3.1 APPROACHES TO THE GENERATION GAP

Generation Gap - Myth or Reality?

Social scientists have been divided on the issue of the existence of the generation gap - whether or not there is a gap in attitudes and values among generations significant enough to warrant serious attention. Three perspectives have emerged from research done - generation gap as an illusion, a great gap between generations, and selective continuity.

There are those who have considered the generation gap an illusion (Douvan and Adelson, 1966; Flacks, 1967; Adelson, 1968; Elkind, 1968; Duscha, 1968; Masterson, 1968; MacLeod, 1968; Campbell, 1969; Feuer, 1969; Offer, 1969; Adelson, 1970; Walsh, 1970; Westby and Braungart, 1970; Weiner, 1971; Munns, 1971; Yankelovich, 1970; Lerner and Weinstock, 1972). There is nothing really new in the contemporary contrast between generations, they opine. Such differences have existed in the past, these observers pointed out; and although age contrasts manifest today may be more highly publicized, there is not likely to be revolutionary social change as a result. This is because the generations differ on inconsequential issues like preferences for food, clothing, music, mundane domestic issues, etc. But core values and standards of conduct are shared by parents and children. Conflicts, if any, arise from peripheral issues.

A second line of argument from this perspective emphasizes the life-cycle foundations of generational conflict and the maturational reform which eventually adjudicates such cleavages. As today's youth matures into adulthood, these observers
suggest, one may anticipate a reaffirmation of the basic continuity that exists between the
generations in the structure of social institutions. This continuity is in part the result of a
decrease in age-related competition for freedom or authority, coupled with the inevitable
bilateral exchanges in the socialization process (Bengtson, Furlong and Laufer, 1974)

Coopersmith, Regan and Dick (1975) have treated the generation gap as a myth. They argue that the gap is largely between the general worlds of adults and children rather than between parents and children (Halyal and Mallapa, 1986).

In contrast with the debunkers of the notion of the generation gap are the advocates of what Bengtson (1970) has called the “great-gap” hypothesis. They believe there is considerable discontinuity in the attitudes and values of the younger generation and their parents. This orientation suggests basic differences between age groups in society, culminating in rapid cultural transformation. Traditional socialization processes become dysfunctional in an age of rapid social change, often exacerbated by the apparent hypocrisy of the parental generation. The result is discontinuities in attitudes between youth and their elders.

Generational Comparisons

Generational discontinuity has been studied both on a macro (age-cohort) and a micro (family lineage) level.


The generation gap has also been researched using parent-child pairs (Flacks, 1967; Jennings and Niemi, 1968; Friedman, Gold and Christie, 1972; Yankelovich, 1970; Hyman, 1959; Thomas, 1971; Meisels and Canter, 1971; Lewis, 1972; Armstrong and Scotzin, 1974; Gangrade, 1974; Jacobsen, Berry and Olson, 1975; Lerner et al., 1975; Tolor, 1976; Gallagher III, 1979; Halyal and Mallappa, 1985, 1986).

Certain researchers have also measured attitudes across three generations of the same family line (Jennings and Niemi, 1968; Hill, 1970; Fengler and Wood, 1972; Friedman, Gold and Christie, 1972; Armstrong and Scotzin, 1974; Payne, Summer and Stewart, 1973; Gallagher III, 1979).

Scores of investigators have compared the attitudes held by youth towards contemporary issues with the attitudes held by their parents towards these issues. Some
have come across a wide disparity in attitudes between the two generations. But most have concluded that the differences are slight - but statistically significant. Others, like Adelson (1970), view this discontinuity in attitudes as insignificant and term the generation gap more ‘apparent’ than ‘real’.

Meisels and Canter (1971) investigated the perception of the generation gap among college students. They concluded that although there may be few serious, actual differences between adolescents and their parents, extensive differences may be “perceived” to exist by members of either or both groups.

Lerner and Weinstock (1972); Anthony (1969); Lerner, Karson, Meisels and Knapp (1975), Shibata Kaoru (1979) and Atkinson and Dodder (1985) have conducted research on these lines. Their findings reveal that while actual attitudes may not provide a source of serious inter-generational conflict, the maintenance of distorted perceptions about the attitudes of others may play such a role (Lerner et.al, 1975). Thus, it is the perceived similarity in attitudes, rather than the actual disparity in attitudes, that nurtures and widens the generation gap.

A considerable amount of literature relating to attitudinal differences between parents and their children appeared in the 1960s and 70s. In a majority of the studies, either high school or college students or both have been selected as the sample of the younger generation. It was found by Tolor (1976) that the high school and college groups were significantly less traditional in their attitudes than adults, and college students were more non-traditional than the high school students. He suggested that parents continue to exert more influence on their children’s attitudes during the high school years than in the later stages. Thus, many researchers, to examine the generation gap, have shown their preferences for the comparison of attitudes of parents and their late adolescent children in their research about generation gap.
The approach of the present research is of a micro-level (intra-familial) using two generations. The sample consists of college youth and both their parents. Second year and third year degree college students were selected for the reason that their educational effects are expected to crystallize at this stage.

3.2 STUDIES ON GENERATION GAP

Upon examining the literature available on generation gap, one is struck by its diversity – by the fact that the "Generation Gap" has caught the attention not only of family researchers, but also of counsellors, philosophers, journalists, and the like. Hence this literature is a mixture of points of view, including impressionistic evidence about the generation gap, anecdotal evidence, literary essays, a given individual's personal experiences with the young, as well as traditional empirical and theoretical research (Jacobsen, Berry and Olson, 1975).

A spate of literature relating to attitudinal differences between parents and their children appeared in the 1960s and 70s. The generation gap was empirically researched both on an age-cohort (macro) and on an intrafamilial (micro) level. Intra-familial studies on generational discontinuity were conducted either by using two generations (parent-child pairs) or by comparing 3 generations (grandparent – parent – child) of the same family line. The findings of some such intrafamilial studies on the generation gap are mentioned below:

Fengler and Wood (1972) investigated value differences among three generations. A college student, his parents, and one grandparent were interviewed from each of 73 three-generation families. Respondents were asked to state their reactions to a series of 50 statements covering 8 major contemporary issues. Wide differences were found both between student and parent generations and between parent and grandparent generations.
on 6 of the 8 issues. The researchers concluded that age consistently contributes to the explanation of generational differences in values and attitudes.

Payne, Summers, and Stewart (1973) studied generational differences among 95 College students, their parents, and their grandparents. Of the 95 student subjects, 44 were male and 51 were female. Questionnaires were mailed to the parents and grandparents. The questionnaire was returned by 68 fathers, 69 mothers, 32 grandfathers, and 59 grandmothers. The questionnaire consisted of 85 items that assessed feelings of guilt. Each item consisted of a brief description of the type of behavior, e.g., reading obscene literature, killing someone in self-defense, cheating on one's income tax or failing an exam. Subjects were asked to indicate how “bad they would feel” were they to engage in each type of behavior described by these items. It was found that on the whole the student subjects were less severe in their moral judgments than were their parents, who in turn were less severe than the grandparents.

“In particular, these results suggested that (a) substantial generation differences exist with regard to judgments about a wide variety of behaviors, including those having involving important social and personal implications; and (b) these differences are not peculiar to the present college youth and their parents, but appear to characterize the preceding generations and their parents, as well.” (Payne, Summers, and Stewart, 1973)

Gallagher (1979) investigated the role of social class and sex on the attitude differences across three generations. He studied late adolescents, their parents, and their grandparents. The population was limited to the same-sex family members. Thus, a sample unit consisted of a college student, the student's same-sex parent, and the parent's same-sex parent. The population was distributed into three social classes. Results indicated that all three generations exhibited some degree of attitudinal dissimilarity. Social class appeared to be a major factor in attitude formation. The lower the social class position of
the family, the more conservative were attitudes on issues like religion, child-rearing, and the role of women.

Comparison of scores on five scales of social and political values taken by 93 Columbia College students was undertaken by Friedman, Gold, and Christie (1972). 90 mothers and 75 fathers replied to the questionnaires by mail. Findings indicated highly significant differences between parents and sons, with the later being much more radical in ideology.

Lo Sciuto and Karlin (1972) conducted a survey to measure the generation gap in the state of Pennsylvania. 2632 high school students completed a self-administered questionnaire measuring the amount of agreement with parents on 15 social issues like religion, sex before marriage, college education, smoking and drinking, spending money, the Vietnam war, discipline, etc. Two groups of high dissidence and low dissidence students were formed. Sex and grade in school emerged as the strongest predictors of dissidence. Male students and students in higher grades were more likely to be highly dissident than females and students in lower grades. It was found that the students in the sample exhibited more harmony than discord with parental viewpoints. However, a small but consistent minority of students reported complete disagreement with parents over a variety of issues.

Buys (1972) examined differences in attitudes between 90 college freshmen and 90 fathers in a sample survey on family roles, societal values, college, blacks, religion, ecology, and marihuana. Findings indicated a substantial generation gap. However, there was a failure by both groups to perceive that gap.

In a study on generational similarities and differences in social attitudes by Steinerger and Lesser (1974), 79 male and 89 female college students and their parents (108 fathers and 138 mothers) responded to items dealing with social issues. Parents were
found to be more conservative on 21 of the 24 items, significantly so on 13. "The generation gap was greatest for items closest to the daily lives of the respondents and may be both an expression of and a contributor to social change" (Steininger and Lesser, 1974).

Jacobsen, Berry, and Olson (1975) studied the existence, universality, and specific locus of the generation gap through a comparative intrafamily study of 117 fathers and their college-age children. 31 male and 109 female university students constituted the adolescent portion of the sample. The questionnaire involved ranking eight important contemporary issues. Results showed that a generational consensus level characterized fathers and offspring. Specific foci of disagreement emerged, related to sex and year-in-college of the student and to the working class origins of the father. The generation gap was more manifest in families with working-class origins. Sex of the respondent determined disagreement, with daughters retaining more consensus in their families than sons.

Hamid and Wyllie (1980) investigated intergenerational conflict between adolescents and parents. Their sample consisted of 101 male and 90 female secondary school students from New Zealand, and their parents. Conflict was measured by asking subjects to list for each of 20 issues (household activities like watching T.V., doing jobs around the house, aspects of personal appearance, frequency of outings, time of arrival at home, drinking and smoking, etc.) how often they had disagreements in the preceding month with their mother, father, and best friend. Results indicated that most of the adolescents sampled did not perceive levels of conflict worthy of concern. However, although the levels of intergenerational conflict were low, they were significantly higher than the conflict levels between the adolescents and their best friends.

Traub and Dodder (1988) examined the nature of intergenerational discontinuity in terms of value-norm acceptance, differential interaction patterns and behavioral
dissimilarity between the generations. Data from 412 college students and 557 of their guardians were examined. It was found that Youth and adults did not accept the same values and normative “dissensus” existed between youth and adults. Results supported the notions of a “great gap” between youth and adults.

Murata, JoEllen M. (1989) investigated the magnitude of the generation gap between delinquent and non-delinquent Mexican-American teenage boys from California and their respective parents. While no significant differences between the attitudes of delinquent and non-delinquent family triads were found, results supported the notion of a generation gap.

Durganand Sinha (1971) investigated differentials between the young and the old on their attitudes to dress, family, marriage, religion, traditionalism and conservatism/radicalism, idea of psychological proximity and span of nearness, hero-image and perception of certain typical incidents having social moral connotations, outlook and motivation, concept of good and bad and the moral code, reaction to frustration and value orientations. The approach throughout was ‘perceptual’ consisting mainly of analysis of how persons and situations were categorised, perceived and reached to by groups of subjects representing the younger and the older generations. A sample of 300 students and 300 teachers was individually administered appropriate tests for each of the factors studied. The average testing time per subject was approximately three hours.

Findings revealed that there was a certain degree of gap between the two generations but it was not of a character to be called fundamental or to make the situation tensional or fraught with conflict. There was considerable overlapping in outlook, attitude, and values as well as in the perceptions of the younger and the older generations. The finding goes against the commonly held idea of the presence of inter-generational conflict.
which is frequently taken for granted without any sufficient evidence. It is however to be borne in mind that the present study was confined largely to the educated sample. It is felt that if the educational gap is also added to the generational gap, the situation is likely to be radically different from what has been revealed in the present investigation” (Sinha, 1971).

A study conducted by Anandalakshmy (1972) yielded similar findings. Very little generation gap was found between 40 women students of colleges in Delhi and their mothers. The sample was from the middle class. Mothers and daughters were interviewed separately on the same set of questions relating to issues like spending patterns, fashions in clothes, social relationships with special reference to the opposite sex, obligations to elders and members of the extended family, education and career expectations, etc. The differences in the attitudes of mothers and daughters were of small magnitude. “There is no gap between the generations if we take the middle class female urban-dwellers into account. Intergenerational conflict is muted because of adjustment and adaptation on the part of both the generations”. (Anandalakshmy, 1972).

Mitra (1972) examined generational difference in social, political, educational and ethical matters. The study, conducted on a macro level, concluded that a generation gap in attitudes meagerly exits between youngsters and adults.

Gangrade (1974) studied conflict between two generations on family matters; relationship with the opposite sex and marriage, religion, educational and carrier aspirations; teacher’s authority and students participation in university affairs, style of life, political participation and national goals. He concluded that though often sharp differences exist between the values and attitudes of the two generations, very few are transmitted at the family level. Intergenerational conflict is latent at the family level and more likely to be manifested in the wider society where the consequences are likely to be impersonal.
In recent years, the problem of unrest among the youth of India has assumed serious dimensions. Diverse causes have been imputed to the growth of this problem. The causes often mentioned include a faulty educational system with its lack of emphasis on preparing the student for economic pursuits, lack of sufficient and healthy contacts between students and teachers, and exploitation and misleading of the students by political leaders. Some, however, are of the view that unrest among the youth stems from the widespread disease of social in-discipline in our country which is manifested in phenomena like corruption, bribery, nepotism and political immorality including the crossing of floor for personal ends. In an atmosphere surcharged with social and political immorality it is hard for the youth of our country to escape their morbid influence” (Gangrade, 1974).

Kapur (1982) reported differences between adolescent girls and their parents on some trivial issues. She cited developmental problems as the cause for these differences.

Reddy (1983) compared scores on an attitude—toward—authoritarianism questionnaire of rural, urban and metropolitan youth and adults. Findings indicated significantly more authoritarian attitudes among the adult groups than the youth groups. However, this was true only for the rural and urban sample. There were no significant differences found metropolitan areas. Reddy concludes that age difference is not the only contributing factor and that exposure to different environmental conditions narrows the gap in attitudes toward authoritarianism between age groups.

Mallik (1986) assessed central and peripheral cultural values, as described by Kluckhohn et al. (1952), in 102 subjects consisting of 3 males and 3 females from three consecutive generations in the same families. Results indicated that the oldest generation was the most authoritarian, fatalistic and conservative.
Attempts to explore generational differences in broader perspective by using the concept of attitudinal modernity were made by Halyal and Mallappa (1985). Two hundred college students and both their parents were administered the modernity scale which has four dimensions, namely personality modernity, socio-cultural modernity, political modernity and health modernity. Findings indicated that the younger generation was significantly more modern than their parents, thereby indicating a generation gap in basic positive attitudes and value orientations, which are a pre-requisite for personal growth as well as economic and political development of the society.

“A closer observation of generation gap in broader perspective reveals that the gap would certainly perform a vital function in any energetic society... it may imply certain strain and conflict but this is not necessarily negative for the society” (Halyal and Mallappa, 1986).

3.4 GENERATIONAL STUDIES ON MODERNITY

Systematic attempts have been made to measure “attitudinal modernity” as a dependent variable, while investigating the magnitude of differences between generations.

Klineberg (1973) studied generational differences in Tunisian adolescents and their parents in terms of 4 factors of modernity. (1) family independence (2) Personal efficacy, (3) new socialization and (4) economic optimism.

Klineberg (1973) observed that education and mass-media exposure “appear to create a radical discontinuity between the generations”. He further stated that the more deeply traditional the parents were, the more modern were the attitudes and aspirations that their educated sons expressed.
Gallagher (1979) measured attitudinal differences between generations which he called "generationalism". He measured attitudinal differences in terms of modernity in the areas of sexual freedom, the importance of traditional religion, the social role of women, political activism, and child rearing practices.

Kurian (1986) explored parent-child interaction regarding processes of cultural assimilation, dating and marriage, and cultural identity among Indian immigrant families living in Canada. Results suggested that youth adapt more easily to Canadian society and have friends from other ethnic groups, creating a generation gap between parents' and children's attitudes. The general trend was a gradual change towards modernization that was less disruptive than a sudden break with tradition.

Zhangling, Wei (1986) studied traditional vs modern cultural values in the contemporary Chinese family. A new trend toward free mate-choice, late marriage and small families was found to have enlarged the generation gap within the contemporary Chinese family.

3.5 GENERATIONAL STUDIES ON VALUES

In almost all societies, parents are the primary agents of socialization. Their codes of conduct are internalized by the children and yet there comes a stage when parental authority is questioned and parental values replaced or at least their priorities rearranged.

The differences in the value priorities between the two generations has received the greatest amount of attention in generation gap analysis (Jacob, 1957; Freeman, 1972; Fengler and Wood, 1972; Mumms, 1972; Soronsen, 1973; Sinha, 1977; Gallagher, 1974; Payne, Summers and Stewart, 1973; Lerner et al, 1975, Gangrade, 1975; Kirpal, 1976; Halyal and Mallappa, 1985).
Freedman (1972) noted that the greatest difference between students and parents occurred with respect to the attitudes toward student unrest, drugs, and sexual behaviour.

The results of a study by Munns (1972) indicated that the students conformed far more to peer-group values than to parental values. This supports Jacob's (1957) notion of the "degeneration of values" in college students.

Fengler and Wood (1972) reported value differences among three generations. In seventy-three three-generational families, college students, their parents and grandparents were interviewed on major contemporary issues. The investigators reported wide differences between student and parent generations, and between parent and grandparent generations on six of the eight issues. They concluded that age consistently contributes to the explanation of generational differences in values.

Damle (1970) reported that, in India, the areas of differences between students and their parents involved notions of equality, social justice, liberalism, dignity and worth of the individual, freedom of thought and action, and caste discrimination.

Conger (1971) found differences between generations in their attitudes towards sex, education, foreign policy, religion, drugs and social justice, as well as in personal tastes in dress, music, art and social customs.

Payne, Summers and Stewart (1973) found that members of the youth generation are less severe in their moral judgements than are members of the older generation. This is consistent with previous findings (Payne, Ahern and Johnson 1970; Yankelovich, 1969). Further, the differences observed were not confined to matters of taste, but included differences in judgements about behaviours having broad social and personal implications.

It has been reported by Gallagher (1974) that when generations were treated as age cohorts, an inverse relationship between age and liberalism was uncovered in the areas of sexual freedom, the importance of traditional religion, the social role of women, political
activism, and child-rearing practices. Generational discontinuity was especially intense regarding the free expression of sexuality, traditional religion, and the social position of the female.

In Soronsen's (1973) national survey of adolescent sexuality in contemporary America, 80 percent of all adolescents stated that they had "a lot of respect" for their parent's ideas and notions, while disagreeing with them on specific issues like sex.

Damies' (1970) study on the elite youth of Poona reveals differences on areas of choice of career and occupation, choice of life partner, dress and diet and leisure activities.

'Sinha (1971) investigated differences between the young and the old on issues like dress, family, marriage, religion, traditionalism, and conservatism/radicalism. He found a considerable overlap in the perceptions of both generations.

Gangrade (1974) studied conflict between the two generations on family matters, relationship with the opposite sex, religion, etc. He concluded that although sharp differences exist between the values of the two generations, very few are transmitted, in the form of a conflict, at the family level.

Prem Kirpal (1976) investigated the value changes in traditional culture and noted the youth's quest for new cultural values in terms of scientific spirit, realism, rationalism, efficacy and emancipation from dogma and tradition. He observed that youth advocates for changing and modernizing many of the traditional values by using indigenous factors.

Troll (1982) explored parent-child relations among adults and their parents, and people in early old age and their parents. She concluded that generation gaps in value differences are present and may be of the same magnitude in all age groups.

Traub and Dodder (1988) examined the nature of intergenerational continuity and discontinuity in terms of value-norm acceptance, differential interaction patterns and behavioural dissimilarity between generations. They studied 415 college students and 557 of their guardians. Findings supported the notion of a generation gap between youth and adults.