

Generation gap: Who is to blame?

NOWADAYS THE older people and the younger population complain of generation gap and of breaking down the communication between these twos. But who is to blame? I think both go amiss now and then.

There is a great hue and cry raised by the elders and the young both that the communication between them has broken down and they accuse each other for and bemoan this state of affairs. They attribute it to generation gap. Majority in the society carries along with this moroseness and never pauses to think the why and how of the problem.

The elders are more critical of the younger generation with a big inventory of complaints against the young and the young mostly tend to ignore the grumbling, mumbling and occasional loud protestations of the older generation. But now and then they do protest. They resent the petting attitude of the elders.

The generation gap, however, is a deeper malady than viewed superficially. There may be the following differences between the old and the young:

- Of ideas on general conduct comprising dress, food habits etc.
- Morality, marriage & career
- Of tastes on art, music, literature, and in short total outlook.
- Family unit breaking up and gradually losing the importance it once had. The central authority of the paternal figure becoming redundant.
- Imposition of the self-righteous attitude of the older generation on the young.
- Biological evolutionary difference

It is generally observed that the old behave like a frog in the well. They are fully convinced that the ideas they have had throughout their lives are the ultimate and ideal. They ignore certain vital factors that are no longer valid in the case of the modernity. There always has been generation gap since the dawn of civilization. The young have always deviated from the older standards and it was well that they did or there wouldn't have been any progress today.

I was once travelling by train. I noticed a gentleman in western dress talking to a small group of co-passengers. He was very critical of the younger generation. He was giving full rein to his criticism condemning point by point everything the young did. As is usual in such situations, his audience was nodding their heads authenticating his criticism. Finding me indifferent to this, he confronted me why I didn't comment as others did. I politely told him I enjoyed listening to his discourse. But he pressed me to express my opinion, which others hadn't dared or bothered to do.

I told him after he had verified through catechism my eligibility to contribute to this important discussion that I was also educated and I apologized in advance as I differed from him. The purport of his discourse was that the young should do exactly as the elders do. I asked him with all humility at my command if he followed his own advice to the young. His dress, occasional sprinkling of English vocabulary in his Hindi narrative, for he was educated upto Sahitya Ratan, purely a Hindi degree, his travelling in a train rather than on camel's back or by a bullock cart and numerous such acts were in total divergence from his ancestors' way of life.

I added to his consternation that all this change was progress and the things he criticized in the young were manifestations of progress. But for this change, everything would stagnate. There is never a moment when change is not taking place.

The younger generation naturally differs in dress, food, habits etc, as all these were not available to the older generation. These changes are indicative of progress. With the passage of time when the society, right from the basic unit of the family through society and the entire humanity, is changing, how can the new generation be asked to stagnate or move backward to the ancestors' way of life? In the olden days, in the Indian society the arranged marriage took place first and love between husband and the wife were thought to be a natural development.

It was in fact a rare accident as in most cases even incompatible marriages lasted a lifetime and many a husband and wife were martyred as a consequence. The moral standards differed in consonance with the contemporary situation, as human society is essentially a utilitarian one. The elders couldn't have visualized what was to come in their lifetime i.e. live-in relationship, one night stand, car key pooling and fishing and things that are yet to come out in the open.

It will be generally agreed that most fathers want their offspring to adopt the same profession that they themselves followed without giving due weight to the aptitude of the offspring. This causes tension between the elders and the children. The younger generation is more intellectually evolved than the preceding one. But the ego of the older people does not permit them to accept this hard truth and they would always like to play the role of the destiny makers of the younger ones.

The modern age has a wider field and many times more job opportunities are available to the really deserving candidates. Hence the youth have to become deserving and must walk on the untrodden path to face a cutthroat competition. It won't be wise to check them in this advance in the right direction.

People are fixated on the music of their youth. The film songs, for example, of one's youth are still attractive and the later music is rarely appreciated. The same is the story about art and literature or the type of reading available in a given age. The tastes keep changing and no one should bemoan this change. It is unavoidable and can't be stopped. The ways people relax also change from age to age. Traditions, culture, moral definitions keep changing. To criticize these changes is to expose oneself to ridicule and is unwise. If

one persists in it, one widens the generation gap and certainly has no business to criticize the youth. Those who are young today will face the same predicament when their time comes.

The family unit is breaking up. The central authority is losing its power. Every member of the family earns or has to earn. One who earns won't accept the authority of the other that is equal usually to that of the father. In olden days only the family head earned and the others lived on his income. Thus he held the baton of power. Now, he must surrender it to the young. If he doesn't yield, there are bound to be conflicts and unrest in the family.

The older generation had few opportunities to come into contact with the western world. The earth was a big planet. Travels were slow made with animal power. Automobiles were rare. The people were content with whatever environment they had. But now the world has shrunk. A global environment is developing. It is natural for the young to learn newer ways of this rising global culture encompassing every aspect of human life. They can't afford to follow the retrograde suggestions of their elders.

They have wider horizons to explore if they are to survive or lead a normal life from the existing standards of modern life. They must speak a language universal in its application and not be confined to their local language whatever it may be hence, the generation gap. They must eat Italian pizza, Chinese food or fast food and prefer coffee to the good old milk or lassi (yogurt). The leisurely ways of the old are gone. The younger generation must have speed, of motorbikes, cars, helicopters jet planes and rockets going into space. What can link them to the old bullock cart?

At least a quarter century separates the older generation from the younger one. In most cases the gap is of over half a century. Naturally an imperceptible biological evolution takes place and the nature wants the survival of the fittest. The young generation can't survive if it doesn't change. No power on earth can prevent the natural gap owing to this evolution. Nature equips each succeeding generation with mechanism to survive the rigors of the new environment.

The old have to leave early after having lived their lives. They would be wise not to interfere in the pace of development of the new. It was high time they stopped complaining. The young should see this predicament of the old and be tolerant and reverential towards them. It will ensure harmony in the society and add joy and peace to the daily life.

But every rose has a thorn. The younger generation should also be on their guard against the evils coming in train with the fast life. Stress, depression, frustration as a result of a race for ascendancy shouldn't be ignored or they can rob them of the fruit of their labor and their dreams. The young are our future, the future of humanity, of the human race on mother earth.

Only they can save themselves by heeding early warning of the evils of the modern world and life based on their own assessment. The old can still tell them that they in their time faced these travails of transition and suffered now and then. They young should listen to the old but must take their own decisions with discretion and a balanced perspective. The coming generation will be better than each preceding one.

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