

Significance of Sex Education among the Adolescence in Christian Perspective

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Abstract: *Christian perspective of sex education is also a means that would erase the negative ideas that has been wrongly inflicted in the minds of the people. However, amidst changes in the world, it is a challenge for Christian ministry to draw principles of life from the unchanging Word of the unchanging God.*

Keywords: *Sex Education, Adolescence, Christian Perspective*

Introduction:

The Christianity has taught for many centuries that sex is a good and wonderful gift from God and that sexual activity performed within the context of marriage is a sanctifying thing and human sexuality is never considered as something negative. Over the centuries the church developed a large body of teaching in the era of sexuality, human relationship and marriage. Taking the Christian perspective of sex, an attempt is made to explore the significance of human sexuality among the adolescence in Christian Perspective.

1. Nature and Meaning of Sexuality and Sex Education:

According to the Oxford English dictionary, sex in its primary sense denotes "either of the two divisions of organic beings distinguished as male and female respectively"¹. But sexuality is "The sum of those differences in the structure and function of the reproductive organs on the ground of which beings are distinguished as male and female, and of the other physiological differences consequent on these: the class of phenomena with which these differences are concerned"² sexuality is also closely related to physical sex and thus to our reproductive capacities. It is an aspect of our being that lies behind, produces, and is given expression by physical sexual characteristics and reproductive capacity³. Sexuality can also be defined by the existence of sexual organs and not how a person perceives oneself to be⁴.

The Christian concept of sexuality affirms that human beings have been created in the images and likeness of God. In this understanding both male and female make up

the orthodox understanding of God. At the same time sex and even discussions about sexuality is seen with in the institution of marriage. This makes sex out of marriage is problematic and deplorable⁵. Education is considered to be one of the most important instruments of empowerment and development⁶. The word education is derived from the Latin word 'Educare' which means 'to bring up', 'to nourish', 'to raise' and 'to bring forth'. Education, therefore, means both to bring forth as well as bring up⁷. Education is also considered as the process which draws out the best in people with the aim of producing a well-balanced personality and culturally refined, emotionally stable, ethically sound, logically correct, mentally alert, intellectually competent, technically advanced, morally upright, physically strong, socially efficient, spiritually mature, vocationally self-sufficient and intentionally liberal. Education according to John Dewey "is the development of all those capacities in the individual which will enable him to control his environment and fulfill his responsibilities."⁸

The term "sex education" may be taken in a narrow or broad sense. In the narrow sense it means the imparting of information on the so-called facts of life; in the broad sense it means the training of the young not only in the understanding but also in the accepting, evaluating and practicing of sexuality. "Sex education is not only the study of Anatomy and Physiology alone but also learning social and ethical good behavior, sex realities, the meaning of Love, family life and above all religious aspect and attitudes towards sexual urges."⁹ According to George Hagmaier and Robert Gleason, "sex education means not only a progressing familiarity with the process of

¹Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Sexual Relation in Christian Thought* (New York:Happer and Brothers Publishers, 1959), 261.

²Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Sexual Relation in Christian Thought*, 261.

³Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics an Evangelical Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster Press John Knox Press, 1997), 2.

³ Stanley J.Grenz, *Sexual Ethics an Evangelical Perspective*, 2.

⁴Jerry Kurian, "The Church:Human Sexuality and Challenging the Unchallenged; Why the Church needs to Change in Light of the Delhi Gang Rape", *Gurukul Journal of Theological Studies*, 15/2 (June, 2012):65.

⁵Jerry Kurian, "The Church: Human Sexuality and Challenging the Unchallenged; Why the Church needs to Change in Light of the Delhi Gang Rape", 65.

⁶Nesar Ahmad, "New Economic Policy, Education and Women", *Women's Link* 8/13(July-September, 2002):18.

⁷Thankachan, *Philosophical and Sociological Bases of Education* (Kottayam, V Publishers, 2009), 17.

⁸John Dewey, cited by Thankachan, *Philosophical and Sociological Bases of Education*, 18.

⁹J.J. Puthenkandam, *JivithavumLingiekathuvam* (Mal) (Thevara:Janatha book Stall, 1986), 9.

reproduction; it includes the concepts a child has of masculinity or femininity, his growing capacity to give and to receive affection and the kind of relationship he has to his own father and mother. As John Meyer observe, “sex education is one aspect of the aim of education in general; the guidance of children to maturity”¹⁰.

Therefore the purpose of Christian perspective of sex education in the church is to lead each person into a decision to live as a Christian character. The concern of such education is to help persons to resolve the issues involved the sex in terms of Christian values and purposes as Miller says¹¹. Its focus is, therefore, the clarification of values in terms of a distinctively Christian theology of sexuality and its normal implications. As John Meyer observe, “sex education is one aspect of the aim of education in general; the guidance of children to maturity.”¹²

2. Significance of Sex Education:

It is a very controversial subject all over the world. There are always certain prejudices and doubts when we explain sexual matters. “Sex is pure not at all shameful matter. It is one of the unavoidable states of human relations.”¹³ Sex education is not only the study of Anatomy and Physiology alone but also learning social and ethical good behavior, sex realities, the meaning of Love, family life and above all religious aspect and attitudes towards sexual urges.¹⁴ It helps to develop skills linked to decision making, communication, learning to ask for, and to identify the trustworthy sources of help through family, professionals and welfare services. Through sex education, they are taught to recognize pressurized situations and how to deal with them. Sex is often treated with suspicion, fear and prejudice but it is God’s creation. Therefore it is neither shameful nor dirty; it is an integral aspect of our human relations. Sex education, therefore, must cover besides instruction about biological facts proper social and moral behavior and right attitude towards sex, love, family life and at large inter-personal relations in society.¹⁵

Public discussion of topics related to sex is considered as taboo in most societies widely. Majority of parents do not accept the responsibility of providing sex education, while the youth are left to resort to information they

gather from books, magazines, youth counselors and media with its increasing accessibility. According to George Hagmaier and Robert Gleason, “sex education means not only a progressing familiarity with the process of reproduction; it includes the concepts a child has of masculinity or femininity, his growing capacity to give and to receive affection and the kind of relationship he has to his own father and mother”¹⁶.

Education means providing a child with the chance of growing up in accordance with its own immanent possibilities, giving it the chance of truly blossoming. It should aim at encouraging the child to grow into an adult who thinks, judges, and acts for himself or herself. It should not aim to turn out an obedient robot relating by heart the wisdom imparted by its teachers. Sex education is just one aspect of the whole process. It rests on the firm conviction that it is impossible for anyone to attain real maturity unless his sexuality is developed and educated on the way. In other words, it is a process which seeks to help a child to develop into a fully human adult. It demands an easy and healthy facility with our own bodies, and knowledge of the physical nature of others. It requires an acceptance of our own impulses not as something evil and shameful, but as something normal and natural. Finally, it requires a comfortable control of those impulses in accordance with our own sense of values, the rights of others, and the demands of society. To achieve all these, our sexuality should be given at least as much concern and be provided with at least as much chance to develop as any other aspect of our total personality.¹⁷

3. The Need of Sex Education:

The need of education is to draw out of the best in the human being to the fullest extent. “Education then consists of those experiences which enable an individual to bring forth every ability, skill and capacity to the fullest extent.”¹⁸ Therefore it is accepted that sex education is not a part; but integral. Considering sex education in cultivating positive values and attitudes, it provides an all-round learning experience conducive to the development of the human personality. Sex education is something very impatient but only few one is able to do anything effective about it. The term “sex education” may be taken in a narrow or broad sense. In the narrow sense it means the imparting of information on the so-called facts of life; in the broad sense it means the training of the young not only in the understanding but also in the accepting, evaluating and practicing of sexuality. Here we take the term in both its aspects, but mainly in the broad acceptance. Age appropriate, scientifically appropriate, culturally competent education on sex adds to general health, adaptation to environment and quality of life. The need for sex education is rooted in the very nature of man as a rational being. In animals instinct is adequate

¹⁰John Meyer, cited by Felix M. Podimattam, *Sex Education* (Delhi: Media House, 2007), 19.

¹¹C.J. Job, *Church Education and Society* (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing House, 1994), 97.

¹²George Hagmaier and Robert Gleason, cited by Felix M. Podimattam, *Sex Education*, 19.

¹³J. J. Puthenkandam, *Jivithayum Lingiekathuvam* (Mal) (Thevara: Janatha Book Stall, 1986), 9.

¹⁴J. J. Puthenkandam, *Jivithayum Lingiekathuvam*, 9.

¹⁵J. J. Puthenkantam, *Sex and Sanity* (Calicut: St. Thomas Press, 1974), 1.

¹⁶John Meyer, cited by Felix M. Podimattam, *Sex Education*, 19.

¹⁷Felix M. Podimattam, *Sex Education*, 18.

¹⁸Vimla Paulose, *Introducing Christian Education* (Madras: CLS, 1986),

equipment for the propagation and preservation of life as is seen in their mating, building nests, rearing their young etc. Man, on the contrary, has to learn to use his instincts or urges in the proper manner to attain the desired ends. He has to understand his sex instinct in order to evaluate and master it. The sex instinct, though natural and normal, is at the same time full of potentialities for good or bad. The adolescence has to be protected against the abuse of sex and helped to form the right sex habits from the very start. The development of a balanced personality depends on a proper adjustment of the sex impulse. The control of this instinct should come from the child itself and he can acquire it only if he is properly instructed¹⁹.

The curiosity of adolescence about sex is a concrete manifestation of their more fundamental quest regarding the meaning of the “whence and wherefore” of life. Hence they have a right to an answer to their questions. The ignorance; secrecy, shame and fear, associated with sex and reproduction are incentives to adolescence to try to know everything about it. The growing child is sure to gather information in a haphazard manner from undesirable obscene literature, from cinemas dealing with sex, and from ignorant and unscrupulous companions, household servants etc. Incomplete and vague knowledge may lead to worrying curiosity and should be guarded against. In the absence of correct information adolescents are likely to fall victims to doubt, anxiety and inner torment. Sexual curiosity may eventually become a fixation with them in the form of an obsession. Many of the psychic disorders and aberrations of adult life and the failure of many a marriage can be traced back to the lack of inadequacy of initiation into sex²⁰.

The changes in the body, at puberty and after, may come as a rude shock to adolescence of both sexes especially to girls. They must be made to understand that such changes are natural and normal. Timely sex education gives adolescents clarity of vision which is quite necessary for their sexual well-being. Clear knowledge in its turn begets spiritual joy and inward satisfaction. It fosters a sense of security and removes one of the main causes of the defiance of parental authority which characterizes adolescence.²¹ The socio-cultural changes taking place in contemporary India make sex education all the more necessary. Industrialization, urbanization and the resulting socialization of man have been creating ever new problems both for parents and adolescence, and many of them have a direct bearing on sexual development. There is today a general trend towards a secularist view of life.

As a result sex is considered less from the angle of religious conceptions, taboos and myths, than from that of objective scientific investigation. Though in itself a

healthy development, it may lead to a loss of the sense of reverence before the mystery of sex as something sacred. Hence the needs for instilling in the minds of the young the idea that sex is not a mere “thing” to be experimented with, but a symbol of abiding inter personal love between man and woman²². The process of transition from a highly regimented society to an open one, from the joint family to the nuclear family, is bound to result in greater freedom and democratization. If the younger generation is not taught how to use this freedom it may go to extremes in the domain of boy-girl relationships as in the West. As a result of socialization, adolescents are exposed to many more influences than in earlier times. They get acquainted with new ideas and patterns of behavior prevalent among other people and cultures. Besides, traditional barriers between the sexes are slowly breaking down especially in urban areas. This new situation calls for an enlightened sex education of the young to cope with the changing times. They must again be instructed on the function and hygiene of the sex organs so that they may avoid disease and foster a healthy attitude towards sex. The misuse and abuse of the sex organs may lead to certain social evils and pave the way for their own degradation which is powerful enough to undermine their whole future²³.

The complex emotional state in which youth find themselves in, stigma surrounding matters of asexual nature in the society and widespread gender inequality makes it increasingly challenging for adolescents to attain the knowledge they need. Sex Education may be renamed as Family education on viewing through the healthier angles. Even though the right age to begin is still debated in the societies, it is possibly the most important education that could be given to someone entering his/her teens. Parents have a responsibility to equip our children with a comprehensive view of sexuality. It must be taught within the context of a Biblically holistic approach, to be taught correctly. It is perfect to teach that God gave the material relationship as a sign and symbol of the internal love of the Trinity and His love for us²⁴.

Conclusion:

The above discussion clearly says that, the rapid change of sexual mores in the society demands critical Christian reflection and an appropriate response on the part of the Christian churches. The church centered sex education teaches that sex is a gift from god which is to be seen and treated as a gift. But the Christian view of human sexuality has been challenged tremendously and even led to the sexual issues among the adolescence among the churches. Education is impeccable in the growth as well as the development of the new generations.

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²¹J. J. Puthenkantam, *Sex and Sanity* (Calicut: St. Thomas Press, 1974), 2-4.

²²J. J. Puthenkantam, *Sex and Sanity* (Calicut: St. Thomas Press, 1974), 2-4.

²³J. J. Puthenkantam, *Sex and Sanity*, 2-4.

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