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Intergenerational Conflict

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Abstract:
In the adolescent stage all the behavirous of 'teen' are not tolerated. The behaviour tolerated in a five year old may not be considered acceptable for a sixteen-year old. Adolescents today have many distractions. Going to clubs, discos, etc. in metropolitan cities is quite common and this trend is now rapidly spreading to smaller cities and town. Peer group pressure often enforces the need to visit these areas of entertainment. The opening up of media and mass communication due to the forces of globalization has meant the introduction of 'western' culture which is more attractive for young minds, than what is offered by traditional culture. At this stage in their life, the adolescents are not in a mature frame of mind to be discriminatory in nature. They are unable to distinguish between what is "good" and what is "bad". In the name of 'modern' many adolescents fall prey to life styles, which may not be approved by parents and elders. It is thus, that the more susceptible among them fall prey to anti-social activities with gangs. Chances are that such youngsters can go astray if there is no parental control or it may occur without their knowledge. During adolescence their forces work against each other. There are conditions that push the youth forward and others that hold them back, especially in the early adolescent years. Adolescents, have a desire to assert their individuality and also great need to confirm. They want to be independent and be protected at the time. They harbour many conflicting feeling and motives, which leads to intergenerational disturbances.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of inter-generational conflict has been known from time immemorial. As far as India is concerned the problem is of recent and urban origin. An analysis of the inter-generational conflict in India involves a study of the crisis in youth values. The decline of parental authority and of parental influence in the value orientation of children is certainly an important factor of inter-generational conflict. The intergenerational conflict is the product of interaction between the two generations – young and old. Each generation, guided by a definite set of values and attitudes, has a behavioral pattern and sometimes the two may not coincide and may possibly be in conflict one with the other. A change in the socio-cultural process affects the conflict. Therefore, in any non-static society the values, mores and modes of behaviour of younger generation are systematically different from those of the elder age group. Hence the stress of the younger generation has resulted in open intergenerational conflict more among urban educated section.

The emergence of open conflict between the generations need not depend on the existence of extreme differences of opinion about social values between generations. The most important feature of the contemporary conflict of generations is the disharmony between human attitudes, including the attitudes of the younger generation, on the one hand, and social context, on the other. The disconsonance between the authoritarianism of the family and the urge for individuation expressed itself in stresses and strains and conflicts. These were deepened by the inability of parents to offer any guidance to the younger generation in the solution of their problems. This resulted in intergeneration conflict.

The struggle between parental norms, which in a changing society represent established principles of a preceding generation, and those of youth, which represent the norms of the present, is a natural source of conflict between the generations in a rapidly changing culture. Hence, the youth wants emancipation from the bondages of the parents. The essential element in emancipation is the freedom, desire and ability to take responsibility. The emancipated person may seek advice from his parents, but he will not allow his parents to dictate his decisions. When adolescents strive to achieve independence and emancipation from their parents, they are gradually but drastically reversing a pattern of behaviour they showed in infancy.

Adolescent emancipation is a problem for both the children and for parents. Ever since the youngster was an infant they have had him in their care. The habit of watching over him is strong and the desire to do so is also likely to be strong. Hence they fail in cultivating the habit of allowing the youngster to have more and more freedom and self-determination. This results in intergenerational conflict. Such conflict is the obstacle in communication and understanding between members of different generations in a family. Rapid change in modern civilization tends to accentuate intergenerational conflict for within a fast changing social order the time difference between generations creates a hiatus between one generation and the next. The parents become old fashioned and the youth rebellions and clashes occur between the two generations.

Generational differences are based on the biological facts of the human life cycle. Children inevitably grownup in a culture, that is different from that in which their parents were raised. Unfortunately, even though parents are aware of the rapid social change, they do not always consider them while interacting with the youths. These parents do not realize that times have changed. Most of the children, irrespective of sex, prefer the company of their friends when they are of college going age. It is very common for college students to attend occasional parties that carry on until late in the night. By failing to understand the society in which their children are growing or by enforcing the rules and behaviour of their own generation, parents emphasize the intergenerational conflict.

The adolescents and the parents represent different socio-cultural worlds. These groups experience different cultures. They are born in different historical periods and grownup under influence of the then prevailing styles, facts, media, technology, beliefs, attitudes and values. Today intergenerational conflict is essentially recognized a cultural gap. Today, computers, the internet and other technology have made the world different in ways the older generation cannot fully understand. Further, adolescent behaviour often frightens parents. Most parents worry about drugs, alcohol, sexual activities and harmful peer pressures. Some are pressed financially trying to keep up with the real and perceived needs of their teenage children. Hence, instead of actively appreciating their children and drawing them into the community as contributing members, parents view them as objects of ministry and concern. This prevents adolescents from growing up. Young people are often forced to postpone the decision to become adults because their parents refuse to let them take responsibility for their own lives.

The adolescents have their own perceptions towards their personal aspects. But parents are obsessed with presenting their children with perfect choices not realizing that it is a valuable experience for adolescents to be out in the real world making their own decisions and their own mistakes. The main reason is parents want their children to confirm to norms and stick to rules is fear. They are afraid that things will not workout for their children; their children may get emotionally or physically hurt, or may do something which may affect them for the rest of their life. All parents were once teenagers and one of the main reasons they are afraid their children will make mistakes is because they probably did.

2. Areas of Conflict

Both amongst boys and girls there are serious disagreements between them and their parents regarding many aspects including dress and diet. Similarly, friendship between the sexes creates a crisis situation. Leisure activities and smoking are yet other sources of disagreement. Keeping late hours at night for reading, getting up late in the morning and in general not conforming to the time discipline of the home can give rise to serious conflicts between students and their parents. Returning home late in the evening is almost taboo for girls. In many case students avoid eating with their parents in order to avoid disagreement and dissent. Where the parents are strict disciplinarians disagreement over these areas is very likely to develop into conflict. In more important areas such as choice of courses and careers and colleges etc., disagreements are likely to be sharp and almost certain to engender conflict between students and parents. Control over purse and time is yet another area of disagreement. Because the students disliked being required to account for their time and money in every detail.

There are other various areas of social life in which intergenerational conflicts seem to occur. Choice of spouse, choice of occupation, the joint and nuclear family, the use and abuse of leisure, inter-caste and interclass friendships and modes of hetero-sexual behaviour are some areas of conflict between the generations. There is some disagreement on the question of the expenditure pattern of students. A certain amount of conflict can be seen to arise from their conspicuous consumption and expenditure on vicarious pleasures. They want money as block grants without having to give account to parents. As against this, students' reluctance to give account cannot be described as a source of generational conflict.

Much of the conflict seems to arise from a lack of communication. Another source of conflict is the changing attitudes of the younger generation to sex and religion. It is because with technological advancement, the younger generation would have to adjust itself continuously to the changing social conditions. Keeping in mind these aspects this chapter endeavors the areas of conflict, which are solely personal matters.

In the present day Indian caste ridden orthodox society, the parents are more afraid of their social status and prestige than anything else. They read in the newspapers, periodicals and electronic media every day the cases of kidnapping, elopements etc. Therefore, taking into consideration the social bondage the parents oppose them. It may be due to lack of proper understanding of their own adolescent children's character.

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