



A PARADIGM SHIFT IN CHERISHED VALUES OF INDIAN YOUTH

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Abstract

In recent times there is a redefining and reinterpreting of fundamental values. Values of earlier times are being reassessed to suit modern needs, with corresponding decline of traditional value system of the youth. Present day youth is not attaching due significance to cherished human values of past. *Honesty*, for example, that used to be considered as 'the best policy' all along is no more guiding philosophy of many. There are only a few takers of *truth* when it comes for being practiced in real life. Similarly, there is the change in perception of *love* as life giving value. The present paper seeks to assess level of changes that have occurred in assessing traditional values such as 'honesty', 'truth' and 'love', especially by the youth and their consequent impact on society.

Key words: Human values, Honesty, Truth, Love.

INTRODUCTION

The present age is characterized as one where materialistic and individualistic values are at zenith. Materialism, as it stands, may be taken as single largest promoter of unethicity. 'Materialism coarsens and petrifies everything, making everything vulgar and every truth false' (Henri Frederic Amiel). The spirit of profit has undertaken the world under its sway. Everything is being analyzed in the terms of its profit. Capitalism, despite its obvious limitations has no alternatives. The death of communism brought about a death knell for all that stands for lofty ideals. In today's harsh and matter of fact life people are so much preoccupied with their own affairs that they have no time for thinking for creating a utopian world order. They don't have any idealistic pre-occupation such as Gonzalo's ideals in the Tempest:

"All things in common nature should produce without sweat or endeavour. Treason, felony, sword, pike, knife, gun, or need for any engine Would I not have; but nature should bring forth of it own kind, all foison, all abundance, to feed my innocent people."
- Shakespeare 334

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The cut-throat competition has made them so much concerned with their own rights and privileges that they don't bother to pay even slight consideration to the concepts like, sharing, caring, duty and sacrifice. Convenience has become the *mantra* of modern age.

Youth of contemporary times is no exception to this course. As a trend setter of the generation, he has not only adapted but also has immersed himself deep into the essence of the age. This is proved by his cool, calculating and pragmatic attitude towards life and its affairs. He is not willing to govern by the established norms, values or laws, but is keen to reset and reshape them as per his convenience and needs. Thus, degeneration of traditional values has gradually occurred over the years.

This paper analyses changes in value system, especially among Indian youth. It examines changing perception about certain values such as, honesty, truth and love by Indian youth, and its impact on societal norms. It is essentially a concept paper based on an in-depth study and analysis of both primary and secondary data from books, journals and Internet. Conclusion drawn are based on select short term surveys conducted on students of both undergraduate and post graduate courses of three leading engineering and management institutes at Mathura and Faridabad. The study was conducted using a structured questionnaire as well as eliciting information through informal interaction with students.

HONESTY AS HUMAN VALUE

Honesty as a value is perhaps most widely emphasized human value given the wide spread corruption in the society. In the bygone ages, honesty was something sacrosanct. 'The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out' (Proverbs 10:9). However, today it has lost its validity as well as charm. Majority of young men seem to ask why they should follow honesty when dishonesty has become the way of the life. There are no takers of Thomas Jefferson's, third US President, conviction of honesty being 'the first chapter of the book of wisdom'. When the dishonest people thrive and honest ones suffer, what is the rationale of following honesty people often ask?

The surveys conducted on young people show some very interesting results. Understanding of honesty by present generation is something vague. Most of them relate it to economic and financial activities. Many young men believe that one who does not take bribes is an honest person. Some others think that accumulating black money is dishonesty. However, for sure they take honesty to be antonym of corruption. Corruption is viewed as indulgence in financial irregularities.

However, the situation changes dramatically when the matter gets concentrated on the youth himself and his own affairs. An 89 per cent of youth reported they would readily pay bribe if it helped them in getting their work done. A large number (66 per cent) are willing to accept gifts rewards and other forms of pecuniary benefits for the favours done on their parts. Furthermore, majority (73 per cent) are not willing to view such favours as bribe. They take just gift or token for the services rendered. Only 17 per cent of them were candid enough to accept it as bribe and openly acknowledge it as easiest way to enhance their status and resources.

Both of these types, however, believe that their accepting such gifts/ rewards (euphemism for taking bribes) is not an issue in itself for even if they do not accept such favours, it is not going to change the prevailing unethical environment. With such acts only they will be bereft of its advantage and will be left behind in the race. A type of cynicism has overtaken Indian youth. He openly challenges the validity of the old proverb of honesty being the best policy and is convinced of that "...those who practice it are often made to pay either with their jobs or with their lives". (Mahapatra, 2011). There are only a few takers of Mahatma Gandhi's view, "What is true that honesty is compatible with amassing of a large fortune." For an average youth following honesty is not just difficult, but also totally impossible.

TRUTH AS HUMAN VALUE

Similarly, truth as a human value is an impractical concept that come from some alien land or some bygone ages. Almost all young men interviewed accept telling a lie in one way or another. About 90 per cent of them find lies all right as long as it does not harm or hurt interests of others. "If speaking a small lie saves you from a lot of hardship and explanations, what is wrong in it", they seem to ask. They are convinced that the present social scenario leaves almost no chance to accept the adage, "Truth is mighty and will prevail" (Mark Twain, *Notebook*). For them sticking to truth or just following it blindly is nothing but a folly and those who do so have to pay the price. It seems OK as far as it goes. However, such cynicism of youth takes an alarming turn when he begins to question the validity of the truth as a value and abandon it for fulfilling his own selfish ends. Thirty one (31) per cent of the people interviewed accepted that they will not hesitate telling a lie if it gives them substantial gains, notwithstanding it hurts others. Worse still, about 44 per cent openly questioned the wisdom of some great men who had all along been steadfast in following the truth. These young people do not even hesitate in mocking the great followers of truth including such stalwarts as Mahatma Gandhi. Some of them (17 per cent) are sceptic enough to believe that truth, honesty, non-violence, uprightness and similar values of these great personalities are just gimmicks used by them to serve their ends and score points over their rivals.

LOVE AS HUMAN VALUE

Like values of 'honesty' and 'truth', the value of 'love' has also undergone considerable transformation in present time. In keeping with his tryst with 'profit', the youth today values the love that yields in 'self' and 'sense gratification'. The old virtues of sharing, caring, duty, responsibility and sacrifice – so closely associated with love – have not much meaning for them. Love to them seems more a matter of taking than giving. It is not that they are not willing to give, but this giving, to a great extent, is another means to give them satisfaction and gratification.

Recent studies have inferred that the urban youth of today value mostly two types of relationships based on love. These are: friendship and lover-beloved relationship. However, it is friendship that has gained an unprecedented prominence in the modern times. It has become the most cherished and sought after relationship for urban youth of

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today. Now-a-days youths are keen on having friendship with a large number of people and many of them are intimate ones. Apart from face-to-face friendship, we have, 'net friends', 'chat friends', friends on various social networking sites, and so on.

No doubt friendship, with a strong bond of comradeship, has all along been an important relationship. Lord Rama and the monkey king Sugreev and Lord Krishna and Sudama are only a few examples of great friendship from our tradition. However, previously the stress was on quality and profundity of relationship. Now-a-days it has become quite extensive and inclusive. It is in this relationship that most of the information is transferred and the maximum secrets shared.

"Youth appeared to voice the flavour of the changing times in terms of their levels of inter-personal social trust and circles of belonging even while reflecting the 'social environment' that shapes the reality and the times that they live in. In social interactions that they nurture and nourish, Indian youth have pushed traditional boundaries. The youth demonstrate a moderate level of inter-personal trust in those they interact with. The intensity of trust is significantly higher among those who are part of their 'immediate social circle'"

- *Indian Youth in a Transforming World.*

Thirty two (32) per cent of young respondents surveyed, value friendship the most (among all the relationships). A record 67 per cent acknowledge sharing their most personal secrets to their close friends. Out of them, 49 per cent are willing to do whatever they can for their best friends. However, 38 per cent accept that they freely indulge in backbiting of even their best friends if they find their involvement something against their interest. Forty six (46) per cent are ready to leave their best friend if some major differences occur. Accordingly, 19 per cent respondents will not hesitate to hurt the interest of their best friends if they come in the way of their own interest.

In the same way, 'love relationships' have also undergone a watershed change. Now-a-days there are so many 'love relationships' which, by and large, carry the same story. Urban youth crave for having girl-friends/ boy-friends for them. In fact, having girl-friends/ boy-friends has over the years become a fashion or status symbol. Stealing times to be with their partners, having hours long phone chats with them, fighting on trifles, sobs and tears followed by silent hours and once again reconciliation (Sometimes break-ups also) – these eternal sweet-sour moments of love is a common phenomenon. However, the soul seems to be changing fast. Internet and mobile phones have become biggest catalysts of today's love relationship. In the absence of these love of today cannot even be imagined. In her long stay in hostels among young girls the researcher has observed a type of similar interacting pattern among different lovers. There is so much of 'sorry' and 'please', so many terms of endearing and flattering, but the intensity and earnestness is singularly missing. As observed in other cases patience is missing here also. Everything seems to be done in haste. One of the young men interviewed has aptly responded with these words: "Today everything happens fast (*fatfat*). We fall in love fast, we get intimacy fast and we break out of the relationship fast."

Like all other aspects of youth's life, love affairs of today also seem to be a thing of show

and very little substance. There is exchange of expensive gifts, outing to exquisite resorts, feasting in grand restaurants, but still essence of love or whatever it may be seems to be lacking. Whatever may be the nature of these relationships, 'friendship' and 'love' have come to acquire very important place in the life of today's youth and they are likely to stay in prominence for a long time to come. It is because they have practically come out of the situations and needs of today's youth. However, these relationships seem to take a heavy toll on many other intimate relationships such as relationship with parents and that with the siblings. The intense love between the parents and their children or the sense of comradeship among siblings, which we used to find in olden days, now seems to loosening its sway. The worst inferences we come upon suggests that most of the youth are now taking these relationship for granted. However, the blame also goes to the present situation and parents too cannot escape their responsibility.

The busy life of today has made parents change their priority. In keeping with the trend they are running fast to catch the moon, leaving their children without their care and attention. They try to compensate this by spending more and more money on their children and entertaining their all demand. The communication gap between the parents and the children continues, creating different kinds of complications. A record 73 per cent young men do not share their personal/ private matters with their parents. Another 30 per cent of them say that they are afraid of their parents. According to a survey on urban Indian Youth (18-30 years) by the *India Today Group*, aired by the news channel 'Headlines Today' and conducted by AC Neilson in the year 2010 in 18 cities across India showed that 'an overwhelming majority (95 per cent) would not smoke or drink in front of their parents. This does mean that the youngsters do not smoke or drink, it simply shows that Indian youth prefer not to inform parents about what they are doing.....This is more likely to be fear, rather than respect.'

However, a closer scrutiny suggests that now-a-days they are the parents who are more afraid of their children than the children of their parents. Many times the children indulge in the arm twisting and blackmailing tactics to get their things done. A significant 38 per cent youths acknowledge to have yelled or shouted at either of their parents. A sizable 54 per cent say that their parents with the intention of escaping their resentment heed to their viewpoint without much argument. The relationship with siblings shows similar downturn. In today's family a child has only a few siblings. Many times study and job related assignments force them live separately. Naturally, the youths have found friends as easy alternative to the siblings.

The persistent currents of globalisation have brought watershed changes in the values cherished by the Indian youth. This has almost altered the very complexion of the character and role of Indian youth in the context of himself and the society. We appreciate today's youth for his practical and matter of fact approach. This practicality is a direct outcome of the shattering down of the idealists' dream of establishing a utopian world order, most explicitly the down-fall of communism. The youth of today does not dream of changing the world and making it a better place to live in. He is more concerned about the betterment of himself and those close to him. In keeping with the materialistic ethos of profit,

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contemporary youth is focused at getting more money and more convenience. Thus, the values like sharing, service and sacrifice are getting deleted from his dictionary. He is not shy of achieving his aims by any possible means. The Gandhian idealism of 'right means for right end', seems alien to today's youth.

This is not to suggest that the youth of today is devoid of everything that stands for good and ideal. He too yearns for a society more just and humane. He too wishes to be things to be right and in the order. What he does not wish is to establish this at the cost of his own privilege and convenience. Today's youth does not have the guts to wedge a war against rots and ills. Worst he even tends to question the intelligence of those who stand against evils and in turn pay for that. The *chalta hai* ('all is well') attitude has overtaken today's youth. He seems quite at ease with both good and bad. However, this is not the stoic acceptance of life as it is. It is something turning away of one's duties and responsibilities. His bubbling energy and youthful exuberance too seem to lose direction. Something of aimlessness has overtaken modern youth. True he aims. But he fails to aim for something grand and noble. All of his dreams aim and actions are directed towards his own self-gratification and sense gratification. And the biggest sufferers are the fellow human beings in their capacity of social animals.

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