CHAPTER IV

FACTORS INFLUENCING GENERATION GAP

The phenomenon of generation gap is too complex, and it would be too simplistic to reduce the cause of the differences to any single factor. This hydra-headed concept has been examined by developmental psychologists, social psychologists, sociologists, political scientists and so on; hence each one of them has suggested different causes to explain this universal theme (Halyal, 1984).

Age creates the greatest contrast of all the independent variables (Bengston and Lovejoy, 1973). Age as socially defined— is a particularly salient dimension of social differentiation and experiencing. Generation gap results from the differences in age and opinion between parents and offspring.

Besides age, other salient variables influencing the generation gap could be identified as socio-economic status, rural-urban setting and education, communication media, and sex of parent and child.

4.1. SOCIO—ECONOMIC STATUS (SES)

Social class is a mediator of experiencing and thus a fair predictor of attitudes and values (Bengston and Lovejoy, 1973). Parental values are significant in the process of development of the value system of a child. Children “inherit” the values of their parents through the process of socialization. In almost every society, there are class groups or status subgroups to which people belong. The status grouping is family-wise and the
social status of the members of a family is determined by the social status of the family head. The social status of the family head is determined by several factors like the person’s education, occupation, income and in certain societies, religion, caste and ethnic group. Each status group has a distinct style of life marked by distinct norms, values and patterns of behaviour. Hence, the social status of a child is determined by the status of the father, who is also the head of the family. In a traditional society, social and geographical mobility is limited and an individual as an young adult generally finds himself in the same status group in which he was born. In a modern or modernizing society on the other hand, the individual is likely to find himself in a status group completely different from the one he was born in. The upward education and mass-media exposure in families with low social status can create a cleavage between the youth and their parents.

As long as the life style of the parents – their norms, values and patterns of behaviour – continues to be relevant to the kind of life their children aspire for, parent-child relationship is smooth. When children aspire for a life style of a social status different from those of their parents, problems begin to arise, the parents find themselves inadequate to guide their children for adult roles. This results in a generation gap.

Different factors have been used as indicators of Socio Economic Status (SES).

Father’s education and occupation (Jacobsen, Berry and Olson, 1975).

Income and self identification (Kahl, 1968).

Household items (consumer goods) the family is possessing (Klineberg, 1973).

In Indian studies, caste has also been included as one of the factors determining an individual’s SES (Sen, 1962; Singh, 1983; Halyal and Mallappa, 1985).
In traditional societies, status changes between the generations are little, with sons generally continuing in the occupations of their fathers, and daughters following the pattern of life of their mothers. The situation is different in a modern or a modernizing society. Modernization offers both vertical and horizontal mobility of status and formal education is the avenue through which mobility is achieved. This situation in which there is a gap between the educational and occupational levels of parents, and the aspired levels of children, creates tensions and conflicts.

Various studies have investigated the influence of social class, or parental socio-economic status on differences in attitudes and values between the generations. Lynd and Lynd (1929), in their classic study of Middletown, noted that the child-rearing practices in a family affected the personality of children. Generation gap was relatively low in the lower SES group, which supported and practiced conformity. The working-class mothers in their sample placed more emphasis on teaching their children obedience than did the high-class mothers. Hence, the generation gap between working-class mothers and their children was lower. Sewell (1961) explained the variance in the personality of children in terms of attitudes and values learned by virtue of the family's social position. A change in lifestyle and social status due to education would, he felt, bring about attitudinal and value differences between generations. A study by Sen (1962) found a positive correlation between the SES, particularly caste and education, of individuals and their attitudinal modernity.

Similar results were obtained by Kahl (1968) in his study of modernism in Brazil and Mexico. He identified income, education, occupation and self-identification as factors determining an individual's social class position. In both the countries studied, social class was a good predictor of modernity.

The influence of social class of the family on generation gap was examined by Jacobsen, Berry and Olson (1976). The generation gap was found to be more manifest in
families with working-class origins. College education provided greater social exposure to students from these families and contributed to disagreements on social issues with their fathers who had blue-collar occupations and only high school education.

The results of a study, on attitude differences between three generations by Gallagher (1979) suggested that while social class had little effect on attitudinal distance between generations, it was nonetheless a major factor in attitude formation. Opinions on religion, child-rearing, and the role of women were structured differently between classes. The lower the social class position of the family, the more conservative were attitudes on these issues.

Halyal and Mallappa (1985) made an attempt to examine the significance of generation gap in different socio economic status levels, to assess the differential influence of socio economic status on generational discontinuities. 189 college students and both their parents formed the sample and were grouped into high, middle, and low socio economic status levels. The generation gap was measured in terms of attitudinal modernity. Findings suggested that the generation gap was more in low socio economic status level than in middle and high socio economic status levels.

4.2. RURAL – URBAN SETTING AND EDUCATION

The present Indian society is changing rapidly because of industrialization, urbanization, mass education and geographical and occupational mobility. Education, in India today, has created a new breed of educated youth against the vast majority of uneducated old people. The educated youth are on the way of acquiring new beliefs, norms, sentiments, ideologies and values. They are increasingly becoming aware of the cultural lag existing between them and their parents.
Sociocultural change can be measured on a continuum ranging from near stagnancy to revolutionary reorganization of social order. One can classify societies by their internal dynamics in terms of the rural–urban continuum with usually slow-changing rural societies at the one end and fast changing urban industrialized societies at the other. Tempo of social change is directly correlated with attitudinal and value differences between the generations.

The generation gap occurs in an uneven rate between different generations. The gap would be less or negligible if the two generations are similar in their life experiences. For example, an illiterate rural resident son of an uneducated farmer will have similar attitudes and beliefs to his father because the two generations are not exposed to factors of social change like education and urbanization. However, the son of an uneducated farmer will develop attitudes different from that of his father if he migrates to the city and gets educated in school and college. Thus, the magnitude of the generation gap depends on variations in the factors of social change like education and urbanization (Halyal and Mallappa, 1985).

Gangrade (1974) hypothesized that intergenerational conflict may alter or change in relation to rural/urban background of parents and children. He found that where students have an urban background and parents a rural background, there are more differences than in cases where both the generations have a rural background or both the generations an urban background.

Reddy (1983) hypothesized that “there would be significant differences between youth and adults in their attitude towards authoritarianism in the rural, urban and metropolitan localities”. 250 college going students each (17 to 20 years) from rural, urban and metropolitan localities were compared with 250 adults each (50 years and above) from
rural, urban & metropolitan localities. An attitude questionnaire with regard to authoritarianism developed by Reddy was used. Comparison of youth and adult groups showed that the latter scored lower than the former indicating more authoritarian attitudes.

In both rural and urban localities the generational differences were significant. However, in metropolitan areas, no significant generational differences were obtained. “This could be due to progressive ideas and exposure to the mass media of communications in the metropolitan localities”. (Reddy, 1983).

Halyal and Mallappa (1985) made an attempt to focus on the relative contribution of education and urbanization to the attitudinal modernity differences between students and their parents. 41 male students studying in city colleges and whose parents were still in rural areas were studied. Another group of 98 male students studying in city colleges and residing with their parents in the city for not less than 10 years formed the other group for study. Thus, a total sample of 134 students and both their parents were administered the modernity scale. The study clearly demonstrated that education and urban experiences had influenced the modernity of the younger generation. “The problem is more perceptible in families where first generation learners are trying to shun the out-dated traditions, replacing them by modern values acquired through their educational and other allied exposures”. (Halyal and Mallappa, 1985).

Sociologists have long since established that education is one of the most important ordering principles governing the characteristics of individuals in modern societies. The amount of education an individual has received plays a major role in determining the occupation he will attain and thereby the income he will receive. This is a major determinant of the prestige he will be accorded in most formal social situations. Education leads to differences not only in cognitive content, but also in cognitive style, that
is, in the way the individual reasons. Education brings about subtle differences in individual attitudes, in values concerning personal and social relations, and in the strength of certain psychological propensities such as the tendency to be “field dependent” or “authoritarian”. Education is a major determinant of the syndrome of attitudes, values, and behaviours which distinguish the more modern man from the more traditional man (Inkeles and Holsinger, 1973).

Suzman (1973) noted that education is important in shaping the most basic sorts of psychic dispositions. It renders one modern not only in value and attitude, but in one’s basic personality.

According to Kahl (1968), Education is the sorting mechanism which prepares men for their adult roles.

Schnaiberg (1971), whose principal focus in his Turkish study of female modernism was on urban experience, found that “Urbanism effects are observed only because of the close linkage between rural residence and low education and economic opportunities in developing areas”.

Klineberg (1973) in his study of the Tunisian Society, found that schooling does indeed appear to create a “radical discontinuity” between generations. He pointed out a “contrast effect” among school attenders with regard to parental attitudes; the more deeply traditional the parents, the more modern were the attitudes and aspirations that their educated sons expressed.

Singh (1988) explored intergenerational continuity in religious and social values in Bangladesh, using 101 old and 279 young respondents. He concluded that
intergenerational transmission of values and attitudes is significantly affected by changes in social conditions, e.g., rural to urban migration or education.

4.3. COMMUNICATION MEDIA

In India today, avenues for communication are wide open to the youngsters to which their parents, in their youth, could not even aspire.

Adelson (1968) blamed newspaper and magazine articles for exaggerating and distorting the differences between adolescents and adults. In his opinion, adolescence was both more mundane and more complex than the simplistic, sentimentalized, popular accounts, and scientific understanding of adolescence was served poorly by the caricatures produced in popular media.

Angel (1968) attributed generation gap differences, in part, to the education gap he credited radio and television with furnishing the young of today with more information and preparing them better for school, thereby, inducing a loss of respect for an older generation who has less education and were not as well informed.

Hayakawa (1968) went further in describing the influence of communication media on the generation gap (Murray, 1971): “Present day adolescents have been betrayed by television and movies into believing that simplistic solutions, such as can be conveyed on the screen in a relatively few minutes, are the complete answers to difficult problems. Both television and movies allow for no interaction with others; both feature mindless, impulsive people who can get all that they want by using the correct hair oil or toothpaste. They provide answers swiftly, pleasurably, and apparently invincibly, as contrasted with the programs of hard work in industry, hard study in education, and good works proposed by religion”.
Sinha (1971) identified a value ambiguity among the young, as a result of which they were not able to have clear-cut evaluative responses to certain socio-moral issues. According to Sinha, the reason for this ambiguity was exposure to the mass media. While the older generation has a relative lack of exposure, the younger generation was completely immersed in various forms of mass media like television, radio, films, the press and magazines so that the world of arts, sports, entertainment and contemporary events were constantly brought within their psychological field, leading to a proliferation of role-models available to them. While the choice of the older generation was largely limited to the figures and personalities about whom they had heard from their elders in the form of stories and legends or read in books which projected unambiguous roles for them, the young were confronted with a large array of 'not-so-important' figures, made familiar to them by the mass media. The proliferation of roles with which the young were confronted, made it difficult for them to identify completely with any set of clear-cut roles or personalities, which is important in the formation of an ego-identity. There was an absence of normative models for the youth as a group.

4.4. SEX OF PARENT AND CHILD

A few researchers have attempted to examine the influence of sex of parent and child on generational discontinuity. Two questions have been addressed in such research: (i) Among adolescents, are boys more prone to generational conflict, or are girls? (ii) Is there any difference in the extent of the generation gap between same-sex and cross-sex parent-child pairs?

LoSciuto and Karlin (1972) conducted a survey to answer the first question. 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 students - high dissidence and low dissidence - were formed. Sex emerged as one of the strongest predictors of dissidence. Male students were more likely to be highly dissident than female students.

A study conducted by Jacobsen, Berry and Olson (1975) yielded similar results. Their sample consisted of 31 male and 109 female university students and their fathers. Disagreement between students and fathers were studied on contemporary problems dealing with sexual behaviour, economic-ecological, social, political issues. Findings indicated that daughters retained more consensus in their families than sons. "The often documented fact that a young daughter is more protected and emotionally closer than her brother to both her parents apparently continues largely unaffected into her collegiate years". (Jacobsen, Berry and Olson, 1975).

Difference in the extent of generation gap between same-sex parent and cross-sex parent was studied by Jennings and Niemi (1968). Their study, based on political value transmission, elicited no differences between same-sex and cross-sex parent - student pairs.

Gallagher (1979), while investigating the role of sex on the attitude differences across three generations, found a similar trend. The effect of sex on generationalism was negligible. The difference between mother/daughter/student dyads and father/son/student dyads was hardly noticeable. He found no significant difference in parents' and grandparents' attitudes by sex, although, as a generation, they were markedly more conservative than their children. Sexual membership bore little relation to the attitudes of the student generation.
Cunningham (1973) found no sex differences in modernity levels among her Puerto Rican high school students.

Aldous and Hill (1965) tested and verified the proposition that more intergenerational continuity exists in same-sex family linkages than in cross-sex family linkages. They explained this on the basis of greater affiliation and social cohesion between same-sex pairs.

Gallagher (1979) took the opposite view. He pointed out the emphasis placed by psychoanalysis on the ambivalent feelings generated for the same-sex parent. The implication is that generationalism is more extreme in dyads consisting of an individual and the same-sex parent.

Jacobsen, Berry and Olson (1975) in their comparative intrafamily study on the disagreement between generations on contemporary issues also found more discontinuity between same-sex than between cross-sex parent child pairs.

Hamid and Wyllie (1980) investigated intergenerational conflict between secondary school students and their parents. No significant sex differences were evident between conflict levels of male and female adolescents. However, young people were found to be more intimate with their fathers than with their mothers. Conflict was less with fathers than with mothers, particularly for girls.

Gangrade (1974) studied intergenerational conflict between 100 students from colleges of the Delhi University and their fathers on family matters, relationship with the opposite sex and marriage, religion, educational and career aspirations, teacher’s authority and student’s participation in university affairs, style of life, political participation and national goals. The male students and their fathers were found to be more progressive than
the female students and their fathers. In case of conflict, the female students were found to have a more submissive attitude in actual practice than their male counterparts.

Halyal (1984), in his study on generation gap in terms of attitudinal modernity, found no significant sex differences among the 84 boys and 105 girls studied. However, for both boys and girls, the generation gap was found to be higher in relation to mothers than in relation to fathers.