Understanding Democracy and Political Participation among College Students An analytical Study of District Baramulla

Farooq Ahmad Magray
Research Scholar Mewar University Chittorgarh Rajasthan, India

Abstract

Democracy is the frame for politics in India. The institutions and practices of democracy create the political space in which we as citizens form our identities and exercise our rights. Democracy requires that all citizens have an equal opportunity to express their opinion. Freedom of expression granted by the Constitution of India is also applicable to discussions on nationalism. Conflict as a social phenomenon, a part of social interaction when state delegates on issues on what concerns them, it becomes a conflictual situation. For Kashmiri's it is at the core of the Kashmir conflict and needs to be given a safe space to engage with. This will also facilitate discussion amongst the fragmented mobilizations of students and make them a strong stakeholder which can engage politically with the community and the political elite.

This paper explains how students perceive the notion of democracy has implications both for social life and political participation in order to develop the democracies they are a part of. The focus of this paper relates to conceptions of democracy and their participation in political activities as expressed in qualitative group interviews among college students of District Baramulla.
The present paper is to identify and analyze the impact of ongoing conflict situation on Youth of District Baramulla. The qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted to answer the research question.

KEYWORD: Democracy, Conflict, youth, participation, Development

Introduction

Democracy, or rule by the people, is an egalitarian form of government in which all the citizens of a nation determine public policy, the laws, and the actions of their state together. Democracy requires that all citizens have an equal opportunity to express their opinion. In practice, democracy is the extent to which a given system approximates this ideal, and a given political system is referred to as a democracy if it allows a certain approximation to ideal democracy

Democracy is the frame for politics in India. The institutions and practices of democracy create the political space in which we as citizens form our identities and exercise our rights. Empirical research has produced substantial knowledge about students' support for democratic values, and their current and envisioned civic and political participation (Mikkelsen, Fjeldstad, & Lauglo, 2011; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010; Torney-Purta, 2002). When conflict sets in the peace and development gets arrests. Conflict as a social phenomenon of competition between actors with incompatible goals is as old as human civilization Conflict is a part of social interaction when state delegates on issues on what concerns them, it becomes a conflictual situation. Nowadays conflicts

and wars are numerous and often extremely cruel. As such they are a serious threat to the health and well being of millions of people. Emerging political struggle, armed conflict and wars have a very different impact on present population than the conventional war of the past. Psychologist's dealt with inner conflicts and dynamics of attitudinal change and political philosophers addressed themselves to questions of power and authority, physiocrat's concentrated on competition for the necessities of life; and anthropologists studied conflicts rooted in primitive customs that had integrative functions. To philosophical category, they denote conflict the clash of power in the striving of all things to become manifest. A distinct category of social behavior- as two parties trying to get something they both cannot have.

The **Kashmir conflict** remains one of the most protracted in the world. It cannot be compartmentalized into a particular typology of conflict and its complex dimensions are geo-political, ethnic and religious in nature. High unemployment, corruption and nepotism are important factors for the alienation of Kashmiri youth who see bad governance as the failure of the state. The student community has been extremely disappointed with the failure of the government to tackle the problems of unemployment and low-quality education at all levels. The sense of political powerlessness is strong amongst students who have no platform to be part of the political processes engaging with the conflict.

Conflict in Kashmir has affected various aspects of the youth, including student life. Ahmad (2013) has argued that conflict situation makes students vulnerable to insecurity. Another study has documented the widespread psychological disorders including depression and stress amongst the youth as a consequence of conflict and its impact on everyday life (Aminet.al, 2009). There is scarcity of literature on the theme of conflict and education in Kashmir. There is only study dealing with the impact of the conflict situation on youth.

Freedom of expression granted by the Constitution of India is also applicable to discussions on nationalism. For Kashmiri's, it is at the core of the Kashmir conflict and needs to be given a safe space to engage with. This will also facilitate discussion amongst the fragmented mobilizations of students and make them a strong stakeholder which can engage politically with the community and the political elite.

 "Generally conflicts arise when people are competing for the same resources, when the people are unhappy with how they are governed, when people's beliefs clash religious and political views or ethnic difference cause conflict. Indeed, conflicts of all kinds most frequently arise when people feel threatened - regardless of whether the threat is real. It is harder to soothe and reassure people when they are frightened or angry."
The present study is identifying and analyzing the impact of ongoing conflict situation on Youth of District Baramulla. The qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted to answer the research question

    This paper explains how students perceive the notion of democracy has implications both for social life and political participation wishing to help develop the democracies they are a part of. The focus of this study relates to conceptions of democracy and their participation in political activities as expressed in qualitative group interviews among college students of District Baramulla.

Methodology: This empirical study gives us an insight of different dimensions based on the field work carried out in district Baramulla of Kashmir. The aim of the theoretical analysis of student understands about democracy through different variables (Citizenship, Education, Social connectedness and Civic activities). This enables us to understand, explain, analyze, and identify the political views among college students' and explore the relationship between individual's political attitude and their personality. Finally how can institutions of higher education help foster greater political participation among college students.

At the initial stage of the research a realistic understanding was developed from primary and secondary sources. The necessary details available on the topic have been collected from the secondary sources which include research documents, books and journals.

This research study was carried out with the college students of district Baramulla of Kashmir. The total sample size was of 100 respondents (Male 50, Female 50). The focus of the study was investigated by obtaining different parameters like Citizenship, Education, Social connectedness and Civic activities.

The research concentrates on following main objectives:

- How do college students understand, define, and view democracy, politics, their political engagement, and the work of democracy?
- To evaluate the students participation in social development
- To analyses the conflict and its impact on youth expression and prospects
- How can institutions of higher education help foster greater political participation among college students?
- To suggest the intervention in order to ensure development in a democratic country

The sample of the study composed of 100 respondents living district Baramullah of Kashmir of J&K.

A student questionnaire was designed in order to collect quantitative and qualitative data for evaluation, and data from the website statistics' counter was analyzed. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections: **a)** the background information of the respondent; **b)** the understanding of democracy and political attitude/ participation of college students **c)** the required suggestion for better results.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the words of the National Commission on Civic Renewal, we are becoming a "nation of spectators" (1998). Measuring trends over the past quarter century in political participation, political and social trust, associational membership, family integrity and stability, and crime, the bi-partisan Commission concluded that our overall civic condition is weaker than it was a generation ago:

During the past generation, our families have come under intense pressure, and many have crumbled. Neighborhood and community ties have frayed. Many of our streets and public spaces have become unsafe. Our public schools are mediocre for most students and catastrophic failures for many. Our character-forming institutions are enfeebled. Much of our popular culture is vulgar, violent, and mindless. Much of our public square

is coarse and uncivil. Political participation is at depressed levels last seen in the 1920s. Public trust in our leaders and institutions has plunged.

Robert Putnam echoes this crisis in our civic health in his groundbreaking work, Bowling Alone (2000) drawing on vast survey data that report on Americans' changing behavior over the past twenty-five years, Putnam shows how we have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors, and social structures, whether the PTA, church, recreation clubs, political parties, or bowling leagues. He warns that this shrinking access to "social capital"—the basic building blocks of community and civic health—is a serious threat to our civic and personal health.

Again, survey research has demonstrated that young people are considerably less knowledgeable of and interested in political affairs. Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter (1996), for example, note that the average college graduate today knows little more about public affairs than did the average high school graduate in the 1940s. The National Assessment of Educational Program's "Civics Report Card for the Nation" reported that only one-in-ten young people ages 18-29 could name both their U.S. Senators, compared to one-in-five of those ages 30-45 and one-in-three of those over the age of 45 (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

The WHO (2002) also notes that young people are less likely to display violent behaviour in communities with a high degree of social capital characterized by resilience, integration and trust. The youth and development literature also stresses the importance of decision-making mechanisms that empower young people by giving them voice and allowing them to exercise agency. A variety of different youth voice and empowerment projects have been developed at the community level (see Somers 2006 for examples), but there is a need to link these to wider governance, decentralization and voice and accountability programmes.

Findings and Discussions of the Study

A healthy democracy maximizes citizen participation in collective decision-making, thereby maximizing individual freedom and the freedom of the community. To paraphrase Jean Jacques Rousseau, we are most free when we obey laws we prescribe to ourselves. Thus, the higher the level of participation in influencing the laws by which we must live, the greater the democracy and the greater the freedom we enjoy as citizens. At a minimum, in our representative democratic system, this means the maximization of citizen voting at all levels of electoral politics.

The researcher conducted interviews in the District Baramulla with college's goers their levels of vulnerability and resilience - based upon a combination of access to more options and different types of influences from their communities around them.

Given that most of us live our lives primarily in our local communities, we should be most active in the politics of those communities if the democratic ideal is to be fulfilled. Laws and administrative practices for registration and voting therefore ought to facilitate as much voting participation as possible. This principle should apply to college students living in the community. To achieve the objectives of the study the following dimensions of the college students were evaluated:

I)   **Citizenship**

To get to the heart of the ambiguous place of college students within their communities, we felt the need to revisit the meaning of citizenship. One dimension of citizenship is that one is obligated to obey the laws of their community, national, state and local. Since most college students are residents of their college community for at least nine months of the year, they, like their fellow citizens, are bound by the same obligation and must obey the same laws, including local ordinances passed by the local government.

One of the dimension of citizenship involves the contributions each brings to the community, including economic resources, such as capital and human labor, intellectual, political and social resources was missing among college students bring enormous resources of all kinds to their communities. There was very less visibility of restaurants, sports clubs and a variety of entertainment venues in and around college. Students provide a youthful and energetic labor force for any development work.

In sum, college students were not contributing significantly to their college communities and were less obligated to obey state law and local government. Consequently, students ought to qualify as full citizens and deserve the legal right Political participation for the development. Due to the ongoing situation the students in Baramulla revealed that they are being denied their full democratic rights.

II) Education

Curiously, apolitical, politically inactive college students learn much in their four years of college, but largely fail to develop the political skills and practical knowledge that could enhance their intellectual development and expand their political participation. The quality of student participation was found negligible.

The participation in educational programme at higher education level leads to maturity, experience and exposure which were absolutely missing among students. .

III) Social Connectedness

A relationship may also exist between ties to community, a "social connectedness", and the motivation to vote. As citizens become more involved in their communities, as they develop a "stake" in society, they may become more interested in voting. This natural dynamic should apply to students as well as other citizens. Students may see voting as one way of being connected to their communities but it was found they do not exercise this right therefore, are not able to influence the direction of their communities/ local youth forums. They will be less likely to become socially committed. Social and political commitments likely go hand in hand and affect each other, either positively or negatively.

IV) Youth Participation in Democracy and Good Governance

Of the hundred percent of the population of India, seventy percent of the massive population include today's youth. And the importance of youth participation in Democracy and Good Governance cannot be, in any way, underestimated. In fact, they play a very major role in uplifting a country's stature.

A democracy depends upon the will of the majority and youth comprises the majority in state and country. The youth of state has a very important role to play in shaping state.

a) Exercising their rights to vote: The constitution having the youth bestowed with the right to vote is itself a blessing for the country. The youth today needs to

understand the present day scenario of the state, know their voting rights; can choose a better government to govern. Having exercised their right to vote, they can change the government with their collective power and effort. Hence, the youth having the right to vote in itself is the biggest power they possess in bringing good governance. It was found in the college students that they do not exercise this right at the same time they are not satisfied with the governance. Once the youth of today understands their responsibility of being a good citizen, it's only then they can do well to the country, for every single responsible citizen is what makes the country a better place to live.

b) Social services to the society: The youth has a very major role to play by offering their services to the society, If the youth of today starts small things like cleaning the environment, asking people not to urinate in public walls, stopping them from spitting their betel juices all over, though not fast, but will slowly witness changes in the heart and mind of the people. This is definitely possible if the youth today offer their full participation. This was evaluated in the research among college students and was found that community participation was at higher side. However, it was also found that college students were not involved in the management committee of the college therefore college activities they were not even aware of. Due to this unawareness, many people remain aloof from the services they could easily enjoy making the lives of themselves.

V)   Youth as social construction

The meaning of youth, and the way society regards youth, varies across time and space, as well as within societies. Hence, in addition to being defined chronologically (as a period of age between certain ages), youth is also defined functionally (involving a process of transition from childhood to adulthood, marked by rituals or physical changes), as well as culturally (pertaining to the role that individuals play in a given social context).

In conflict hit areas youth and violent conflict focuses on analysing the reasons why young people engage in violence. Do young people, by the mere fact of being young and energetic, tend towards violence? Then a large proportion of young people in society are a warning sign for trouble in state. It was evaluated that do young people fight for their own causes/rights, or are they mobilized into violent acts by others? Do young people fight to change the circumstances of their particular grievances – and if so, what are these grievances? This research looked into these questions and tried to point out the possible positive contributions of young people in society. It was also found during the interview that 42% of youth was for development. It was found that youth should not be regarded as merely a negative force. Through this piece of research it was found to understand more about the motivation of college student's involvement in violent acts and was found that they were highly unsatisfied with the governance and system. They feel deprived of adequate education and employment opportunities and other development initiatives.

It is striking that the concept of 'youth crisis' is often used but rarely explained. In very general terms, two different meanings of the expression 'youth crisis' can be identified: (i) a societal crisis impacting on youth, resulting in a feeling of 'uneasiness' in the face of societal changes and constraints; or (ii) a crisis originating from youth and impacting on society at large. In fact, these two meanings are often confused or used interchangeably.

Ismail, student of Boys Degree College pointed out:

Young people incarnate the future and should represent the promises of restored identities, as opposed to Colonial alienation and postcolonial forms of domination and subordination. But it was found that Young people are the greatest casualty of the conflict situation in terms of economic opportunities, educations prospects and developmental initiatives and consequently resulted into the violence and anger.

Mahmooda, students of 3rd year said:

Not only are young people losing the sense of belonging and they no longer represent the national priority. Young students have resorted to a new kind of socialization. No longer seen as a sign of hope, the youth turned into a source of violence and became a threat. It is to have to do with the capacity of the State to respond to youth demands, rather than with a fundamental change in such demands.

Dilawar, student of B.A final year reflected as:

There is room for the a participation of young people to fulfill their ambitions and to live up to the expectations placed upon them, but the state is not able to invite the participation and just the tokenism can't solve the problem .

Nighat, student of Bsc Final year expressed her experience as:

The social integration of youth into the society is important. When the conflict situation resulted into means a shrinking of job opportunities for youth .The problems increased and led to further frustration. It has marginalized youth or reduced their chances for sustainable livelihoods.

Yaqoob, student of first year student said:

The ongoing conflict situation underpins young people's sense of exclusion and marginalization from society. Two major factors of this impaired transition are the lack of education and the lack of employment opportunities. Going to school and finding a job are often cited as key priorities by young people in the developing world. At the same time, a lack of education and unemployment (for both the educated and the uneducated) appear at the top of the list of youth grievances, and are singled out by most scholars focusing on youth crisis. These two elements therefore deserve particular attention.

CONCLUSION

Youth is the most vulnerable group in any conflict situation therefore it needs a special attention with local remedies in consultation and participation of of youth itself so that the sense of belonging is retained and sustained. The objective of this work is not to offer an all-encompassing explanation of youth, but rather to carve out the path that is to be followed.

Young people in most of the developing world are increasingly deprived of education and employment opportunities – and hence of the possibility of establishing themselves as adults and caretakers in an increasingly competitive world.

Key policy-level recommendations include*:*

- There is a great need to work out a secure framework towards youth – balance efforts to prevent the engagement of young people in violence with a focus on their positive role;

- Ensure policies and programmes work towards the inclusion of youth, rather than containment or appeasement;
- Consider the linkages between different forms of violence (violent conflict, criminal violence, political violence etc);
- Look at the opportunities for addressing youth needs in terms of economic educational and other development arenas;
- Ensure the Youth Participation Guide includes a thorough directory of resources on youth and violence prevention e.g. youth assessments, literature, case studies;
- Commission a fuller review of different interventions to address youth exclusion and youth involvement in violence, what has worked and what has not and best practice for working with youth via different aid instruments.

Key programme-level recommendations include:
- There is a need to undertake context-specific analysis of the situation of youth and key risk factors
- Involvement of young people in analysis and programming is equally important otherwise youth will not automatically benefit from general development programmes
- A keen attention is required in order to integrate youth issues into existing programmes e.g. design specific youth components; earmark resources for youth; target interventions at youth
- To ensure support of National Youth policies, but ensure they are properly resourced and actually implemented

Key areas for follow-up work and further research include:
- At a country-level, context-specific assessments of the situation of youth and particular risk factors are needed.
- More systematic studies of individual motivations for engagement in violence including specific studies of the motivations, role, experiences and consequences of young people involvement in violence.

- The first essential step to determine whether and how to address youth issues in a particular country is a context-specific analysis of the situation of youth in that country, the challenges and risks they face and the actual and potential impacts of these on achievement of violence prevention and development outcomes.
- In conducting an assessment of youth, it is absolutely essential to involve young people themselves. Any credible analysis will need to be based on consultations with a cross-section of youth (not just youth leaders, who in some cases may not be representative of the diversity of youth or may enjoy little legitimacy with sections of the youth population) and key individuals and organizations who work with youth.

- *Full multi-sectoral youth programmes* which address different issues of concern to youth in a specific context to be conducted focusing on capacity building, skills training, income-generating activities, peace building and community empowerment).

- *Youth and peace building programmes:* There has been increasing interest in programmes seeking to engage young people directly in democracy and peace building activities as a means to empower youth, to harness their energies and capacities as a force for change and to prevent them from being drawn into renewed violence.

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