CHAPTER 2

ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS
2.1. **Sex differences in adjustment problems:**

The special reference to adolescent girls' adjustment problems first raise the question as to whether there is any difference between the problems of adolescent boys and girls? or do the problems of girls present unique variations so as to deserve a distinct approach in our investigation? A straightforward and univocal answer to these questions no doubt will be positive. Cole and Hall (1970, pp. 80) remarked "a girl's adolescence involves quite different kinds of strain and difficulty from those experienced by the boys." Anyone who has worked with the young people, is able to note easily the difference between the problems of boys and girls, particularly during the period of adolescence. They are different in almost every aspect of personality (Stefic and Lorr, '74, pp. 1123-26) and these differences have a great deal to do with the manner in which they face their problems or reality. Various studies have revealed that adjustment difficulties are not always the same for the two sexes and girls face more problems than boys in each area of adjustment (Pathak, '74, pp. 120-22). Hurlock (1956, pp. 12) states "there are more problems among girls than among boys and with the increasing age the number of problems
that girls face increases, while for boys the number decreases."

The realization of basic sex differences among boys and girls come mainly during the period of adolescence, and to some adolescents this realization may come as a shock and to others as a pleasant surprise. Girls are physically different from boys and this difference has a deep significance for personality development: development of interest, attitude and behaviour, formation of self concept and self identity. All these factors determines the pattern of adjustment of the girls in different areas of life (Schutz, '58, pp. 1-5).

It is an established fact that pubertal development of girls of all races precede the boys by two years on the average. This earlier physical maturity heralds important changes in social outlook, emotionality and also changes in intellectual, moral and religious spheres. The girls, as a rule, are more seriously affected by physical changes than the boys. Because the advent of puberty in girls appears to be a relatively abrupt phenomenon, requiring emotional and social adjustment of an immediate nature (Horrocks, '76, pp. 398). Moreover, physical changes are also more rapid among girls than among boys. Rapidity of bodily changes often puzzle them, causing in many situations shame or disgust when the early signs
are noticed. The changes make girls more concerned about their different physical characteristics.

Cultural and social factors also determine to a great extent the pattern of adjustment to problems faced by the adolescent girls. These two factors play an important role in the determination of sex roles and in corresponding sex differences in behaviour. Anastasi (1971, pp. 470) remarks "it is the social implications of such physical differences, rather than biological sex differences themselves, which lead to divergent personality development in the two sexes." In the development of gender identity, social conditioning plays a major role. Social customs, rules and regulations etc. all clearly influence a girl feels about herself. Henderson (1975, pp. 108) states "The adolescent girls have to face not only her own personal turbulence at adolescence, but also a changing social situation involving her in uncertainty about the nature of personal and power relations between men and women."

In our Assamese society, generally, girls' freedom is checked early by various social taboos, family chores and rigid social customs. These often present various problems, which the adolescent girls find difficult to cope with. Upon attending puberty, the adolescent girls not only have to grope with the physiological changes but also a complete change of attitudes among people in the
immediate environment. It is still believed by some people in our society that menstruation is a phenomenon which one should be ashamed of. They have to obey various social restrictions which generates much irritation. Furthermore, girls are generally more severely treated for any deviation from the culturally approved pattern of behaviour than the boys. Therefore, they have to remain conscious about these restraints on their behaviour and often they find it difficult to conduct themselves well through these restraints.

It appears that adjustment problems of adolescent girls are quite different from those experienced by adolescent boys in different areas of their life. There are, no doubt, certain similarities, but the fundamental problems are always different in both sexes. The range and variety of problems faced by the adolescent girls in different areas are discussed below.

2.2. Problem areas:

(1) **Home** - The home or family plays the most important role in the development of adolescent personality. Because the type of relationship existing between the adolescent and family members influences the type of adjustment he or she makes to people outside home. This is specially true for girls. Because the girls have to spend most of their time in the family or home environment
and so they are socialised more by their own families than by outside groups. Studies have revealed that for the adolescent girls' home is one of the most significant area where a large number of problems exist. In one study, it is observed that most of the adolescent girls' problems arise from restriction, parental conflicts, household duties, inadequate family environment, economic condition of the family etc. (Goswami, '75, pp. 56-61). Another important source of problems is "restriction of movement": Girls are generally more restricted in their behaviour than the boys. They are also supposed to perform more household duties which often make them irritable.

Economic condition of the family also creates problems for the adolescent girls because it has a direct bearing on the problems of satisfying one's needs and wants. When their needs and wants remain unfulfilled, they get easily frustrated and find it difficult to adjust properly in several areas of their life (ibid, p. 60). Adolescent girls are generally conscious about their dresses, cosmetics etc. and generally become upset when they are with friends who have more than they have and this becomes a source of great concern. Besides these not having enough to spend, unable to get desired things, economic paucity of the family etc. also disturb them to a great extent.
The pattern of the family also influences the personality development and adjustment of the adolescent girls. Girls in authoritarian homes have more problems than those in democratic homes (Garrison, '69, p. 304). Thus home is an important area where a large number of problems exist. Girls with unsatisfactory home adjustment are often found to suffer from various behaviour problems such as — inferiority complex, emotional instability, extreme self consciousness, lack of social contacts and nervous mannerisms (Hurlock, '55, p. 427).

(ii) School - School also exerts potent influence on the development of personality of the adolescent girls. As they have to spend most of their daytime in school, numerous problems arise in this area. In a number of studies adolescent girls have reported that most of their problems occur in this area (Abel and Gingles, '65, pp. 389-392) Goswami, '75, pp. 56-61). In school, problems arise from teacher student conflict, lack of facilities and difficulties in school, relations among classmates, favouritism among teachers etc.

The method of instruction in school often fails to provide the need for achievement and self improvement of individual pupil. Teaching failure is a commonly reported problem. Moreover certain attitudes of teachers such as aggressiveness, domination and favouritism also create
problems of adolescent girls. Lack of facilities for choosing the desired subject, not having library facilities, inadequate school routine, not having sports facilities etc. are also frequently reported problems (ibid.).

The school shares with home the responsibility of helping the adolescents to acquire those behaviour characteristics which can help them in making satisfactory adjustments in their present and future life activities. But in many homes the adolescent girls do not get proper facilities for studying which ultimately lead to unsatisfactory school adjustment. Besides these, because of economic paucity, many parents cannot provide their daughter desired things for studying and this also hampers their school adjustment to a great extent.

(iii) Social - Social problems trouble the adolescent girl more frequently than the boys. As the girls mature earlier than the boys, they generally become socially conscious at an early age and are more concerned with how to improve their social adjustments. Mrs. Hurlock (1967, pp. 117) has pointed out two reasons: first the girl by her age is more mature in her attitude than her male counterpart and therefore she views problems from the frame of an adult earlier than a boy of her own age. Secondly, the girl's social life is more dependent on the type of social adjustments she makes. Studies conducted
by Adams (1964, pp. 207-14), Abel and Gingles (1965, pp. 389-92) reveal that the area of interpersonal relation is a great concern to the adolescent girls. In another study by George and Abrahman (1967, pp. 112-18) among the secondary school pupils of Kerala, it has been observed that girls have more social problems than boys.

As girls become socially conscious during this period they want to go out of home and want to take part in social activities and at the same time in some heterosexual activities also. But they are generally not allowed to do so by their parents. The denial of this desire often makes them discontent and restless. The society also imposes various restrictions on the behaviour of the adolescent girls. Accepting the restraints of the society in public as well as in the family, the girls often find difficult to conduct themselves through the restraints and this becomes a matter of great concern to them. Again criticism by neighbours, conservative attitude of the society also irritate them frequently.

Furthermore, how to get along with others is an important problem for the adolescent girls (Adams, '64, pp. 207-14). They want to act in a socially approved manner and also to establish themselves in the peer group. Girls on the whole, are able to perceive their status in the group better than the boys and they are also more
anxious to maintain a favourable status in the group they wish to join (Horrocks, '76, pp. 214). Acceptance in the social group makes them happy and contented and non-acceptance or rejection on the other hand makes them unhappy and frustrated.

Resistance to adult authority is also very pronounced among the adolescent girls, when they try to establish themselves socially (Hurlock, '74, pp. 424). Girls are expected to conform more to parental wishes than the boys and this leads to many clashes with parents and other adult authority. They often rebel against home restraints. Thus, a number of social problems disturbed the adolescent girls when they try to establish themselves socially.

(iv) Sexual - Sexual problems are the most serious and most disturbing problems that the adolescent girls encounter. Pubertal changes bring many new adjustment problems which they often find extremely difficult to cope with. The first and foremost change, however, which puzzle them mostly is the appearance of first menstruation. Girls generally receive considerable emotional shock from their first menstruation and often exhibit marked emotional reaction to it (Cole and Hall '70, pp. 80). Of course they vary in the extent to which they experience physical pain and discomfort, or changes in mood, such as depression, listlessness and irritability (Jersild, '63, pp. 76). Even
after a girl discovers it a perfectly physiological phenomenon, the initial fright together with secrecy and fear that surround it tend to build up an unfavourable attitude toward menstruation. Regardless of physical discomforts, the girl's attitude towards it is more influenced by socio-cultural factors rather than physical. They often express resentment over the limitations put upon them by the elders during menstruation and also feel embarrassed when they are not allowed to go out to play or to take part in other social activities (Rasul, '74, pp. 14). Such attitudes often make them to think it a great misfortune, an illness, a shameful phenomenon, and in some vague way disgusting and harmful to others.

The development of secondary sex characteristics also create problems for adolescent girls (Hurlock, '55, pp. 55). They often feel embarrassed with their developing body. Some girls try to hide their developing body by choosing different dresses. At the same time sex inappropriateness become great concern to them. Faces and figures donot conform to their ideals of womanliness disturb them greatly (Ibid, pp. 57). Besides these undeveloped or large breasts, large hands and feet, appearance of axillary and pubic hair disturb them greatly.

Many problems also arise from the developing interest for the opposite sex. Heterosexuality is often
accompanied by a strong desire for romance and sometimes takes the form of erotic day dreams. These problems consist in how to draw attention of the right boy, how to keep members of the opposite sex interest in her etc. Problems arising from the moral aspect of sex behaviour are more numerous and more serious for adolescent girls. As the girls are more restricted in their behaviour and are treated more harshly for any deviation from socially approved patterns of behaviour, discussion of sex matter, thinking and dreaming about sex often create a feeling of remorse, guilt and shame in the mind of the adolescent girls.

(v) Emotional and mental - We may distinguish the type of emotional development between boys and girls (Wall, '65, pp. 77) and a considerable amount of evidence shows that girls are more emotional and less stable than boys (Willoughby, '35, pp. 728-29, Terman and Tyler, '68, pp. 1089). The factors that determine the emotional reaction of the adolescent girls include health status, intelligence level, adjustment to new environment, degree of social success and amount of social acceptance and rejection etc. Frustration, anxiety, worry, jealousy, inferiority feeling, day dreaming, fear, etc. are the very common emotional reactions of the adolescent girls.
The adolescent girls often feel frustrated when various family and societal restraints deprive them from doing what they wish to do failure in the examination, unable to gain popularity in the peer group, unable to attract attention of the opposite sex etc. are the source of common frustration of the adolescent girls. High school girls generally become conscious about their personal appearance. They often worry if their appearance is not upto their satisfaction and they become angry when they are being teased, treated by teachers and parents unfairly, sarcastic remarks are made by adults, and also when their plans are interrupted (Rasul, '74, pp. 30-31). Anxiety reactions such as restlessness, unaccountable moodiness, extreme mood swings and irritability are also frequently found among adolescent girls. Besides these jealousy and inferiority feelings are often observed. An adolescent girl becomes jealous if her friends are more attractive or if they secure more marks in the examination. Inferiority feelings manifest at all ages but are perhaps more common during adolescence than at other times. During this period the girls begin to evaluate themselves seriously and become self conscious. Poor economic condition of the family, physical inadequacy, poor academic achievement may lead to chronic feelings of inferiority. Thus a number of emotional and mental problems disturb the adolescent girls frequently.
(vi) Health and physical - It is a well known fact that physical wellbeing is extremely necessary for mental well being. The area of health involves both physical and psychological pressures. There is a significant relationship between health problems and emotional reactions of adolescents (Crow and Crow '65, pp. 139). Health is an important area where a large number of problems exist for the adolescent girls (George and Abraham, '67, pp.112-18). There are various types of physical illnesses that often disturb the adolescent girls. Some of these are tonsilitis, dental decay, chronic digestive disturbances, eye trouble etc. Other minor but greatly disturbing conditions are headache, cold, cough, fever etc. (Goswami, '75, pp.56-61). If these disturbances are minor, they are not of great concern but if, however, they interfere the activities of the adolescents, the psychological effect on the adolescent can be disastrous.

Eye trouble, particularly, is greatly disturbing to the adolescent girl. Because they are likely to believe that wearing glasses detracts from personal attractiveness. In the same way skin troubles such as boils, pimples etc., which are very common during this period, are also equally disturbing to the adolescent girls. Some girls again sometimes develop into 'imaginary invalids', for example many girl often use their menstrual periods as an excuse for not going to school even when they are well enough to do
so (Burlock, '74, pp. 401). Moreover, any type of minor physical defect may become a source of great concern to the adolescent girls and sometimes may lead to marked inferiority feelings. Fat also creates problems to some extent, because almost all girls acquire an increased amount of fat during the early part of adolescence. This becomes a source of great worry having their beauty paled by fat accumulation. Moreover, excessive hair growth on the face become troublesome to some girls. Again many girls are disturbed by such physical features as extreme tallness or shortness, excessive stoutness or thinness, underdeveloped breasts, acne, and in any feature in which they believe they are different from other girls of their age (Crow & Crow, '65, pp. 101). Thus health and physical conditions become a source of great concern to the adolescent girls.

(vii) Religious and moral - Religious and moral problems occasionally trouble adolescent girls. Girls are generally more idealistic and more sensitive to moral and spiritual values than boys (Schneiders, 60b, pp. 64). Different religious customs and superstitions of the society often irritate adolescent girls. As a girl has to spend most of her time in the family environment, the family's attitude towards religion greatly influences her attitude towards it. But as she grows older, her independent thinking develops and she begins to express disbeliefs,
doubts, and uncertainties regarding customs. This becomes a source of conflict between herself and the members of her family. Religious doubts are often accompanied by emotional tension because girls are generally more dominated by orthodox religious teachings.

Moral problems are also more serious and numerous among adolescent girls. Particularly in the area of sex relationship, the teenage girls often discover that certain behaviour considered wrong for girls are not so for boys. This often puzzles them and makes them irritated. In the case of heterosexual relationship also they confront unnatural barriers. In the typical Indian society, most elder members of the society consider such contacts by girl to be against good moral bearing. This brings a sense of guilt or anxiety in the mind of the adolescent girls.
SUMMARY

Chapter 2

In this chapter sex differences in adjustment problems have been discussed in the first section. In the second section, the different problem areas of adolescent girls have been stated and various sources of problems are discussed.