CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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1. SUMMARY

The problem of generation gap is a cultural, economic, sociological and an educational one which calls for understanding through an interdisciplinary approach. It has existed earlier, it exists elsewhere. It is not a passing feature. At the root of this generation gap is a conflict between the old and young which has existed from the earliest times of the emergence of life on earth. Generations are like organisms. All history is a record of the conflict of generations. Every generation has its distinct purpose and destiny. With its ideals achieved, the utility of the new generation is gone. Its days are numbered and before long the new generation starts its crusade against it and for achieving new ideals. This forms the story of civilization, of evolution and of progress. "In every age and every society youth have rebelled against the old. The old have damned and denounced the youth. The young find around them a world in the making of which they had no hand - an old world which may have suited the old generation but in which the young no more feel at home. The old want the young to behave in set grooves and to head their counsels of what they regard as their rich experience. Little do they realize that they themselves were creatures of the order in which they were
born and that the times and environments in which they earned their experience have since so completely changed that what was good for their generation is no more so. From inner weakness is born the desire to dominate. The old seek to dominate the youth - the fountain of strength ... Kashyap ... (Subhash C. ... Youth Unrest 1972). The Youth, Kashyap writes, wants to feel independent, to throw off the yoke of feeling of having been once under tutelage. Rebellion for youth is a psychological necessity - a compensation for his past dependence. The elder generation is not prepared to easily concede his demand for the recognition of equality of generations. This makes the transition painful and provokes greater conflicts.

The conflict of generations is based on a conflict of interests and cuts across all other differences of caste, class, sex, race, religion or nationality. The gap between the two generations is wider today than ever before. The old look backwards while the young look forward. While the former have vested interests in the status quo, the latter have heavy stakes in the future. They have a right to feel that they have long been silent spectators of events or play-things and sacrificial lambs in the hands of elders and that time has come when they should make their own destiny and not allow the dying generation to mortgage their futures of their country. In many countries the young already out number their elders or constitute about half the population. Soon they would be the majority in charge in many countries. In India 56% of the population according to the 1971 census was below 25 years. In the
five thousand years of India's history, perhaps there never was a period more exciting than the present. In the long past - full of colour and drama there perhaps never was a decade so challenging and full of opportunities to do something as the present one.

At certain periods in history, the resolving of identity confusion on the part of the individuals becomes particularly difficult. Certain cultural and historical factors influence this intensity. An important factor is the rapidity of change through which a particular society is passing.

One of the features of modern Indian society is the rapid breakdown of traditional values, and the transitional character of its social, political and economic structures. This phenomenon of transition has also made its appearance in the field of education and created anxiety in the minds of student populations, their teachers and parents. There have been changes in the entire pattern of life. Old values have fallen and new ones are still in a state of flux. This phenomenon is not special to India only. As Leon Guerrero, Filippino Ambassador in London says, the elements in all the movements in western history - the break-up of the Roman Empire, the overthrown of the feudal system, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the French and American Revolutions, the disruption of the social system in industrial Revolution, the class-war of Russian Revolution - are all simultaneously bubbling in the Asian revolution. This has been observed by Gunnar Myrdal also
when he says, "It is, then, not only a telescoping in the sense that the changes are concentrated in a shorter time span, but there is also a break in the order in which changes occur, what would in Europe unfold gradually and proceed as a grand symphony with one movement following the other in thematic sequence is by destiny syncopated in South Asia into almost a cacophony" ... Myrdal (Gunnar Vol. I 1963, pp 119 ... 40).

This study has been an effort to identify the areas of conflict and the intensity of conflict arising out of the intergenerational frictions. The subjects studied were the adolescents in the age group 16 to 18 years, their parents and teachers. In a society which has sworn to place premium on achievement, great importance is given to formal education as it prepares individuals to occupy specialized occupational roles in a highly differentiated society. The study was conducted in the year 1975-76 when the new 10+2+3 scheme of education was just one-year-old. Therefore the adolescents of the study belonged to the second batch of students in the first year of the +2 stage. The changes in the educational pattern without the proper implementation at the end of +2 stage had created great tensions in the minds of teachers and also parents, not to mention the adolescents themselves. The changing social system and educational system on the one hand and the changing physiological, psychological stage in which the adolescents were on the other, were analysed within the framework of the dialectical approach. The criteria chosen for locating the
areas of conflict were -

(1) Authority
(2) Decision-making
(3) Hobbies
(4) Recreational activities and
(5) Freedom, etc.

After locating the areas, an attempt was made to find as to where the conflict was more intense.

The sample consisted of mainly Hindus. The parents were in the age-group of 45-55 years. They belonged to the salaried class with their annual income upto Rs. 10,000/-.

Majority of the teachers in sample were between 21 to 40 years of age and they were trained teachers. Majority of them were married and had 10 years teaching experience.

The students were from all the three streams - Arts, Science and Commerce from both English medium and Marathi medium schools. They were studying in 20 schools situated in Poona.

The conflict between adolescent students and parents, students and teachers (as reported by students) was analyzed under the following areas -

1. Habits, hobbies and leisure time activities
2. Punishment and reward
3. Student-teacher relations
4. Student-parent relations
5. Discrimination
6. Freedom
The area that showed the highest percentage of conflict seemed to be hobbies and leisure time activities. The books the student read, the kind and number of movies they saw, parties and dances they wanted to go to, hobbies they wanted to take up all seemed to be either not approved of or totally disapproved of by the older generation. However, the percentage of conflict between students and teachers seemed to be more than the conflict between students and their parents.

Another area which resulted in high percentage of conflict was Reward and Punishments. Not getting the type of food they liked (non-vegetarian in this case) resulted in conflict too.

In student-teacher relations, maximum conflict resulted from the fact that the teachers did not understand the teenagers' problems. The distance between students and their busy fathers, decision making regarding choice of clothes, friends and freedom for going out, discrimination due to sex and age and most important of all parental authority gave rise to appreciable amount of conflict.

Areas of Conflict as reported by Parents

The major areas of conflict as per the parents' report could be put under the following heads -

1. Discrimination
2. No preference for co-education
3. Freedom, Authority and Decision-making
4. Punishment and rewards
5. Parent-student relations
6. Parent-teacher relations
7. Attitudes of parents towards education

Even the reports of parents pointed to the fact that there was conflict due to their discriminating among their children with respect to sex. The girls get less freedom to choose friends, clothes or going out as compared to their brothers. The way the adolescents dressed up did not find the approval of their parents and this gave rise to tension in parent-student relations. Another factor that gave rise to conflict was the parents not allowing the students to take up the courses they wanted. General behaviour of the adolescents was also up to the expectations of the parents and this gave rise to friction too. The parents felt that their youngsters did not respect them and did not give importance to learning as much as possible in school.

The parents reports brought out the fact that the conflict in their relations with teachers was due to two factors -

1. Because the teachers were not willing to help out in students' activities; and

2. The teachers did not understand the teenager's problems.

Conflict as reported by Teachers

The areas of conflict as reported by the teachers in
the sample could be brought under the following four heads -

1. Teacher-student relations
2. Discipline
3. Student behaviour
4. Parent-teacher relations

The teachers and parents seem to agree with the students in one thing at least. All of them felt that there was conflict because the teachers did not understand the problems of students in general and problems of teenagers in particular. The teachers were not willing to give full freedom to students and this resulted in conflict. The teachers felt that the students' behaviour in general depended on the way they were brought up at home while the parents felt that the teachers were responsible for the behaviour of their children. The student community having changed in many ways also resulted in conflict. Another factor that brought about conflict was the result of the teacher's mistrust in the new 10+2+3 system.

2. Conclusions

"Each youth must forge for himself (and herself) some central perspective and direction, some working unity, out of the effective remnants of childhood and the hopes of an anticipated adulthood."

Erikson Eric 1953.
Are adolescents of today really different? "In someways yes, in some ways no."

The study pointed out that conflict did exist in the intergenerational relationships. Viz between adolescents and their parents as well as adolescents and teachers. However the student-teacher conflict appears to be more intense than adolescent - parent conflict. The assumption that the intensity of conflict was correlative with the socio-economic conditions of the parents was not brought out by the reports though even while conducting the interviews the researcher did feel there was a correlation. However, the reports showed that the conflict between generations cuts across the barriers of class, caste and religion.

The chief area of conflict seemed to be the cultural area. As Sociologists and psychologists have agreed, adolescents today are differentiating themselves from adults more thoroughly than ever. The conflict could be explained due to a cultural lag that exists between the older and younger generations. As Ogburn says the material aspects of culture move faster than the non-material aspects. On the one hand the parents agree that education is necessary for both boys and girls. They do not mind allowing their younger to attend parties and picnics even with the members of the opposite sex. But as regards giving respect to elders, cooking non-vegetarian food at home are concerned they do not seem to go along with the youngsters. This produces conflict between them. The sub-culture has found
its origin due to three facts:

1. According to the psychogenic theory it started because a large number of people who have a similar problem of adjustment get together and try to deal with the problem and help each other resolve it.

2. According to the culture-transmission theory new cultures get started as imitations of subcultures of the previous generation and this would mean that teenagers today are not all that different from those of previous decades.

3. The behavioural theory says that subcultures are the result of trial-and-error behaviours, which are reinforced if they are successful and this seems to be the most useful explanation.

The peer groups play a very important role in the process of socialization. Adolescents form themselves into peer groups because the need for support and approval by agemates is at a peak during this time of their lives. Peer relationships follow patterns that begin as loose associations and become stronger and more inclusive as the child grows older. As John Decey has said peer groups perform many functions in an adolescent's life like the radar function, support for rebellion, Ego building, status setting, Negative setting, the avoidance of adult requirements and
replacement for father and so on. R. K. Merton's Reference Group theory also indicates how one's behaviour is a result of the respective reference group. Adolescents are constantly comparing the way they are treated at home with that of their peers. Comparing adolescents with their friends, deriding them or letting them down in front of others leads to great tension.

A person is natural and behaves spontaneously at home and may be altogether a different personality outside home, where he has to suppress his feelings for fear of insecurity, loss of recognition, authority, domination etc. At home things are smoother. Parents accept children with all their limitations and short comings and hence the tension is less intense as compared to the student-teacher relations, the youngster is one among the many – every class has 60 - 70 students. He gets less attention and recognition. He has to submit to unquestionable authority in the name of discipline. This results in greater conflict. At home behaviour patterns and personality traits are set and parents know their children in and out. But for a teacher the student is with him or her only for one academic year. It is very difficult to get to know the background of the students individually. This is made more difficult by the fact that the teachers of this sample were teaching these students only for that one year. To a certain extent their relationship was impersonal - so, temporary goals Vs permanent goals, formal Vs informal atmosphere are some of the aspects which point towards greater amount of conflict in school and
teacher-parent relations while compared with student-parent relationships.

The students, parents and teachers themselves have agreed that teachers do not understand problems of teenagers and do not help students in their activities. Since the future of our Nation is built in the schools, it becomes necessary that the teachers must make an effort to overcome this problem. It is good that the teachers have agreed on this point. This shows that if they are not giving enough time to the students it is because they are not able to do it and not that they do not want to do it.

The socio-economic position of the parents and teachers does not seem to have had any significant effect on the intensity of conflict. Practically in all income groups, the percentage of conflict due to various parameters like authority, decision making, discrimination etc., seems to be same. This is the same in case of student-teacher relations too. This proves that the conflict is with the position the older generation holds i.e. with authority. The student-teacher relations give rise to more conflict because it is more specific, more impersonal and more direct than it happens within the family group. On the part of the teachers, one cannot forget that they are also working under tremendous pressure and hence their inability to come closer to the student-community is not intentional.

Since the areas of conflict have been located, efforts have to be made to overcome this 'eragap' or
'communication gap'. It becomes imperative that this conflict should not be allowed to grow if the society has to move on the path of progress and development. Improved Parent-student relations give a firmer foundations to the society while improved student-teacher relations will relieve the process of education from indiscipline and student unrest.

As it is the education system is in a state of flux due to its commitments to progress and National development. The society itself is in a transitional stage and the adolescents who are in an ambivalent stage of their lives would find it difficult to overcome all the conflicting norms. To a great extent the phenomenon of 'generation gap' makes itself felt in a different manner in stable societies or developed societies. In developing countries it is like an upheaval where as in the developed countries it is like a shaking. The march of time cannot be restrained and every society has to allow for the fact that its young people are growing up and will eventually replace their elders but clearly some line has to be drawn between what is regarded as a significant passage of time, days, weeks and months are unimportant but years and groups of years may be important in defining boundaries between generations.

3. Some suggestions

1. A dialogue between parents and teachers at the beginning of the academic year would be very helpful.
2. Improvements in the educational system. Four major changes could be suggested -

(i) should strike a better balance between teaching basic skills and providing youth with a liberalising education.

(ii) Develop a continuing education system so that education can proceed as a lifelong right and responsibility.

(iii) Provide opportunity for adults and adolescents to learn new skills together.

(iv) Develop new curricula in several areas like -

(a) Marriage and family education including greatly improved courses in sex education.

(b) Career education which involves all courses throughout all the grades in schools and which places the responsibility for decision making in the hands of individuals themselves. This effort may include the creation of new jobs specifically designed to meet the needs of adolescents.

3. Law and Economics.

4. The psychology of adulthood, including an improved
understanding of pre-requisites of mental health.

5. Communication skills including a better understanding of the sociology of human interaction.

6. Value clarification and moral education.