

Title: “Role and Identity Pattern of Youth in India And ASEAN Countries”, by Indira J Parikh, President, FLAME, Wawasan Open University, Penang, Malaysia

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The theme of Role and Identity Pattern of Youth in India and ASEAN Countries addresses those youth born in the last two decades of the last century growing up as adolescents and young adults in this century. They are the generation which is experiencing the benefits and outcomes of several generations who have lived in a world of scarcity and worked extremely hard to create a world where this generation can experience a world of plenty.

Even then, the journey of growth for this generation both in India and ASEAN countries has been arduous but challenging, tough but exciting and uphill but exhilarating. This generation has grown up in a different world than that of their parents and elders. They live in an open world of information and access to state of the art technology, more competition and more demands from them to excel and achieve.

The Youth today has an indomitable spirit to walk the journey of the unknown, paving their paths which in turn make them pioneers. They have the courage to make departures from that which has been there and existed for centuries. They are ever ready to make new beginnings, to learn new knowledge in a uniquely different learning environment.

This address reflects on the dilemmas confronted by young men and women, of growing up, of the purpose and meaning of life and their roles in creating and shaping a new world of tomorrow for themselves, their families and the country. The transition from being a student and entering the open world as responsible adults, the young adults are required to play many roles and being part of multiple systems at the same time. In this process of growth they have to deal with the following codings as well as internalizations:-

1. The cultural heritage of this generation
2. The society of this generation
3. The educational institutions and the education of this generation
4. The family support system and dynamics of this generation
5. The roles and identity of this generation
6. The organizations of this generation
7. The search for purpose and meaning of life for this generation
8. The future for this generation and next

The youth today join an organization with dreams, hopes and aspirations that this environment of learning in work and life will fuel their dreams and help them grow into successful and flourishing entrepreneurs and leaders. The youth looks beyond the given and defined horizons to discover infinite opportunities, to explore the infinity while being realistic and challenging themselves to carve a path of learning for themselves. They propel themselves to work relentlessly, sustain the pace of effort and achieve and excel their desired goals.

The youth today prefers a learning environment that inculcates and fosters a spirit of enquiry, dialogue, interaction and participation to enable them to use the analytical, logical, rational abilities to explore and discover and not accept the givens in blind faith.

The organizations, on their front, try and create an environment where the young meet, live and work with a diverse set of people is part of life. This helps to accept similarities and differences and understand why people behave the way they do. They experience and discover the context from where each one has come from and grown up in. Each one comes from different socio-economic, socio – cultural and educational backgrounds and a very different upbringing from families. Some have travelled far and wide and some of you may not have had that opportunity. However, they live with each other and discover each one has their own stereotypes. They learn to appreciate their strengths and uniqueness. They learn to appreciate the richness of diversity and the plurality of the country and the region. The ergonomics of the workplace, hence, now a days are open offices without any glass doors or cabins so that you learn to share, accommodate, adjust, manage and discover the multi faceted aspects of personalities of different ages, different gender and different thought processes. Here you build life time friends who will walk with you, be with you and understand you. These are friends whom you meet after one year, two years or ten and twenty years and begin relating as if there have been no gaps. Make use of all this time space and people. Do not become or make anyone your echoes and shadows. Discover your own voice, learn to hear your own words and also convey them.

There are a few times when the youth plays a dual role full of contradictions:-

1. They seek role models and live the values given and expected from them but with the freedom to defy.
2. They seek to be treated with respect and as mature adults as well as indulge them as a child.
3. They seek fairness, justice and transparency but at the same time seek personal privileges.
4. They seek affection and love in abundance as well as a healing touch
5. They seek the respect for boundaries and boundlessness.

In essence the youth are exploring the dualities and polarities of life and relationships as a part and process of growing up and at some point of time in life a choice for growth will have to be made.

As the youth leaves the sanctuary of their homes and enter the world of work and formal organizations, they enter a landscape which is unknown and unfamiliar to them. However, it is in this landscape that the destiny is theirs to shape. The first steps are taken to enter a new landscape with dreams, aspirations and hopes. Dreams are anchored as well as floating in the soul just as much love floats in hearts. Both dreams and love beckon the youth to discover the mysteries of the landscape and the magic in your hearts.

What are really dreams? Dreams are always anchored in and beckon to an adventure - adventure to discover and create a new world; a world of people, a home and a family. As dreams are transformed into reality the human life gets caught to seek affirmation and validation from others and being approved and affirmed from our loved ones for what one is

attempting to do. This is when dreams become instruments of power control and possessiveness and in the process make others captives and prisoners of our own dreams. The freedom of choice of others is taken away. Dreams need to be anchored in courage, valour, values, ethics integrity of purpose and meaning and most important to build systems and institutions. Dreams have meaning in life and this meaning is anchored in hope and aspirations. All this is to be more and to expand horizons. Let me speak one more aspect of dream and then of heart and soul.

Dreams respond to challenges and opportunities. It responds to foraging a new path. It responds to fighting a good value based fight which is for what is right and what is wrong. Dreams lead to climb a mountain and or flow with the river and meander through the barriers and difficult terrains. It helps to discover the spirit of life and resilience. However, in the process of transforming dreams into realities if and when one starts using and manipulating people then slowly but surely the dreams start to die. When dreams die something else takes its place is greed, demands of surrender and subservience from others, and to find someone to blame. You then identify an enemy and like Don Quixote fight a battle with windmills viz. people who are under or lesser than you. In that process a person sometimes experience himself as a giant while others as dwarfs. My friends this is a trap and a maze and so be immensely cautious that you do not enter such a terrain. And if you do, catch yourself quickly through a process of self reflection and come out of it quickly.

Let me speak of the heart of the youth. Their heart is anchored in love, affection, caring and sensitivity to themselves and others. This love first has to be towards the self and towards the family, the community, the country and most important their personal family that they will create. The family requires their strength in boundaries, generosity in offerings & commitments, trust in the members of the family and above all security in role relationships and each other. Social roles are many and need to be played as much as they need to be tempered with expressions of the being. This heart then is like a breeze nurturing soothing, healing and bringing peace, harmony and tranquility in relationships and in homes and families.

The youth must also remember that this is very difficult when they do not care enough and only play roles and the expectations of the roles become demands for conformity and surrender of the others beings. Then the heart starts to wither and wilts. In that situation too a search begins to find a villain in the other and then the youth justify their anger, aggression, frustration, and slowly but steadily begin the process of destruction of the other or of oneself. Fights begin which are vindictive, bruising and creators of pain and anguish. The battle that is raging within gets first played outside. It is an immoral fight. It becomes a fight to justify ones victimhood and martyrdom. Eventually, both the dreams and the relationships die with it the soul and the heart wandering away in the wilderness of aloneness and loneliness. The spirit then searches for freedom. Freedom from the angst of ones existence and search for touching ones being.

It is therefore, important for the youth of today to learn about freedom and respect this freedom. This freedom means that youth first experience their inner space and then create space for themselves in the cluttered environment of debris of their limited roles. The ideal

and good son and good daughter role has often made the youth conform and defy and rebel. What is required is that youth find their voice of convictions, values and find courage to live their philosophy of life. A voice which is anchored in the melody of invitations and offerings. Freedom also means that they take an adventure, create a path and be a part of an institution. Institutions and organizations have boundaries structures and frameworks. This is the new world the youth is entering. They need to create, build and shape an institution with time commitment and involvement. They need to bring their dreams and offer their heart and soul to the institutions of belonging both social and work. Eventually they will emerge as leaders who take charge of their destiny and gives shape to the world around.

In this journey of knowledge there are always some gifts they receive – gifts of wisdom and knowledge, gifts of values to live by and the choices that one makes based on these gifts. The life of a youth seems a lot like a lake and its waters. Many a times an individual might have sat for hours dreaming and experiencing many a moments of intense emotions by a lake. He might have experienced evocations and invocations never experienced before. A gentle awakening of the soul might have happened. The lake represents the depths of knowledge and the endless flow of learning. The gift the spirit of the lake gives you is to remain calm in facing the many storms of life that may come and remain tranquil in moments of turbulences of relationships which test the belief and faith in relationships and human existence. The youth needs to learn to carry the soothing gentleness of the transparent and lucid waters as it enters the topsy turvey world of to-day and uncertain world of tomorrow.

Looking at the blue skies of the land one may have gazed at its vastness and boundlessness. One may have aspired and hoped to grow into giants with achievements and accomplishments and hopefully create industrial empires. The spirit of the skies gives the gift of self discipline and beckons to touch the inner potentials and translate them in commitments, involvement and faith in oneself. To achieve, excel, to create, to build and give shape to dreams and make them real.

The hills / mountains always stand tall and majestic. One may have looked at them many a times, admired their solidness. One may have discovered the strength and resilience of standing against injustice and differentiate between what is right and wrong. The spirits of these hills gift the courage of convictions and the determination to make a difference in one's life and the world around. This can only be achieved when one governs oneself with a code of values to live by.

The sunrise and sunsets are seen as a routine thing in life. Sometimes we reflect on the ethereal beauty of the dawn and dusks. The wind that blows evokes the yearnings to experience the magic and the mystery of the moment of life and living. The gift the wind brings is the wisdom of the sages and the heritage of the land of times of yore. It beckons to learn and experience, to experiment, to fathom the unknown, add something of oneself to create something out of nothing.

All these elements come together to etch a life full of glorious moments of learning free, spirit of enquiry, being alive and always with hope to discover one's own magic.

The education has provided the freedom to think, to have a spirit of enquiry, to roam into the world of knowledge and ideas, to be able to visualize, reflect from multiple perspectives and to make a choice. A choice made by the self has no other option but to dignify the choice, add grace to it and pay the price of the choices one makes. I do believe that is the greatest freedom of human beings in encountering dilemmas of human and inter personal living. These dilemmas are ongoing and one is confronted with many, many choices as you live and experience your life.

A human life undergoes many experiences in the journey of life at every age and stage - experience of joys and sorrows, births and losses, exuberance and turmoil, stillness and storms, solitude and friendship, silences and noises and experience living in its fullness which shape the contours of life and relationships. One needs to add character, substance and wholesomeness to all of these. There are moments of being overwhelmed and search for a respite, a pause, a place, a space and a person to share some basic questions of life 'who am I' and 'the purpose and meaning of life'. In such moments of struggles and experiences, it becomes important to revisit the choices made, learn from them and then take a step to mould and shape your future.

The youth today needs to expand the horizons of life and visualize what could be and make it so. It needs to respond to life with the spirit of a complete being and be leaders of men and chiefs of communities, to grow into tall men and women with substance and values where by commitments and actions they evolve and grow into loved family members, respected citizens of the community, the country and the world.

Each nation will have and will create wealth. Wealth needs to be tempered with generosity and charity. Each nation has the power. Pulls of power needs to be tempered with sensitivity and humility. Each nation will have status. Pulls of status needs to be tempered with values of alliances and allies. Each nation will have resources and knowledge where knowledge will need to be tempered with emotions and feelings of self acceptance and self - worth. The interplay of all these, wealth, power, status and knowledge cannot breed contempt and arrogance but needs to be tempered with the pathos and ethos of human existence.

Let the adventure of life begin with a story –

“Once upon a time there was an island.....”