with the challenges of hormonal changes, it is natural for children to have questions about their sexuality and changes in their body. While the government seeks to provide sex education to students, this is not really done effectively and as a result they turn to porn to get answers and very often they lose direction and fall into wrong traps.

Necessity of youth orientation

Youth empowerment is essential for every society for they are the future. Empowered youth, i.e. educated youth with right values is the force in every economy that is most productive and contributes to the rising GDP of the nation and this help reduce poverty. Educated and empowered youth promote the right sets of social values in every society and also raise

voice against social evils as rape, child abuse, dowry, harassment of senior citizens and such other social evils. They are also active participants in the political framework of the country and promote an administrative system that is based on transparency and integrity. This young generation is the sapling that will grow into the trees of tomorrow and if they are well nurtured and have proper orientation their roots will be strong and deep and they will create a strong future of India. Make In India and Skill Development Programs are some of the initiatives of the NDA government to harness the skills of the youth and provide them the right orientation and empowerment so that they can build a bright future for our nation.

National Youth Policy 2014

The National Youth Policy, 2014 (NYP-2014) planned for a holistic vision to empower youth to achieve their full potential, and through them enable India to find its rightful place in the community of nations". The NYP is committed to the all-round development of the youth (person in the age group of 15-29) to enable them to participate in nation building process. It has also categorised youth into different segments such as student youth, youth from rural and tribal belt, migrants and those involved in violent activities, dropouts and also youth with social and moral stigma and cared by institutions. Among this target age group the policy seeks to prioritise the needs for the economically and socially disadvantaged groups, differently abled women. NYP 2014 emphasised on implementing 5 areas followed by government action plans. These action plans focus on education, skill development and also on sports to promote the importance of health amongst the youth. NYP 2014 did not also ignore generating social and cultural values by youth involvement in community services. Youth participation in governance and creating social justice by inclusive growth was also emphasised. It was decided that government of India would formulate an action plan, constitute youth council for implementation of the plan and long and short term indicators as Youth Health Index, Youth Education Index, and Work Index and also participation in Government Index to judge the success of the plans.

The Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports functioned under the overall guidance of the Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Youth Affairs & Sports during the year. In April, 2008, two separate Departments, namely, Department of Youth Affairs and Department of Sports, were created under the Ministry.

The Department for Youth Affairs focussed on matters of Youth and set up committees for development of skills for the youth, their welfare and their overall development through various national and international student exchange programs, youth hostels and institutes for providing financial assistance to needy.

The Department of Sports focussed on the health, physical and overall development of the youth through creating the sports policy, and participation of the youth in national and international sporting events, providing financial assistance through scholarships and also instituting awards for recognising the youth at both national and international levels development of such infrastructure.

Joint responsibility of all the stakeholders

Schools and families should address the need of the youth, the need to understand the **importance of handling finance**. Starting from small things as how to make a house budget, open a bank account, pay bills to larger things. The youth today lacks this basic awareness leading to two problems. First, they fail to understand the value of money and second, they are a total loss of how to handle their finances when they become adults. If they cannot handle their finances they will never be able to contribute to the financial wellbeing of their family, society or the nation

Lack of proper education also leads to **Unemployment** which is another problem that the youth today is facing. The new age market is very technology driven and is constantly evolving and changing at a fast pace. Thus the market today demands that youth have skills sets which are constantly upgraded and they should quickly adapt to the changing needs. Our education system unfortunately is not geared up for the same and we still follow the fixed learning rote method of education in most of our schools and examination systems. As a result, skills of creativity, innovation and optimum use of technology are lacking amongst the youth and they lose their employability quotient.

The government of India has taken several important steps in this direction as **Start Up India initiative** to boost entrepreneurship; the launching of the **Skill India mission**; establishing the **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship**; establishing **industry-led sector skills** councils, and restructuring of the **Industrial Training Institutes** to address the skill gap. Reform in the education system to focus quality, practical and a wide variety of skill is expected to meet the demands of the modern day and increase the employability quotient of the youth.

CONCLUSION

The most vibrant and dynamic segment of society is the youth and India is one of the youngest nations in the world. They are the catalyst for change and bring about socio economic and technological development. Their strength, imagination and potential can be used for building the nation. Therefore India needs to enhance their all-round development for the realisation of their potential towards productivity and nation building process. We need to identify the challenges faced by youth today

and come out with strategies to deal with them. Sustainable development is possible only when there is active participation of youth in the society. Generating critical and analytical thinking among youth is really needed today. Education has to play a decisive role in it. Teachers and parents should share the responsibility of creating young and dynamic young generation. Parents should not overdo for their children because of their affordability or in guilt feeling. They should focus more on making youth of resourceful character rather than a materialistic youth devoid of all values.

Youth of today are the builders of tomorrow. Therefore, it is the duty of the parents, leaders and elders to look into the problems of the youth and to trust them, understand them, give them space, and provide them a purpose in life. The children should also respect their elders and learn from their experiences otherwise the boundless energy of the youth will be dissipated in the wrong direction and lead to chaos in the country.

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