Youth, Modernization and Social Transformation – A Study of Rural and Hill Society in Uttarakhand, India

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Abstract

Modernization is an extremely complex phenomenon, which involves a large number of interrelated changes of many different kinds. Modernization refers to processes in which the society goes through such as industrialization, urbanization and other social changes that completely transform the lives of individuals. The new force of social change like Westernization, Modernization, Industrialization, Globalization, Politicization of issues and Media exposure have changed the norms and the values of the youth throughout the country.

Many values of the parent's generation in regards to education and employment are now put in jeopardy. It erodes the traditional mystique of the parental authority and guidance defining youth's aspirations, their life style and future planning. The global culture has influenced the youth in multidimensional ways from their career choices, family and community interaction, leisure time activities to their inter-generational relations and socialization process.

Youth represents the dynamic character of human society. Youth has the capacity to absorb new challenges and evolve new values in a fast changing society. Thus, through its youth, a society copes with new challenges and demands and passes from a traditional mould to modernity.

In the present paper an attempt has been made to assess the attitude of the youth especially rural youth towards various issues i.e. view regarding marriage, superstitious beliefs, views regarding gender equality etc.

Key words: Modernization, Youth, Social change, Education.

Introduction

Every thing is changing very rapidly be it our culture, customs, norms and values, change have been seen in every phase of life. New concepts like live-in- relationship, gay relationship etc. have emerged as a result of modernization.

Modernization is an extremely complex phenomenon, which involves a large number of interrelated changes of many different kinds. The concept of modernization is multidimensional incorporating economic development, technological revolution, rationality and scientific temper, emphasis on achieved status, equality, social justice and individualism (Dube 1973).

Modernization refers to the processes which the society goes through such as industrialization, urbanization and other social changes that completely transform the lives of individuals. It does not mean that traditionalism and modernity are two extremes and the two cannot co-exist. S.C.Dube and Yogendra Singh are of the view that the two can co-exist. Accepting traditionalism does not mean completely rejecting modernization.

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It may simply mean regulating the forces of modernization. Simply accepting modernization does not mean complete rejection of traditionalism. It means accepting only those elements of traditionalism which are considered by the society as functional for it, in view of the collective goal.

Thus the nature of social change in India is such that we find a synthesis of tradition and modernity. On the one hand, we have discarded those traditional beliefs, practices and institutions which we believe were more dysfunctional. On the other hand, we have imbibed those modern values and have created those modern institutions which we thought will help us in achieving our basic goals of "Change in quality of life of the people" (Sharma 2007).

Social Transformations and the Youth in India

In the course of India's different phases of social transformations, significant changes are seen in their societal norms and values which have deep impact on the youth. The new force of social change like Westernization, Modernization, Industrialization, Globalization, Politicization of issues and Media exposure have changed the norms and the values of the youth throughout the country.

Many values of the parent's generation with regard to education and employment are now put in jeopardy. Currently the traditional mystique of the parental authority and guidance defining youth's aspirations, their life style and future planning is eroded. The global culture has influenced the youth in multidimensional ways, from their career choices, family and community interaction, leisure time activities to their inter-generational relations and socialization process.

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Responsibilities of the Youth in Modern Times

The following are the responsibilities as enumerated by the National Youth Policy:

- To contribute to sectoral, family and self development and to promote social and inter-generation understanding and gender equality
- To extend respect to teachers and elders, parents and the family, in consonance with our cultural norms and traditions
- To uphold the unity and integrity of the Nation, maintain peace and harmony, observe Fundamental Duties and respect the Fundamental Rights and Freedoms guaranteed under the Constitution to all sections of the people
- To respect others' faiths and beliefs in the religious, cultural and social spheres and to different schools of thought and to neither exploit nor be instrumental in the exploitation of fellow citizens and other persons, especially women
- To promote appropriate standards of ethical conduct in individual and social life, to maintain honesty and integrity of character and be committed to fight against all forms of corruption, social evils and practices
- To preserve and protect the Environment; and to commit themselves to create a discrimination and exploitation free environment and to devote their time and energy in nation building activities.*(National Youth Policy 2003,* Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Govt. of India, *www.nyks.org/2003/2003_Responsibilities.html*)

Representation of the Dynamic Character of Human Society

Youth represents the dynamic character of human society. Youth has the capacity to absorb new challenges and evolve new values in a fast changing society. Thus, through its youth, a society copes with new challenges and demands, and passes from a traditional mould to modernity.

A positive growth has been seen in the field of science and technology in the country, but, on the other side, population growth, unemployment and crime against women are on the increase. No change in gender-ration has been seen so far. Instead the status of women in the society continues to decline in various sectors.

Traditionalism and superstitious belief were still prevalent in the rural as well in urban areas.

Focus of This Paper

Keeping all these factors in mind an attempt has been made in the present paper to assess the attitude of the youth especially rural youth towards certain important societal issues. Generally youth are considered as the future of the country so it is necessary to know their views regarding certain issue which has been discussed in the present paper.

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Empirical Studies

Sharma (2007), in his study, 'An analytic study of values and beliefs of youth in context of social change with special reference of modernization', reveals that although major and relevant changes have taken place over the years in the cultural patterns of the lifestyles of the youth, their structural values like the consent of elders in choosing their life partners, respect for the elders and women have not undergone major changes. Traditional ties with family and caste are becoming less important. Thus in modern world, technology has greater and bigger role than even in the process of industrial revolution. The information revolution is now playing a bigger role in social change.

Palanithurai (2005), in his study, 'Role of Youth in Governance at Grassroots', reveals that youth clubs and mahila mandals are the vital social capitals which can work effectively with the Panchayats in mobilising people for plan preparation and for collecting needed data from the people and other organisations. For social development activities, people have to be mobilised frequently. In the whole process, all millennium development goals could be achieved by utilising the existing schemes and programmes of the government with the active participation of people. All government programmes and schemes can be monitored, supervised and evaluated by the youth groups with the support of the Panchayats. For many of the works people have to be mobilised and sensitized and the same could be done by the youth clubs and mahila mandals. Governance of education and health at the grassroots with the active involvement of the youth clubs and mahila mandals through the Panchayats could be achieved. By performing this task Millennium Development Goals can be achieved. Panchayats can be transformed into a citizen's centre which can provide information to the citizens. By doing so the Million 2007 Goals of creating every village a 'Knowledge Centre' can be achieved. It will become dialogue centre, discourse centre and discussion centre. By involving the youth club and mahila mandal members in the Panchayat activities Panchayat will become a strong and vibrant citizen's centre.

Agochiya (2005) finds that the Indian youth community today is going through a period of uncertainty about their future leading to a sense of frustration and cynicism. Avenues for productive employment are limited and young people are getting increasingly involved in crime and other anti-social activities. A generation brought up in despair and hopelessness can never become an asset to the nation. It is, therefore, imperative that the agencies responsible for planning and delivering youth development programmes should address these concerns and problems urgently. The mandarins of the Ministry and senior functionaries of the Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK) and the National Service Scheme (NSS) should realize that they need to move away from an adhoc approach to the one that lends unequivocal direction and focus to youth development programme. It is necessary to identify strategic areas for action that ensure all-round development of youth, preparing them not only for productive employment but also for facing new challenges of modern day life. Only then will they be able to play a positive role in national reconstruction.

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Jha (1999) concluded that boys gave top priority to political values whereas girls gave more emphasis to religious values. Aesthetic value was preferred least by both the groups. Boys and girls differed significantly in respect of their performance for theoretical, economic, aesthetic, political and religions values.

Chakavarty (1975) found that traditional attitudes among the younger generation are changing very rapidly but their modern attitudes are not being reflected in actual process.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the present study is to assess the awareness and attitude of the youth towards social values and practices regarding marriage, towards gender equality and towards superstitious beliefs.

Area of Study and Methodology

The present study is undertaken in the Government Degree College Munsyari located in the District of Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand State in India. The college is located in a place about 300 km near a main city of Uttarakhand, Haldwani.

The main reason for selecting this particular college is that it is located in a remote area which is cut off from the main city of Uttarakhand. We were also guided by the fact that environment plays an important role in shaping the attitude and perceptions of the youth. The social environment and its compulsions in a remote area such the place we've selected for study are more conservative in nature. Keeping all these facts in mind the Government Degree College, Munsyari is selected for the study. Out of the total 400 students, only 100 respondents were selected using random ranking method. The primary data were collected through well structured interview schedule.

Major Findings of the Study

Attitude of the College Students towards the Traditional Practices Governing Marriage

Through this question, researchers tried to assess the view of the college students towards traditional practices regarding marriage. In Indian traditional society, usually marriage is arranged by the parents without consulting their boy or girl, especially in the case of a girl child. It was found during the study that majority of the students 90% prefer the current spousal choice practices, which involve the choice of spouses as suggested by their parents. Majority of the respondents preferred marriage in the same caste as they don't believe in the system of inter-caste marriage. The main reason given in support of this was that marriage outside caste would defame their parents' respect. According to them, the tradition of selecting bride or groom in the same caste was in practice from ancient times. Only 10% respondents were of the view that inter-caste marriage is not bad, but must be done after consulting with the parents.

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Thus, it is clear from the above that no change has taken place relating to the practices followed in spousal choice and fixing marriage. The view and the attitude of the respondents were same as of the traditional society.

Attitude of the College Students Regarding Gender Equality

In India, a preferential treatment was extended to male children within a family. Generally speaking, a girl is considered as a *Praya Dhan* (Praya Dhan is a saying; it means that girls have to marry into another family, so they are not supposed to be the member of the original family; that's why girls are considered as Prayadhan) and spending money on their education was considered to be of no use as she would leave her parents' home and go another family. Keeping this question in mind, the researchers tried to find out the views of the college students towards gender equality. It was found during the study that all the respondents believe in gender equality. According to them there must be no discrimination based on sex. They should be treated on equal terms.

Majority of the respondents (60%) were also of the view that no reservation in jobs, enrollment, etc., should be provided for either on the basis of gender, caste or religion. 40 % were of the view that instead of reservation in jobs, etc., reduced school/college fees or additional scholarships should be provided to the girls. They have to prove themselves without any help. There must be open competition so that the deserving candidates reach the right place. Thus, it was clear from the above analysis that a positive approach was developed among the college students in the sense they believe in gender equality and want equal treatment to members of both genders.

Views regarding Superstitious Beliefs

In this era of information technology, superstitious beliefs are still prevalent everywhere, village, town or big cities. However, the beliefs, interest, values and attitude, and practices are in the process of tremendous change.

In the present research work researchers tried to find out the opinion of the respondents towards superstitious beliefs (a belief which has no basis in scientific and logical reason/s and which cannot be applied everywhere as a universal fact may be considered as a superstitious belief). However, it is, indeed, difficult to define what a superstitious act is. So, the researchers carefully observed the activities and beliefs and treated those beliefs and activities (not based on logical reasons) that restrict the productive behavior of individuals as superstitious beliefs or practices. Examples given below in the next paragraph as part of the analysis will reveal this position.

It was found during the study that majority of the respondents (65%) have faith in superstitious beliefs. It was found during the study that pregnant women in the villages are not allowed to do anything. They are generally considered as impure and during this period they were not allowed to cook food and not allowed to sit in the midst of family

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members. They were kept in separate room/s for a period until they gave birth. Another superstitions belief found in the village was cat-crossing. When an individual walks toward another place in order to perform some work or the other, if a cat crisscrosses his or her path, he or she will change their direction or postpone his or her work for a day because cat-crossing is generally not considered auspicious. About 90% of the respondents readily agree with the view that cat-crossing brings bad luck. No social change so far has been seen on the life of rural people in this area.

Views regarding Determinants of Status

In traditional Indian society, status is usually determined by the gender, caste and money. Status may be determined by other factors such as education and intelligence in modernized communities.

According to Ralph Linton status are of two types.

1. **Ascribed status** Ascribed status is the social status a person is assigned at birth or assumes involuntarily later in life.

2. **Achieved status** Achieved status is a social position a person takes on voluntarily that reflects both personal ability and merit (Gupta & Sharma, 2001:158).

In the present study the researchers tried to find out the view of the college students regarding the determinants of status. It was found that majority of the respondents, 80 % believe in achieved status. According to them, in this era of information technology, nothing is impossible if you have adequate zeal to succeed. Everything can be achieved. So, according to them, the main determinants of status are education and intelligence. Only 20% believe in ascribed status, that is, status determined by money. Thus it was clear from the above analyses that majority of the students believe in achieved status.

Opinion regarding Traditional Health Practices

Women in Uttarakhand suffer mostly due to the child delivery practices. In the rural areas some of the traditional practices still continue, though education, rising economic standard and social awareness have somewhat reduced their suffering. Many women who deliver babies are still subjected to isolation in unhealthy conditions, deprivation of proper nutritional food and other amenities due to false beliefs. Also there is also widespread practice of Dais as "Baby Deliverers" in villages and small towns. These daises (midwives) are experienced in traditional ways of delivering babies. These traditional midwives are preferred by elders in the family rather than the qualified nurses and doctors. It was found during the study that majority of the respondents (57%) still believe in Dais. According to them, they are more experienced than doctors because they are doing it for decades, embracing several generations.

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In Uttarakhand, more than 82 % of the deliveries occur at home in rural areas. More than half of these get assistance from dais. Only one of seven births that occur outside a medical facility receives a postpartum check-up within two months of delivery. Facilities available for emergency obstetric care are grossly inadequate in the rural hill area. Public health facilities in Uttarakhand consist of an extensive network of Government health institutions catering to the health needs of the people. These include district hospitals, 49 Community Health Centers (CHCs), 232 Primary Health Centers (PHCs), 1765 Sub-Centers and 389 State Ayurvedic Dispensaries (SAD) which dispense medical services to the far flung rural populace. However, the network of dispensaries and hospitals is not adequate and the access to health services in the rural areas still remains a challenge. This problem is further compounded by the non-availability of trained doctors, paramedics and diagnostic equipment in the interior areas.

Rural families have more faith in dais instead of doctor. One of the important reason behind this is low level of awareness and unwillingness of doctors to visit rural hill area. Almost one third (32 %) of women in Uttarakhand are undernourished as per the weight for height index or the body mass index. Nutritional deficiency is more prevalent among rural, illiterate women and women belonging to households with a low a standard of living. Thus life of people in the area is same as before. No sign of improvement has been clearly seen so far.

Conclusion

A number of striking findings emerged from interviews with youth that warrant further attention. A positive approach of the youth towards gender equality has been seen, but other important issues which need attention are neglected by the youth. In this era of modernization, globalization and information technology, youth are in the stage of transformation. They are still in the stage of transition. We can only hope that as the time passes a new approach may be developed among the young people and a major social change may be seen over the years.

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