

## **Social Problems among the Adolescents of Manipur: Role of Parents and Teachers**

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Adolescents constitute more than one-fifth of the world's population. India is home to more than 22.5 crore adolescents, the largest ever cohort of young people to make a transition to adulthood. Available evidence suggests that they are also often viewed as a vulnerable group of people with problems, disturbances and rebellion. Therefore, addressing the main problems faced by this segment of the population and improving the quality of life of the adolescents is imperative. The paper discusses the major problems faced by the adolescents in the Indian state of Manipur. The study attempts to highlight three prominent social problems viz., alcoholism, drug abuse and insurgency faced by the adolescents of Manipur and also discusses the role of parents and teachers in addressing these problems. I argue that the main problems facing the state of Manipur can be addressed to a significant extent by attending to the needs of the adolescent population of the state.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Manipur, Social Problems, Alcoholism, Drug Abuse, Insurgency.

Social problems can be defined as the situations and aberrant behaviours which is undesirable by the members of the society. According to Reinhardt, "a social problem is a situation confronting a group or a section of society which inflicts injurious consequences that can be handled only collectively" (quoted by Ahuja, 1997:1). Merton and Nisbet (1971: 184) maintain that a social problem is a way of behaviour that is regarded by a substantial part of a social order as being in violation of one or more generally accepted or approved norms. Social problem like alcoholism may negatively impact a person's life and health, along with the well-being of that person's family and relatives. In order to become an accepted and effective member of a society, the child needs to learn the norms and values of group existence. However, there have always been some individuals especially the adolescents who flouted the patterns of permitted behaviour.

Before discussing the issues concerning adolescents, it is important to know about this age group. Adolescence literally means "to emerge" or "achieve identity". It is used

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to capture the phase of life characterised by rapid physical growth and development, social and psychological changes and maturity, sexual maturity, experimentation and development of mental processes and signifies the period of psychological transition. According to a report of the Planning Commission on adolescents for the Tenth Five Year Plan, there is no universally accepted definition of the term. This could be the reason why different policies and programmes have used different age group to identify the adolescent group. For example, the draft youth policy formulated by the Government of India defined adolescents as those aged between 13-19 years. Under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) the adolescent girls are those between 11-18 years. On the other hand, Reproductive and Child Health programme defines adolescents as those aged between 10-19 years. However, the generally accepted definition is the one proposed by most of the UN agencies such as World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Population Fund, formerly United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), which consider those aged between 10-19 years under the adolescent category (UNFPA: 2003). Keeping in view of the characteristics of this age group, it is widely felt and recommended that it would be most appropriate to consider adolescents as between 10-19 years of age.

India, one of the largest and most populated countries in the world, with over one billion inhabitants is home to more than 225 million (22.5 crore) adolescents, the largest ever cohort of young people to make a transition to adulthood (Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, 2007). Of the total adolescent population, 54 percent belongs to 10-14 age groups and nearly 46 percent are in the 15-19 age groups. They are often viewed as a vulnerable group of people with problems, disturbances and rebellion. However, one need to understand that adolescents are also entitled to enjoy all basic human rights – social, education, economic, political and cultural. Hence, by addressing their needs we are contributing to the socio-economic development, social harmony and improving the quality of life of our people. In this paper, the focus is on the crisis ridden society of Manipur and argues that the main problem facing the state of Manipur can be addressed to a significant extent by attending to the needs of the adolescent population of the state.

### **Manipur**

Manipur is one of the North Eastern states of the country, having an area of 22, 327 sq. kms. As per the Census of 2011, the total population of Manipur is 27.2 lakhs of which around 16.5 lakhs are males and 13.5 lakhs are females. Between 2001 and 2011, the population of the state has grown at a rate of 18.65 percent. According to the 2001 census, adolescents form about 22 percent of the total population of Manipur.

Manipur is known all over the world for its achievement in sports as well as dance, martial arts, etc. Many youths of the state have achieved excellence in their chosen fields. On the other hand, the state has been home to sustained violence for more than three decades. It has failed in providing even basic facilities such as water, electricity and security to the people. Moreover, there is lack of opportunities as there are hardly any industries and factories and people are relying only on government jobs. In such a scenario, adolescents are pushed and at times they themselves willingly join the insurgent groups by dropping out from schools. A large number of them are also addicted to alco-

hol, tobacco and drugs. Recent evidence also shows that many of the adolescents who had taken drugs are also infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). The state also has other social problems such as poverty, unemployment, population explosion, ethnic conflict, exclusivist politics, youth unrest, violence, corruption, gender issues, etc. In the following section, some of the prominent issues that are affecting the growth and well-being of the adolescent population in the state are examined.

### **Alcoholism**

Alcohol abuse is a major cause of concern for India. Research findings show that the number of alcohol users in the country is on the rise and the number of persons requiring help is quite large ([www.sommelierindia.com](http://www.sommelierindia.com)). Available evidence reveals that about 19.8 percent of the total population of Manipur consumes alcohol (Saxena, et al. 2003: 41), which is one of the most commonly used substances in Manipur. Alcohol addiction is widespread in both urban and rural areas of Manipur even though manufacturing and sale of liquor is banned in the state since 1991. Interestingly, the prohibition of alcohol is found to be less successful in reducing the consumption of alcohol in the state, and all forms of alcohol viz, country made liquors (*atingba, asaba*) and foreign made liquors are available in the state. It is observed that the consumption of liquor generally begin around the age of 15. This is the age when students appeared matriculation examination and once they failed many of them dropped out from the school. Especially the boys start loitering around here and there and begin alcohol consumption, at first just for fun and pleasure. There seem to be ample reasons behind taking alcohol like rejection of his proposal by a girl or inability of parents to satisfy his demand or failure of parents to send him to a school of his choice and many others. Initially, they tend to hide from the parents about their drinking habits even though their breath smells. It is observed that those who belong to younger age group especially adolescents mainly consume the locally made liquor known as *yu*, which is cheaper and available in most of the localities. As mentioned before, there exists limited income earning opportunities for these drop-outs, which possibly explain the rising alcoholism among the adolescents in the state. Moreover, in many places where Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes of Manipur are inhabited, alcohol is customarily included in all the social functions, such as ceremonies related to birth, marriage, death, etc. Some of the Scheduled Caste villages viz. Sekmai, Andro, Phayeng are very popular for their local brews. In fact, it is so embedded in their custom that the owner of the house where the ceremony is being held has to stock alcohol for any function, which will be served to the male visitors during the ceremony. As it is customary, taking alcohol is not considered as bad or harmful by many communities. In fact, taking a small peg is considered not only healthy but also manly.

As the consumption of alcohol became so widespread, women in Manipur mobilised themselves into what is popularly known as the *nisha bandh movement* or night patrol-lers in 1975. It was a movement against the sale and consumption of intoxicants especially liquor. Under this movement, groups of thirty to fifty women patrolled the streets after dusk and were on alert for inebriated youth and men returning home after an evening at the wine shop (Jain 1980: 221). The main objective of night patrolling by women is to prohibit manufacturing, selling and drinking of alcohol. Each household in the locality

was supposed to be part of this movement by contributing a female member to this movement. Subtle strictures are passed against a family, which does not contribute a female member to the organisation. However, the movement lost its relevance after the declaration of Manipur as a dry state by the state government in 1991, and later transformed into a more popular movement called *meira paibi movement* (women torch bearers). Despite these changes, there is hardly any visible decline in the consumption of liquor in the state.

### **Drug Abuse**

In the psychological and sociological contexts, drug is a term for habit forming substance which directly affects the brain or nervous system. More precisely, it refers to “any chemical substance which affects bodily function, mood, perception, or consciousness which has potential for misuse, and which may be harmful to the individual or the society” (Jullian 1977, as quoted by Ahuja 2004: 387). The frequent use of drug is considered so dangerous and sometimes even immoral, risky and anti-social. Drug abuse is the use of illicit drug or misuse of legitimate drug resulting into physical or psychological harm. Drugs under international control include amphetamine-type stimulants, cannabis, coca/cocaine, hallucinogens, opiates and hypnotic sedatives, all of which have immediate physical effects. Drugs can severely hinder psychological and emotional development, particularly in young people.

Manipur borders Myanmar (Burma), one of the world’s largest producers of illicit opium. During 1970-1980, drugs such as morphine, heroin or No. 4, poldrom, mandrake, hypogen, etc. were widely available and consumed in Manipur. These drugs were available in cheap rates during this period and led to its extensive consumption. The use of drugs was found popular among the youths as it was considered as fashionable and initially drug was used by the sons of the rich family, mostly belonging to urban areas. However it slowly spread as wildfire to youths belonging to common populace. Early 1980s witnessed a large number of drug users being diagnosed with HIV. In 1990, it was estimated that there were 15,000 to 20,000 injecting drug users (IDUs) in Manipur. In 2001, Imphal alone accounted for 14,000 IDUs, of which 5-10 percent is estimated to be women (Irene, 2007). Another estimate in 2009 by the Social Awareness and Service Organisation (SASO), a local NGO, shows that there are 34,500 IDUs in Manipur, almost half of them are living in Imphal. It is also mentioned that IDUs are critical to the spread of HIV/AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). The risky habit of sharing needles and other injecting paraphernalia has been acknowledged as the most efficient, fastest and convincing way of transmitting HIV/AIDS (Irene, 2007). As a result, Manipur has become one of the six high-HIV prevalence states in the country. Findings of a Rapid Situation Assessment of Drug use done under the auspices of United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP) and Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE) show that out of 308 drug users from Imphal East and Imphal West districts, which is about 62 percent, started using drugs in the age group of 15-19 years, 21 percent in the age group of 20-24 years, 12 percent under 15 years (Ahanthem, 2007). It means that a large number of people started consuming drugs when they were in the adolescence stage. Increasing cases of infections have been observed among people that

had previously been seen as 'low-risk', such as housewives and children. Recent estimates suggest that Manipur with hardly 0.2 percent of India's population contributes nearly 11.4 percent of India's total HIV positive cases (Singh, 2007).

The pattern of drug abuse changed by early 1990s with the arrival of pharmaceutical products such as phenshydyl, corex, parvon spas, spasmo proxyvon (SP), diazepam, valium and nitrosun 10 (N10). Using dendrite and correction fluids like erax-ex by beginner abusers are also widespread. These are cheaply available and school going teenagers commonly used these products. Peer pressure, weak parental control, imitation, emotional stress, lack of discussion on sex, the easy availability of the drugs and the ineffectiveness of the laws on drug trafficking are reasons for young people depending on these substances. Slowly, drug users resorted to crimes to finance their drug requirements. Stealing from family, friends, neighbours and locality became regular features. Street crimes, fights and cases of overdose and deaths are reported often. Of course, there are many unreported cases also. There were even cases of innocent children being kidnapped for ransom to fund their financial needs for drugs.

Young people take drugs or abuse substances for many reasons. The degrading and all round system failure affecting every aspect of the society arising out of misgovernance, corruption, lack of opportunity for progress aggravates this menace in Manipur. May be they do so in order to cope with the frustration in life due to poverty, unemployment, broken family, unrest of mind and for self-amusement or for satisfying company of friends. Many youths also indulge in unwanted activities to gain acceptance and popularity among the peers. The question that arises is, since it would be impractical to expect them to dissociate from their peers, how they can be protected from being negatively influenced?

### **Insurgency**

The words terrorism, insurgency, civil war, and extremism are most often used very loosely; however, common in all these terms is violence. The difference between terrorism and insurgency is that an insurgent has the support of large section of the local population while terrorism need not have such support. Insurgency has by now become a part of life of people living in North East India. With three major ethnic groups in Manipur, its insurgency is also primarily divided among the insurgent groups from three major communities namely, Meitei, Naga and Kuki.

Presently, in Manipur, there are more than 30 insurgent groups. Frequently one can hear the formation of a new outfit, usually carving out from the parent organisation. Insurgencies in Manipur started in early 1970s with an ideology of an independent Manipur, which the people feel was integrated in India after the end of the British rule without the consent of the people. The reasons for the emergence of insurgency in the state are the yearning to maintain the distinctive history and culture of the people of the state, lack of integration of the region culturally, socially and economically with the mainland India, economic backwardness leading to rampant unemployment, widespread poverty etc.

In Manipur, the valley-based outfits like United National Liberation Front (UNLF), People Liberation Army (PLA), Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), People Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) have remained active and the operations by the

Indian Army and Manipur Police have made little difference to their capabilities. In the hills, some of the insurgent groups which are actively functioning are National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM or NSCN-K), Kuki National Front (KNF) and Kuki National Army (KNA). The Naga insurgents of Manipur support the demand of sovereign "Nagalim" (Greater Nagaland) while the Kukis support the demand for the formation of separate Kukiland. Adding more woes to the State, the Naga insurgents, especially the NSCN-K, NSCN-IM operating from Nagaland and the hills districts of Manipur have been controlling the two National Highways - NH-39 and NH-53, which are economic lifelines for the state, imposing taxes on the use of the roads and subsequent punishment on those who are reluctant to pay.

Manipur had been declared as a 'disturbed area' in 1980 and the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) 1958 was imposed in the State, which continues to be in place till now. Yet, even today, bans, blockades, bomb blasts are common phenomena one could notice in the state. The cases of threats, demands for extortion and even kidnapping and killing for ransom are widespread occurrences. Insurgents have resorted to extorting from almost all government employees, contractors, businessmen and including places of worship, educational institutions, health centres and commercial establishments. Due to the problem of militancy, the money meant for infrastructural development has been divested in countering the insurgent groups. The worrying sign is many adolescents especially the school dropouts are ready recruits of the militant outfits as it brings them quick money.

The incidents of death of youths especially boys related to insurgent groups has been reported almost every day in the local media. Such incidents obviously lead to insecurity and fear in the minds of the people. This has led to the closure of quite a few business centres and some individuals have also shifted their operation to outside the state. Between 1992 and 2010, at least 5665 people were killed in insurgency related incidents in Manipur. However, the number of fatalities is showing a decreasing trend. In 2008, there were 485 insurgency-related fatalities which decreased to 416 in 2009 and in 2010, and it fell down to 138 ([cdpsindia.org/manipur\\_insurgency.aspx](http://cdpsindia.org/manipur_insurgency.aspx)).

Another serious problem created by the militants is the kidnapping of childrens to train them to become members of insurgent outfits. The numbers of child soldiers are also on the increase. Studies reported that there are child soldiers in every insurgent group in Manipur, including, children under 15 years of age. It is estimated that the number of child soldiers is between 6,000 and 7,500, which is equivalent to around 50 percent of the total group membership of these organisations. It is further claimed that the recent trend is to induct more and more girls into insurgency movement in order to avoid suspicion. The number of girl soldiers is said to be between 900 and 1,000 (Barnen, 2000).

### **Role of the Community and Parents**

Around two decades back, the role of community was very strong in the state especially in the rural areas. The community members used to know which child is doing what. If a teenager of the community goes astray by way of consuming alcohol or smoking cigarette or involved with ill-disciplined people, the elder of the community used to give advice,

talk to the person and informed the parents about his/her behaviour. That way the elders had some kind of control over the children and try to streamline their behaviour in socially acceptable ways. In some communities of Manipur, consumption of alcohol, eating pan and tobacco products are customary but not taking drugs and joining insurgency groups which are of recent phenomena. As formal education got expanded in the state only after Manipur's integration with the Indian union in 1949, evidently many of the adolescents who are presently studying in the schools and colleges belong to the first or second generation learners. Hence, many children in state grew up in an environment where there is lack of positive role models in the family. With the advancement of new technology, there was sudden exposure to various forms of mass media such as television and internet thereby the interaction and conversations between parents/community members with their children have been suddenly reduced.

Moreover, these days, parents especially in the urban areas are so busy in their own respective career that they are not even aware their children's friend circle. However, parents have to be very careful in bringing up their growing children, they should know where their children are going, whom they are meeting, what types of habits they are inculcating and try to give proper advice and direction and channelise their energies in socially productive activities. It is critical for parents to be part of the growing life of their children and ascertain a close interpersonal relationship with them and established a friendly yet disciplined communication with them. They should know the crucial needs of their adolescent children and respect their views. One of the many ways adolescents may remain uninfluenced by unwanted behaviour may be by enhancing and strengthening their self worth and self control. Recreational centres should be provided as the social life without recreational activities also leads young people to indulge in unwanted behaviour.

### **Role of the Teacher**

The role of teacher is very sensitive and crucial. Teachers are role models to students and often they try to imitate the teachers. At times students may share to teachers certain things which they do not even share with parents. However, teachers are trained to teach about their respective subject. There are no separate textbooks on adolescence education in Manipur but adolescent related issues are integrated in other textbooks such as health and physical education, socially useful productive work (SUPW), etc. Teachers should understand the emotions and needs of the adolescents and handle it with care so that they meet the challenges of life with competence and confidence. Teacher should build up a positive school ambience and promote open communication for imparting adolescent related problems. However, it is easier to say than done. It is a very challenging task for the teachers as they have to be resourceful for handling sensitive topic with ease and care such as the topic on rape or sex, drugs, insurgency, suicide, etc. since he/she has to provide the right information and advice. Topics related to socio- emotional problems as part of adolescence education must be taught in the same spirit as any other usual subject like physics, chemistry, history etc. Somehow, socio-emotional and psychological problems are considered not to be vital and hardly anyone including parents, teachers and students do not give importance. Lastly, guidance and counselling centre is a must in all

the educational centres and teachers need to be trained in these areas. Teacher must see that children are better behaved, respect the law of the land, value others, engage in useful activities and act in a socially desirable manner which is very much lacking in the present scenario.

### **Conclusion**

Adolescents have huge potential to bring about a change in the society since they are vibrant, enthusiastic, resilient with full of energy and filled with curiosity and creativity. They need proper guidance from parents, community members and teachers. In the absence of any well informed advice from elders to help them understand and appreciate the problems and issues they turn towards their peer group. On the one hand, socio-economic problems, political chaos in the state and loosening of the social control of community members over adolescents and on the other hand adolescents' attraction to fun and pleasure and easy life without working hard has worsen the situation in the state. Often, they imitate others by taking drugs, alcohol and joining insurgent groups without thinking of the consequences. Elders need to understand the need and desire of the adolescents and help them resist from taking harmful things or involving in unwanted activities. Though, normally, the problems of alcoholism, drug abuse and insurgency are considered as an individual problem, however as the number of adolescents indulging in such unwanted behaviour has increased tremendously in Manipur over the years, it no longer remain as an isolated individual concern but there is possibility that the problem is rooted in society. Hence, in order to reduce the prevailing menace in the state, it is imperative to look at the functioning of our social institutions and find out the reasons that are pushing youths in the wrong direction. It is important to understand the needs of the adolescents and subsequently change can be brought by collective action of the community members, parents, teachers and the state. The media also can play a very effective role in tackling these problems as the adolescents are embodiments of hope and energy on which depends the future of a society and a nation.

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