POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: A NEED OF THE HOUR

Gitamani Deka
Assistant Professor,
Department of Education,
Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Nagaon

Abstract: *Positive youth development is a deliberate approach for the development of youth of the society in relation to their interest, skills and abilities. The approach considers youth as a resource of the society. The emergence of positive youth developments is based on ideals of engaging the youth of the society in productive activities. It believes the child or individual as the full partner of the community. The approach originated from ecological systems theory to focus on the strengths of adolescence. It is both a philosophy and policy perspective which highlighted on providing services and opportunities to hold all young people in developing a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment. Youth of a nation is considered as the resources of the upcoming future through whom the destiny of a nation can be shaped. Therefore, their positive development is very much essential from both individual and social point of view. The emphasis on making the youth of the society as resources, their positive development becomes an asset of the present hour.*

In the present paper an attempt has been made to study the philosophical and psychological perspectives of positive youth development. The study also looks forward to analyze the role of education in bringing the positive youth development. Descriptive method has been applied in conducting the study. The study is mainly based on the secondary sources of data. From its findings, the study reveals that positive youth development is very much essential to build a nation with competent, skilled and empowered individual and full of human resources.

Key Words: Development, Positive, Youth

I.   Introduction

Each and every child born in the society has talents, strengths and interests that offer the child potential for a bright future. The positive youth development is an approach which emphasizes the youth as the resources of the society and not the problems. The approach aims at understanding, educating and engaging children in productive activities rather than at correcting,

curing, or treating them for maladaptive tendencies or so-called disabilities. It is an area which emphasizes the manifest potentialities rather than the supposed incapacities of young people- including young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and those with the most troubled histories. The approach is consciously holistic, considering the whole community in relation to the whole child rather than privileging any particular interaction or capacity (Damon & Gregory, 2003). It looks, the child as the full partner of the community, bearing a full share of rights and responsibilities. Positive youth development approach begins with a vision of a fully able child eager to explore the world, gain competence and acquire the capacity to contribute notably to the world.

Peter Lorimer Benson pioneered the developmental assets framework, which became the predominant approach to research on positive aspects of youth development and in his works the following two assets are considered to be critical for youth empowerment-

- **Youth as resources:** Young people are given useful roles in the community
- **Service to others:** Young people serve in the community one hour or more per week

Positive Youth Development is both a philosophy and policy perspective which emphasizes on providing services and opportunities to support all young people so that the youth of the society can develop a sense of a competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment in their life. This approach works best when entire communities including young people are involved in creating a variety of services and opportunities that youth need to grow into happy and healthy adults. It refers to an intentional effort of adults, communities, government agencies and schools to provide opportunities for youth to boost their interests, skills and abilities. It is used in scientific literature and by practitioners who work with youth to refer to programs designed to optimize developmental progress. It originated from *ecological systems theory* developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner to focus on the strengths of adolescence. The theory of Positive Youth Development suggests that if young people have mutually beneficial associations with the people and institutions of their community at large, they will be on the way to a hopeful future, which is marked by positive contributions to self, family, community and civil society. The major vehicle for the development of Positive Youth Development came against the *"traditional youth development"* approach. In the traditional approach there is a connection between the changes happening during adolescent years and either the beginning or reaching of

several important public health and social problems, including homicide, suicide, substance use and abuse, sexually transmitted infections and teen and unplanned pregnancies. The positive youth development approaches centered on the active promotion of finest human development. It is a vision, an ideology and a new vocabulary for engaging with youth development. Its vision can be structured into the 5 C's and they are as *Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring* and when these 5 C's are present, the 6th C of "Contribution" is recognized (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem & Ferber, 2002).

The University of Minnesota's Keys to Quality Youth emphasized eight elements of positive youth development programs, like physically and emotionally safe, give youth a sense of belonging and ownership and foster their self-worth, allow them to discover their 'self' (identity, interests, strengths), foster high quality and supportive relations with peers and adults, help youth recognize conflicting values and develop their own, foster the development of new skills, have fun, and have hope for the future. Besides, these eights elements, there are other elements too like, promote bonding, cultivate resilience, endorse social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and moral competence, encourage self-determination, foster spirituality, foster self-efficacy, foster clear and positive identity, foster belief in the future, endow with recognition for positive behavior and opportunities for pro-social involvement and foster pro-social norms. In this sense, the approach is holistic in nature, as the approach very much coincides with achieving the individuals' development as a pathway for reaching or fulfilling the community goals.

1.1. Need and Significance of the Study

The positive development of the youths of the society is essential as its boon and bane influenced the overall aspects of a Nation. The development and enrichment of the Nation can be looked as positive, once its youth are well developed. For this, an approach or suitable means are needed to shape the youths of Nation positively. The development of the youth with the development of three basic domains of individuals' life, such as Cognitive (Head), Affective (Heart) and Psychomotor (Hand) stated by Blooms be able to realized, when we are able to comprehend the positive youth development approach. Positive youth development focuses on the optimal human development and it directly and indirectly influences the overall development of a Nation. Therefore, it becomes necessary to study its philosophical viewpoint as well as psychological outlook to utilize this approach to achieve the youth development and in its long

run to reach the goals of community at large. With this prominence the present study has been considered as significant one.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Positive Youth Development is merged with holistic vision. It pays attention to all aspects of development of the individuals, such as physical, cognitive, social, emotional and moral development. The finest developments of all these aspects of individuals are possible only when, the individual gets the opportunity and competencies to develop the same. It is a very recent concept. In the present era, the approach is very much acceptable as it implied for the development of the future generation.

The present study has been entitled as *"Positive Youth Development: A Need of the Hour"*.

1.3. Operational Definition of the Terms used

Positive: The term is used to mean the desirable quality of an individual full of hope and confidence.

Youth: The term is used to mean the period of transition from childhood to adulthood.

Development: The term is used to mean the process of developing or being developed.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were as follows-

(i) To study the positive youth development as a philosophy of youth development programme.

(ii) To study the psychological perspectives of positive youth development.

(iii) To study the role of education in positive youth development.

II.   Method and Procedure of the Study

Descriptive method has been applied in the present study. Secondary sources of data were used by the investigator. The investigator reviewed various books, journals and website sources to describe the philosophical and psychological perspectives of positive youth development and analyzed how education played a comprehensive role in this respect. To make the study endorsed, some reviews were incorporated in the study and according to the objectives of the study a thorough discussions were made.

III.   Result and Discussions

Positive Youth Development (PYD) move towards the development of the youth of the society positively. The term 'Youth' is a period of human life merged with rapid changes and complexity of the environment. It is the period of transition to adulthood and it is challenging for them. These often influence the life of the youths and several things happens in their life, such as, they become drug abused, they become criminals and as a whole they become a juvenile delinquent and some kind of risk often arise in their life. All these treated the youth as the individual assembled with blizzard and strained. But, from the point of view of the approach of positive youth development, youth are the resources of the society. Therefore, their development should be planned and accomplished by advocating their interest, strength, abilities and potentialities in the area of concerned. The approach is new one in the field of youth development. It has a strong philosophical and psychological foundation. Education plays a vital role in this regards.

3.1. Positive Youth Development as a Philosophy of Youth Development Programmes

The origins of youth development programs started in 1900's in the United States. The appearance of 4-H (Head, Heart, Hand and Health) marked the beginnings of organized efforts in the U.S. to engage youth in non-formal educational activities that contribute to their communities while enhancing the development of individual life skills.

Positive youth development is a philosophy or approach that guides communities in the way to organize programs and supports so that young people can develop to their full potential. There are some key principles of it and they are as follows-

- Positive Outcomes
- Youth Voice
- Strategies Aim to involve All Youth
- Long Term Involvement
- Community Involvement
- Focus On Collaboration

Hamilton's (1999) defined positive youth development as a philosophy or approach to youth programming. There are numerous excellent examples of this facet of Positive Youth

Development and the most outstanding and powerful one being the Eccles and Gootman (2002) National Academy of Sciences which report on community programs to promote youth development. The report discusses the design, implementation, and evaluation of community programs for youth and conceptualizes PYD in regard to the skills, knowledge and other personal and social assets required to successfully transition from healthy adolescence into competent adulthood. Eccles and Gootman (2002) defined four domains of individual assets that represent health and well-being in adolescence, they are as follows—

- Physical development
- Intellectual development
- Psychological and Emotional development
- Social development.

According to them Youth should access to milieu that ease their development through exposure to positive experiences, settings and people and to contexts that provide opportunities to develop and refine real-life skills. Therefore, it is essential for the community to have an array of programs for youth that taken together, offer all features of positive developmental settings. Their framework, as it defined positive youth development programs as those that promote or foster at least five of fifteen outcomes in youth, such as Bonding, Resilience, Social Competence, Emotional Competence, Cognitive Competence, Behavioral Competence, Moral Competence, Self-determination, Spirituality, Self-efficacy, Clear and positive identity, Belief in the future, Recognition for positive behavior, Opportunities for pro-social involvement and Pro-social norms.

In a study sponsored by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2002), eight interrelated features were identified as essential to the quality and effectiveness of youth development programming and they are, Physical and psychological safety, Appropriate structure, Positive social norms, Youth efficacy and mattering, Supportive Relationship, Opportunities to belong, Opportunities for skill building and Integration of family, school and community.

In 2003, Roth and Brooks-Gunn investigated community-based programs to understand what exactly is meant by the term "youth development program" and they identified the three critical characteristics that programs should have. They are Specific program activities,

Atmosphere and Goals. These three defining aspects of youth development programs differentiate them from other programs for adolescents. The goals of youth development programs go beyond prevention to include promotion of positive development and it is characterized by an atmosphere of hope, caring, safety, cultural appropriateness and respect of adolescents' abilities to make choices and bear responsibility. The Program activities provide opportunities for active involvement and meeting new challenges.

In 2003, Blum identified four elements critical to successful youth interventions, they are People (build strong adult–youth relationships), Contributions (active involvement of youth in giving back to family, school and community), Activities (productive and recreational opportunities for youth), and Place (a safe environment free from drugs and violence with adult supervision).

Lerner (2004) on the basis of the work of both Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) and Blum (2003), as well as others (e.g., Rhodes, 2002), argued that there are three fundamental characteristics of effective Positive Youth Development programs. These "Big Three" characteristics are:

- Positive and sustained adult–youth relations (relations between a young person and an adult who is competent, caring and continually available for at least a year, such as a mentor, coach, or teacher)

- Life-skill building activities (e.g., enhancing skills pertinent to the selection, optimization and compensation skills)

- Opportunities for youth participation in and leadership of valued family, school and community activities.

Heck and Subramaniam (2009) described five other youth development program philosophies, or development frameworks, which they defined as a conceptualization that "helps give direction and purpose to a program". The five frameworks that they discuss are:

- Targeting Life Skills: It details the life skills summarized by 4-H's Heart, Hands, Head and Health.

- Developmental Assets (as conceptualized by Search Institute; e.g., Benson, Scales, Hamilton & Semsa, 2006; Benson et al., 2011): These assets are grouped into four categories, such as, Commitment to learning, Positive values, Social competencies and

Positive identity. These individual assets represent the talents, energies, strengths, constructive interests and "sparks" that every young person possesses.

- The Four Essential Elements of Youth Development: These are Belonging, Mastery, Generosity and Independence and were originally proposed as the "Circle of Courage" (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990).

- The Community Action Framework for Youth Development

- The Five Cs: They are Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Contribution (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem & Ferber, 2002).

3.2. Psychological perspectives of Positive Youth Development

The psychological cohesion is understood as a corresponding set of values that adds to one's moral character, such as humility, integrity and vitality. Purpose or goals helps advance the psychological feature of an adolescent's life by acting as the "bond" that unifies these moral characteristics. An individual with strong psychological solidity has character traits, morals and values that all flow together positively because of having a recognized purpose in life.

In the life of the youth, motivation plays an important role. According to Maslow, the people are born with innate needs that they strive to safety. This strive is for self-actualization. The hierarchy of growth and deficiency needs range from primitive physiological requirements to complex needs. For the fulfillment of these needs, positive youth development programmes became an essential requirement. For positive development to occur, the motivational system must become activated and remain engaged in multiple domains of development, while young people deal with everyday real-life challenges. Larson (2000) describes a young person's *initiative* as both a key component of Positive Youth Development and as well as an important crucial point for youth development programs seeking to promote Positive Youth Development.

In positive youth development, developments of positive emotions among the youngs are also important one. To be a subjective well-being, one should have hope, self-efficacy, love, resilience, etc.

The approach of positive youth development recognized the youth as the resource of the society. But, some of the psychologists of the world like Stanley Hall remark that, the

adolescence period is the period of Storm and Stress. There is no doubt that due to the physical changes occurred in their life make the youth puzzled. But, proper care, proper guidance and programme initiating their interest, strength, capacities, potentialities and abilities will provoke their positive development and as a result they become the resource of the community.

3.3. Role of Education in Positive Youth Development

Education is one of the key instruments in implementing positive youth development approach in real mode. It is an approach basically deals with considering the youth as the resource of the society. For this, education should be executed in such a way that they are enabled to deal with the environments as of their capacity and therefore, their learning should be-

- Productive
- Connected with others
- Navigate multiple environments and contexts.

And to correlate the learning with the above, in educational settings diversified courses should be included, such as, Environmental Education, Vocational and Technical Education and Life Skill Education including education for learning of various skills, viz., Problem-Solving Skills, Communication Skills, Conflict Resolution Skills, Skills for Subjective-well being, Skills for Pro-social behaviors, Social Skills, Skills for Efficiency Development, etc.

There are various agencies of Education, such as Family, Community, Peer Group and School. The positive youth development as a holistic approach can be put into practice by making these agencies more active in its pedagogy. In shaping the youth of the society as a resourceful adult some provisions should be made in all the agencies to engage the youth in community services, giving physical and psychological safety to them, opportunities to belong, supportive relationships, support for efficacy, opportunities for skill buildings, development of positive social norms, etc. The expansions of the entire aspects are essentials in the alterations of Youth to Adult with self-sufficiency, good family relationships and valuable social behavior and community contributions.

According to the National Centre for School Engagement, in positive youth development, school plays a very comprehensive role. The school should be acquainted with the positive

behaviour of the youths and they should have numerous opportunities and alternatives in their educational prospect and must maintain and develop positive relationships with the adults and peers within and outside their school. For positive involvement of the youths in the youth work, there should be student advisory boards, student representation throughout the policy making and student-run disciplinary committees in the educational institutions.

IV.   Findings of the Study

After studying the positive youth development as the need of the time or hour the following findings were observed-

a. Positive Youth Development is a philosophy. It emphasizes on giving services and opportunities to support all young people to develop a sense of a competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment.

b. It looks for development of the whole individual, i.e. physical, intellectual, emotional, social, etc.

c. The positive youth development approach denotes Positive Outcomes, Youth Voice, Strategies aim to involve all Youth, Long term Involvement, Community involvement and Focus on Collaboration.

d. The approach highlighted on developing Union, Resilience, Social competence, Emotional competence, Cognitive competence, Behavioral competence, Moral competence, Self-determination, Spirituality, Self-efficacy, Clear and positive identity, Belief in the future, Recognition for positive behavior, Opportunities for pro-social involvement and Pro-social norms among the youth.

e. Motivation towards achieving life's goals influenced the positive youth development programme.

f. Life Skills Education is important for making the positive youth development as means of holistic education.

g. The society should allow the youths to involve in the works which they want to do and which one suited with their abilities and capacities and only then they become empowered and feel competent.

V. Summary and Conclusion

Youth are the forthcoming adult of a nation. Their positive development and means and ways adapting for it should enlarge in such a way that they are able to control their problematic situations and adapt positively according to their interest, needs and abilities. If, we are unable to cope-up them with the changing environment and community goals, the structural skeleton of our nation will be destroyed. The present era is very much influenced by the explosion of knowledge, explosion of population and as well as explosion of science and technology. The means for gathering knowledge are available, but it only becomes fruitful when it is used positively and for this we need to build-up a society with constructive environment, so that we can produce or prepare the youth as Human Resource.

REFERENCES

C. R. Snyder & S. J. Loper, *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology.* Oxford University Press, New York, 2009.

G. Vanette, "The Circle of Courage and Meeting the Needs of Youth Abridged Version", 4-H Youth Development Specialist, Iowa State University Extension, 2007 in *Reclaiming Youth at Risk,* L. K. Brendtro, M. Brokenleg, and S. V. Bockern, Solution Tree, 1990. Available: https://www.extension.iastate.edu/sites/www.extension.iastate.edu/files/scott/CircleOfCourageMeetingNeeds.pdf (2016.02.15)

J. Dotterweich, *Positive Youth Development Resource Manual*, Cornell University, Family Life Development Center – Beebe Hall Ithaca, NY, 2006. Available: https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/21946, (2016.03.12)

J. E. Rhodes, *Stand by me: The Risks and Rewards of Mentoring Today's Youth*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2002.

J. S. Eccles & J. A. Gootman, *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development: Committee on Community-level Programs for Youth*, National Academy Press, Washington, DC, 2002. Available: *http://www.nap.edu.* (2016.02.22)

K. E. Heck & A. Subramaniam, "Youth development frameworks", 4-H Center for Youth Development, University of California, Davis, CA, 2009. Available: http://4h.ucanr.edu/files/1224.pdf (2016.02.15)

K. Pittman, M. Irby, J. Tolman, N. Yohalem, T. Ferber, *Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement: Competing priorities or inseparable goals?* Forum for Youth Investment, Takoma Park, MD, 2002. Available: http://forumfyi.org/files/Preventing%20Problems,%20Promoting%20Development,%20Encouraging%20Engagement.pdf/ (2016.04.22)

L. M. Borden et al., "Challenges and opportunities to Latino youth development: Increasing meaningful participation in youth development programs*," Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Science* Vol. 28, pp. 187-208, 2006. Available: http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/research/cmliterature/Latino%20Youth%20Dev%20Borden%20et%20al.pdf (2016.02.25)

P. L. Benson, P. C. Scales, S. F. Hamilton & A. Semsa Jr., "Positive youth development: Theory, research, and applications," in *Handbook of Child Psychology (6th ed.)*, Vol. 1 (Theoretical models of human development), W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), Wiley, Hoboken, NJ, 2006.

R. W. Blum, "Positive youth development: A strategy for improving adolescent health" in *Handbook of applied developmental science: Promoting positive child, adolescent, and family development through research, policies, and programs*, Vol. 2 (Enhancing the life chances of youth and families: Contributions of programs, policies, and service systems), F. Jacobs, D. Wertlieb & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, pp. 237-252, 2003.

S. F. Hamilton, *A three-part definition of youth development, Cornell University College of Human Ecology*, Ithaca NY, 1999 in R. M. Lerner, J. V. Lerner et al., "The Positive Development of Youth: Report of the findings from the first seven years of the 4-h study of Positive Youth Development, Join the Revolution of Responsibility", Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development, Tufts University, Lincoln-Filene Center

Medford, MA, 2011. Available: http://ase.tufts.edu/iaryd/documents/4HPYDStudyWave7.pdf, (2016.02.15)

W. Damon & A. Gregory, "Bringing in a new era in the field of youth development," in *Handbook of Applied Developmental Science: Promoting Positive Child, Adolescent, and Family Development through Research, Policies, and Programs,* Vol. 1 (Applying developmental science for youth and families: Historical and theoretical foundations), R. M. Lerner, F. Jacobs, & D. Wertlieb (Eds.), Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 407-420, 2003.