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Youth Aspirations and Governance in Meghalaya: A Case Study

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Abstract:

The main objective of this study is to provide an analysis of the massive discontent with and opposition of the youth of Meghalaya to the existing socio- economic and political order in the State and their expectations from future governments. The focus is to enquire about the reasons for the growing frustration and aberration on the part of the youth who form the most progressive, articulate, inspired spearhead of the dynamic segment of Meghalaya's population. This paper uses surveys conducted on the youth of East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya, to investigate their views on the different aspects of socio-economic and political life in the State. Empirical findings showed that in Meghalaya, besides unemployment, overpopulation, poverty, inequality and underdevelopment, misleading politics and rampant corruption have made life very complicated for the new generation. The youth are up against these problems, the like of which did not exist in the past. All this echoes a resonance to bring improvements in the existing democratic political framework of Meghalaya. Unseen and quiet but steady in its quest for a more just society is the call of the youth for better governance. It is also shown that the youth must act as a catalyst to bring about better administration. Democracy will acquire a new resilience with the youth exuding greater sense of responsibility and duty to the state than ever before.

Key words: Youth, problems, frustration, governance, change

CHAPTER 1

1. Introduction

Democracy is now the most popular form of government. It has established itself as an ideal which is cherished by almost the entire world. It is the only government which depends on the will of the people and stimulates them to take part in the country's political life. It gives adequate opportunities to all, and makes everyone feel that his existence is recognised, and that full justice is being done to him. It is a government aiming at the welfare of all. It makes authority a trust and ensures equal consideration for all. The growing popularity of democracy has resulted in the belief that the common man has a right to enjoy some political freedoms and he must be provided with enough opportunities to exercise them effectively.

If democracy is real enough, its success will be reflected in the government's fulfilment of the aspirations of the ordinary people. A democratic government sustains itself in power only because it is continually answerable and perpetually responsible to the people.

Simple declarations of the best intentions in the interest of the people are no test of its being called the best. It has to have a clean and honest administration to give a shape to its welfare politics. The government machinery has to function in a very appropriate manner. If the people are delivered the required goods, then it can claim to be the best form of government. The best touchstone for judging governance is what good deeds it performs for the people.

Good governance is consensus oriented which requires mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus in society on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved. A society's well-being depends on the ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded. This requires all groups, to have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.

It is believed that universal adult franchise brings enlightenment and promotes the standard of living, and the welfare and well-being of man as the suffrage gave a voice and power to the people. As a result of adult suffrage, many social groups, who were previously unaware of their strength and not affected by political changes, suddenly realised their strength and even the possibility of their bringing changes in their lives and the society. One such group is that of the youth.

The youth have been one of the most important strata in any society whether in the developed or developing countries. Youth is a Generic term comprising of both the students and the non-students. On many occasions, youth, express “massive discontent with, and opposition to the existing social and political order.” This activism had been made possible because of youth’s social cohesion, frequent interaction of ideas, their dynamism, their love for change and their feeling of obligation to champion not only the issues concerning them but also of the masses around them.

In Meghalaya in the fast changing scenario of events and personalities, the youth have a crucial role to play. They are up against problems, the like of which did not exist in the past. The demands for change are getting shriller by the day. There is frustration and anger amongst large section of youth. Indeed , the cross currents created by the conflicting waves of change make the youth believe that now is the right moment to replace the obsolete values and notions and metamorphose the existing political structure in the state.

What is there to feel optimistic about? Is the question posed by many young people. There is expression of futility, of absolute distrust in the political system, of the desire for change but not knowing how to bring about the change, the mobilisation of the youth of others who are like minded, all of which go to show that governance has completely failed. Unseen and quiet but steady in its quest for a more just society is the call of the youth for better governance. A call for cleansing the system of its rot has now emerged.

One of the undesirable fallouts of our brand of democracy has been that the system itself has by and large been used for undemocratic ends. Unfortunately this is what the experience has shown.

Development in Meghalaya has not happened in four decades because there has been no proper planning and no prioritisation. Much has been left undone and unresolved hindering peace and development in the state. Inter State and international border matters are unresolved agenda. We have a host of other issues like unemployment, rising prices of essential commodities, food and water security, rights of women and the disabled, environmental danger etc.

Urban poverty is growing and with it the mess that ghettos without any basic amenities are apt to display. Challenges of urban life loom large in the shape of housing, health, education, living standards, jobs etc. The government finds itself increasingly unable to address all these problems. Shillong city is growing beyond urban plan. Building construction, drainage, sanitation etc. are in a deep mess. Shillong presents a gloomy picture. This arouses a feeling of despair and leave young people wondering what Shillong would be like.

The unfortunate part in the entire history of Meghalaya is that corruption is rampant. Corruption plagues every facet of our democracy and it is we who vote to power the very politicians we say have defiled our democracy. Unfortunately, we hardly had any alternative, though we hopefully thought that the next government may prove less corrupt, but in vain. One must realise the implications of the extent of corruption that have come to occupy so much space in our society. It affects the quality of governance. Not merely that. It has the menacing proportion of threatening the very foundations of our society and state. Corruption in public life is but one manifestation of mal-governance and the call for the elimination of corruption echoes a resonance for better governance in all spheres of life.

So often, and especially in these trying times when politics and governance are floundering, Young people wonder why Meghalaya has stopped producing leaders of consequence. There is a gradual decline in the quality of leadership. The upright, sincere and fired with zeal and commitment type of leadership, which the State was fortunate to be blessed with earlier, is gradually disappearing. Ideologies do not matter anymore, nor it seems, are there permanent friends or foes in politics. Shameful political squabbles bring us ridicule from everywhere and encomiums from none. Political instability, resulting in governance deficit, has become a brand name for the state.

The young are restless and disillusioned by the lack of opportunities. The level of infrastructural development in the state is almost negligible. It is at the lowest rung of the infrastructure index ladder. In the absence of major industrial establishment and other employment opportunities, unemployment rate is not only high but also increasing rapidly. Those who have the where withal have moved out only to add value to the economy elsewhere. For long we have spoken about brain drain but as usual things have ended with mere discussions.

The problem of unemployment is a grim one. As far as the uneducated youth are concerned they have to be satisfied with the non-productive agricultural activities, mining, lumbering, domestic activities and others. The educated lot on the other hand, are on the lookout for either government service, which is touching the saturation point or employment in industries. The latter is absent. The problem of educated unemployment is already nerve breaking. An average youth has nothing but frustration in store for him. It is believed that such a state cannot go on forever. Something must break.

CHAPTER 2

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Selection of the Area

There is one area selected for this study i.e. East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya. The present study was conducted on the youth of the area.

2.2. Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the views of the youth on the different aspects of socio-economic and political life.
- To study the expectations of the youth from future governments.

2.3. Type of Study

The present study is descriptive and explanatory in nature.

2.4. Sampling

In the present study “Cluster sampling Method “was used. The sample for the study included youth of East Khasi Hills, District of Meghalaya. As the programme itself is a group oriented, therefore, 150 youth based on educational qualification were selected from certain localities of the district.

2.5. Tools of Data Collection

The researcher used interview technique for two sets of questionnaires –one in English and the other in khasi language (local language) which were used for obtaining information from the youth of the State. News articles and various other materials form the secondary data supporting the primary data.

CHAPTER 3

3. Interpreting the Data

The present analysis and interpretation of the data collected is made in the context of the growing dissatisfaction of the youth in the present political system and expectations from future governments. It is hoped that the study will shed light on the empirical views of the youth of East Khasi Hills, District to bring improvements in the existing democratic political framework of Meghalaya.

The distribution of the youth (respondents) is as per the following table:

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
18-20	20	20	40
21-24	45	32	77
25-28	13	20	33

Table 1: Distribution of youth (Respondents) Age wise

The area has a substantial youth population and youth can be considered as socially active actors of our society. The youth residing in the area are from diverse ethno religious backgrounds . It can be mentioned that apart from the youth born and brought up in the area, the youth from other north eastern states of India are settling in the area for higher studies.

Education	Number	Percentage
Under Matric	24	16%
Under Graduate	66	44%
Graduate	46	31%
Post Graduate	14	9%
Total :	150	100%

Table 2: Educational distribution of youth

In the study, (table-2) youth who are under matric is 16 percent(24 persons), youth pursuing under graduate courses is 44 percent (66 persons), 31percent (46 persons) are graduates and those who are post graduates constitute 9 percent (14 persons). The study has to take into account the educational status of the respondents as this will reflect the present status of the youth and the impact of their views on governance.

Sl No	OPINION	EDUCATIONAL STATUS				Total Percentage
		Under Matric	Under Graduate	Graduate	Post Graduate	
1.	Unstable governments	7	20	15	3	30%
2.	Lack of quality leadership	10	11	5	5	21%
3.	Gap between people and representatives	7	15	7	2	21%
4.	Lack of political commitment	0	20	19	4	28%

Table 3: Opinion of youth on Deficit Governance in Meghalaya

Government is the main actor in governance and its institutions have a shared responsibility in good governance. The Institutions of government and officials and agencies assist to serve the interest of the public. 30% are of the opinion that due to coalition government and infighting within the major political parties of the state there are frequent changes of government as a result of which the development of the state suffers. Almost all the MLAs wanted to get a ministerial berth in the cabinet. The percentage of respondents who attribute deficit governance in the state to lack of quality leadership is 21%. They are of the opinion that Meghalaya is in dire need of quality leaders without which it will degenerate and fall victim of decadence. It was also felt by 21% of the respondents that in Meghalaya there is a gap between the people and representatives and with the government. Therefore the representatives and the government have to closely look into the matter as to ensure good governance in the state. 28% of the youth say that Governance In Meghalaya has failed to meet the expectations of the people as it lacks accountability and commitment.

SI No	OPINION	EDUCATIONAL STATUS				Total Percentage
		Under Matric	Under Graduate	Graduate	Post Graduate	
1.	Make people literate	14	10	7	-	21%
2.	Ensure poverty allievation programmes	1	20	8	-	19%
3.	Leaders giving impportance to ethical values	4	18	14	-	24%
4.	Civic education to be provided to people	-	12	3	-	10%
5.	All of the above	5	6	14	14	26%

Table 4: Opinion of youth on eradication of corruption

On the issue of corruption, the common view shared by the youth is the increasing instances of corruption in democracy have made the idea of a real democracy a utopia. Political corruption must be eradicated before it eradicates democracy. In order to root out corruption in Meghalaya, out of 150 youth, 21 percent accounted for those who feel that a democratic state marred with corruption can still be brought back to the right path if the people, the true rulers are made literate, so that they can protect democratic values. Democratic values thrive where there is higher rate of literacy. 19% feels that government should strictly ensure that Poverty Alleviation Programmes, especially in the rural areas, are speedily implemented in a judicious and transparent manner. This will enable the benefits to reach the genuine beneficiaries in time. When people are better off the necessity of their approaching the politicians in times of financial needs except very urgent and unavoidable cases, will be lessened to a great extent. 24 percent suggested that leaders should give importance to ethical values. They pointed out that we live in an era of unprincipled politics. Leaders seem to have lost ethical values and have gone about their business as if nothing is sacred anymore.

Tales of bribery, corruption and cheating have become legion. Getting votes is all; what happens after that seems to be nobody's business. Things cannot continue like this and may result in disaster. Politics without ethics is a disaster.

Among the youth, those suggesting the need to provide civic education to the people account for 10 percent. Civic education is necessary in order to ensure that people should not stop being active participants in the political process. As people start caring less about who comes to power and stop going to polling booth, corruption in the political arena grows even stronger. However, 26 percent shared the view of giving importance to all the options given above in order to root out corruption.

Sl No	OPINION	EDUCATIONAL STATUS				Total Percentage
		Under Matric	Under Graduate	Graduate	Post Graduate	
1.	Encouragement of vocational education	2	24	14	10	33%
2.	Setting up of Industries	12	17	16	2	31%
3.	Rectification of poverty	5	5	4	0	10%
4.	Population control	5	20	12	2	26%

Table 5: Distribution of youth stating their views on steps to be taken by the Meghalaya government to generate employment opportunities and preventing the youth from being part of anti-social elements

Unemployment has been the scourge of Meghalaya for long. With continuous decline in the employment – output ratio and increasing growth of the labour force this problem has assumed dangerous proportions. Therefore a solution is desperately sought. 33 percent youth feel that the present educational system lays so much emphasis on achievement rather than developing the true potential of a student. Number of men and women coming out of educational institutions do not gain occupational or vocational training that are required for professional and managerial undertakings. This aggravates the unemployment problem. Politicians should open ventures for employment in the fields of agro- business, agriculture, crafts, animal husbandry, hotel management, communication, etc.

There is a dire need for changing the curriculum to the needs of the century. Infact, the Gandhian concept of education system based on vocational training should be emphasised. Another group of youth constituting 32 percent of them, emphasised the need of establishing industrial complexes where greater employment opportunities can be provided. There is no other way than that of industrialisation in order to deliver the state out of the morass of backwardness. Both industry and agriculture should be given equal importance. Agriculture output should grow at the envisaged rate as per the five year plans. This will definitely ensure growth of employment in agriculture. This will absorb the growing labour force and also reduce the backlog. As a number of youth are taking to anti-social activities due to unemployment and poverty, 10 percent of the respondents felt that Meghalaya has manifested rising poverty and it does not have a poverty eradication programme. The focus of the government should not so much be on minimum needs to tackle poverty but on reasonable standards of living. Unless poverty is removed, illiteracy the major stumbling block in poverty alleviation cannot be done away with. However, 26 percent youth are of the view that the need of the hour is population control. Population explosion is eating away the fruits of economic development. Population problem is not such a thing that cannot be solved effectively if proper approach and right policies are adopted.

All the respondents also stressed a great deal on the greatest need for proper utilisation of the natural resources. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources. Attempts have to be made to check the reckless destruction of resources by proper implementation of the Mining Policy of the state.

SI No	EXPECTATIONS	EDUCATIONAL STATUS				Total Percentage
		Under Matric	Under Graduate	Graduate	Post Graduate	
1.	Development of rural areas.	10	23	7	-	27%
2.	Development of new township.	12	17	9	-	25%
3.	Stringent laws to be implemented and followed.	2	10	14	3	19%
4.	All of the above	-	16			29%

Table 6; Expectations of youth on solution of the major social problem of changing the Present status of Shillong

All the youth are of the consensus view that Shillong is on the verge of bursting with population explosion and is in a sordid state. Issues like pollution, traffic congestion, slums, and cleanliness are to a great extent responsible to make living in the city a nightmare. 27% of the youth feels that though a lot of initiative has been taken by the government to improve the economic conditions of the rural people and providing infrastructure to boost the rural economy, yet much more is needed keeping in view the peculiarity of our rural areas in the field of education, electrification, drinking water and health and hygiene sector etc. Now the time has come to make efforts to make the villages more habitable and attractive than the city. Until the basic needs of villagers are met in the village itself, there can be little hope of stopping the exodus of rural population to Shillong.

The implementation of schemes like Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) to provide road connectivity; the Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY) and the Samagra Awaaz Yojana for provision of dwelling units to people below poverty line; the Swarana jayanti Gram Swarajgar yojana (SGSY) to support the income of rural people; the Employment Assurance Programme, and the National Assistance Programme is to be properly checked to get the desired result.

25% are of the opinion that the greatest need of the hour is the faster development of the New Shillong township at Mawdiangdiang. With the development of the township, economic activity would gravitate to this area. For this, development of infrastructure is the basic requirement. There is a consensus among the youth that with strong political will and determination, everything can be achieved. 19% young people expressed the view that no society can exist and progress without a certain corpus of law. Administrators need to strictly implement the declared policies and laws of the government without favour or partiality and to assist the political masters to carry on the administration of the state. Democracy also invests the people as true citizens with a sense of responsibility to stringently follow the rules of the government for a cleaner and better state. Those who gave importance to all the above to bring about the solution to the problems is 29%. They are of the view that the working together of the political leaders, administrators and the people will usher in the much desired change. For everything we cannot depend upon the government. If we are not civilised and we lack refinement in behaviour and daily living, we are forfeiting our claim to democracy.

Sl No	OPINION	EDUCATIONAL STATUS				Total Percentage
		Under Matric	Under Graduate	Graduate	Post Graduate	
1.	Should be encouraged	17	43	23	11	63%
2.	Should not be encouraged	3	7	23	3	24%
3.	Cannot say	1	15	-	0	11%
4.	Choose not to say	3	1	-	0	2%

Table 7: Opinion on participation of youth in politics for reforming the functioning of government in Meghalaya

The percentage of youth that gave affirmative view is 63%. They stated that politics affect the lives of youth as much as the lives of the grown-ups. Politics will enable them to understand and appreciate political and social issues in a better way. Youth are full of energy and enthusiasm. They can purify the politics of the state of all dross and stench. It was also felt that freshness of youth will be infused into politics if young people participate in it. This will inject into the functioning of the government in Meghalaya a new vigour and resilience.

Those who oppose participation in politics constitute 24%. They put up a strong case. They argue that politics is a dirty game. It leads to enmities. Also they stated that politics causes a great interference in the studies of the students. Taking part in politics will entail the frittering away of their time and energy on things which have little relevance to their careers. Also interest in politics leads to participation in strikes, demonstrations and processions and this may bring them into a serious clash with the police. However, 11% accounted for those who cannot share their opinion on the matter. Lastly, was the category of respondents who choose not to make any comment. This group accounted for 2%.

CHAPTER 4

4. Conclusion

Democracy may be the best form of government but it is not a readymade solution to our social problems. Its implementation leaves much to be desired. Merely having a functioning democracy is not enough. It must be seen that it works well and in the larger interest of the people. The purpose of governance is to bring political and economic changes. Governance can be made effective by reinventing the tools and means of thinking for mechanisms for delivering governance and the mind sets of those who implement schemes.

In Meghalaya, the youth are watching. They are sick of mismanagement, venality and the lack of accountability that have become the hallmarks of our institutions of governance. In their absolute dissatisfaction, they see the issues and problems of the past being accumulated, multi-layered and multifarious. Presently there is a distressing trend in the state and that is growing corruption. Most of the youth are of the opinion that unless the whole milieu is cleansed of this dangerous pest, it will for sure lead to the fall of our democracy.

From the survey it has been found out that since majority of the youth are unemployed, they feel that though the region is rich in various resources, neither the infrastructure has been created to give a meaningful employment to them nor the enlargement and diversification of industries which demands more manpower of various degrees and skills is necessitated. They are therefore looking forward to the future in the hope that it will usher in the much talked about change. A change from despondency to hope.

As it is seen, in Meghalaya, there is an unbridgeable gap between the people and their elected representatives and with the government. We see here a dichotomy instead of oneness of interests between the elected and the electorate. This dichotomy is reflected in their economic status and lifestyles too. Unless this gap is bridged we will not have good governance. The growing aversion of the people to politics in general and politicians in particular must be recognised and remedial measures taken to make the elected representatives more accountable to the people.

The youth of Meghalaya expect its leaders to make democracy in the state vibrant, productive, free of all vices and an example to the rest of the country. Our State politicians should start thinking of how to develop and change the face of the state, instead of thinking for their chairs. The crux of development lies not in lack of central funds but in instability, unaccountability and restless politics

amongst various political members. The youth are hoping that the people of the state will use their vote in the coming elections in favour of dedicated, sincere and honest leaders for the welfare of the state.

The youth feel that the answer to Meghalaya's woes will come also from political awareness. It is rather unfortunate to see that education for responsible citizenship, has not found a place in many of our educational institutions. We have to reflect a while and resolve to change the tide of events. Citizens must be made sensitive to socio political and cultural issues. Issues like injustice; corruption exploitation etc must become every citizen's concern. The young people must be taught to be responsible citizens. This is perhaps the greatest challenge for the State and the very ingredients for the development and prosperity of Meghalaya.

Hopefully in the coming years the government will come up with policies for every important sector of governance. It will zealously work for providing employment opportunities, eradication of poverty and illiteracy, root out corruption from the state, improve basic amenities etc. To improve the quality of life, political commitment and more responsive administration is a must. The government operations should not follow diplomatic tricks. The youth are no longer impressed by visions of grandeur. They want to see concrete action and measurable results..

On the part of the youth they must see and believe that the government is as much for them as it is for the rest of society. Government cannot be expended its energy planning for adults only. The Youth Policy of the State should address the skill needs of young people and identify their multi-various talents. This policy would help channelize youth energy into positive and constructive objectives. Here's calling all young people to advocate for a coherent and comprehensive youth Policy for their all round growth and development. This should take care of the needs, problems, hopes and expectations of the youth. This is advocacy at its best.

Hopefully, elections will throw up governments capable, on their strength and sensibility, to adopt a flexible and co-operative attitude which works in the interests of the youth of the state. The political parties should feel the pulse of the young people and shape their destiny. The democratic tempo of the youth as well as of the leaders is on trial. The youth watches with its fingers crossed.

Meghalaya will witness the working of new Governments in future which will charter their path. Only time will tell, how smooth the journey will be. It has now become obvious that at present when Meghalaya appears to be in a state of flux the youth can certainly give it a positive direction. They can help build a Meghalaya that is free from any traces of social economic or political injustice.

However what is really needed is the problem of youth unrest in the state caused by unemployment, poverty, inequality, misleading politics and value crisis should be tamed. Unless this is done our democracy will be in danger as the future builders of the state are not at rest, they are at unrest, depressed, frustrated and astrayed. The diabolic spikes of frustration should be nipped in the bud by sincere and active efforts of our leaders. There is also a need for the youth to awaken to the danger that threaten them and their future. The more visible the youth and the more voluble their assertions the greater is the likelihood of them getting something out of the system. Their youthful vigour energy is the real locomotive strength of our state. The young generation must act as a catalyst to bring about better administration. The youth should not remain confined within their own worlds. They should break the wall that constrain them and use their vitality and innovativeness to transform society for the better. They cannot and should not wear blinkers where the political happenings around them are concerned. The young must bring about the change they wished to see. This will generate a new enthusiasm in them to discover novel techniques to make the people the real rulers.

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