



## The Political Culture of the Indian Youth

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The term "culture" in the Indian context connotes a wide meaning. It is a way of life, an overall pattern of existence, comprehending the living tradition of the past, the meaningful life of the present and the cherished aspirations of the future. To the Indian people and especially the youth, culture is all pervasive that manifests itself not only in the creation and practice of the arts but also influences deeply the quality of life expressed in man's religious, economic, social and political concerns.<sup>i</sup>

The evolution of culture is the result of the interplay of the physical environment and metaphysical ideas. Ideas, theories and beliefs are not bound to any particular locality. In every country we find different types of ideas and beliefs, but the concrete aspect of the culture is determined by the geographical and social conditions of a country. It is the atmosphere which gives to the people of a country a common outlook and temperament though they may differ in their religious and philosophical ideas. It is this common national temper and mind which is the most important source of national culture.<sup>ii</sup>

The present-day cultural scene of India is derived from three main sources - the traditional past, the colonial experience and the aspirations for the future, post-independence era. The traditional past which comprises of manifestations of diverse forms of traditions and faiths is significant of the phenomena of unity in diversity. The influence of the West during British rule created new forms and patterns of culture. The impact of modernization, the emergence of nationalism and a search for identity brought profound change in the social, economic and political life. To these experiences of the colonial period were added new vistas and aspirations. After independence democratization and development resulted in a quest for a decent living standard and a higher quality of life for all. Thus the contemporary established culture emerged gradually with the realignment of the social, political and economic forces after independence.<sup>iii</sup>

A novel concept, which is being increasingly used nowadays, is that of political culture. It is used independently as well as often aligned with political development, so much so that has become an important parameter for the analysis of political system. <sup>iv</sup>Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, define culture as, the psychological orientation towards social objects, cognitive affective and evolutionary orientations." According to them, political culture refers to the specific political orientations, the attitudes towards the political system and its various parts and the attitude towards the role of the self in the political system. <sup>v</sup>Thus, political culture refers to the values and norms concerning political life, and which are reflected in people's attitudes and orientations towards political action, institutions and processes. Political culture is concerned less with the formal and informal political structure of politics, political parties, pressure groups and governments and political behaviour of a people, but more with the attitudes and beliefs of people about these structures and behaviours."<sup>vi</sup>

Almond and Verba indicate three types of political orientations of the people. They are allegiance, apathy and alienation. Another dimension employed to measure political culture is citizen, subject and parochial culture. The citizen culture is participatory, the subject culture although aware of the political system is like an object of state activities whilst the parochial culture is confined with in its

own family or group, unmindful of the larger political system. It is under these dimensions that we will determine the political culture of the Indian youth."<sup>vii</sup>

At the onset of independence, the youth of the country were looking forward to a system based on the principles of Gandhi and Nehru. The tragic happenings in the aftermath of partition were borne bravely and resourcefully and the youth were able to overcome their fears and prejudices and the accompanying senseless violence with courage and compassion. The constitution based on lofty principles of democracy and justice opened new vistas of hope and aspirations. There was no dearth of outstanding leaders in all walks of life. The blending of conflicting ideologies of the old and new, the traditional and modern, the Eastern and Western concepts resulted in a "cultural renaissance" of creativity. Independent India presented a glow of idealism and the promise of a high quality of life. Soon, this idealistic with a jaunt new order dissipated and gave way to despair and dissent, particularly directed against the wielders of power. The reign of love, truth and justice of which Gandhi had dreamt vanished in the realities of power politics and the pursuit of self-interest and greed. The gulf between thought and action on the part of the elders, verging on hypocrisy and dishonesty appeared more glaring in the course of politics at all levels of national life. Corruption and nepotism grew unchecked and communalism and casteism raised its ugly head. Political life was marked with a grab and struggle for power and a rat race for grabbing lucrative positions of authority."<sup>viii</sup>

This decline of political life was marked with youth dissent emanating in protest of different forms. University campuses were exploited and converted into hubs of violent agitation. The gullible youth were misled by unscrupulous politicians and party bosses, and petty issues and controversies were blown out of proportions. The pent up feeling of discontent with parental authority and irrational working of social institution also found vent in political demonstration and agitations. Although the politicization of youth after Independence was a difficult and controversial process; the youth represented a citizen culture marked with participatory behaviour and allegiance."<sup>ix</sup>

However, nowadays, doubts are being raised that what we see in youth of today is a culture of apathy which is dangerously bordering on alienation. At the dawn of the third millennium when 70% of our population is under the age of 35 and is poised to become the torch bearers of our nation's politics, culture, business, sports, cinema and so on. The prospective leaders whilst pursuing and excelling in all fields of their career, either at home or abroad seem to be apathetic towards the nation's politics. Politics as a career option comes way down the list and is not considered an "in thing" with the youth of today. Very few realize the value of the vote when less than 50% of the population casts its vote. The rampant corruption, nepotism, criminalization of politics, lack of accountability of the politicians and the ugly image that they have created for themselves are the reasons for this nonchalance. "... it is our duty to erase this ugly image of the Indian politician, it is necessary for the best and brightest among the youth to join politics and serve the nation "aptly said by L. K. Advani in the seminar on, "National Values -Crisis and its Redressal." He further lamented that in India, politics today is seen, "neither as a mission nor as a profession but a pure commerce."<sup>x</sup>

It is this lack of sensitivity and accountability of the government and growing importance of muscle and money power that politics is considered as untouchable by the youth. "Even the few who do want to join don't know the way and even if they do, they don't find it clean. There appears to be a wall between them and politics. We should tap the energy of the youth in building the nation. But for this we have to open our closed doors". Rahul Gandhi said whilst addressing the party workers at Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi. Rahul Gandhi has definitely taken the initiative of opening up the "closed doors" of politics by announcing allocation of a majority of tickets for the youth in the upcoming general elections, and following suit Miss Mayawati the Chief Minister of U.P. gave similar sound-bites.

Another challenge is that politics in India is based on dynasty and not ideology. This is the reason that while we can acclaim the political success of the likes of Jyotiraditya India, Sachin Pilot, Jitin Prasad, Rahul Gandhi and so many others we still find this brigade of young MP's unable to challenge the shackles of the geriatric party leadership and nowhere near the decision-making structures. While the Indian state is dancing in the buoyant shoulders of the young the Indian government is still dependent on the old." <sup>xi</sup>In U.K. Tony Blair retired at 58, Obama becomes the President of U.S.A at 47 years of age while in India the chief posts of the government are occupied by 60 and often 70 plus. The decline in ideology can also be attributed to be reason for the apathy of the youth." <sup>xii</sup>

Despite this bleak scene on the political front on a positive note we see that the educated youth has realized that they cannot afford to be distanced from politics as our system is such that politics is the only way to execute fresh new ideas and bring change. The emergence of "Bharat Uday Mission", an outfit of young II Tians who are planning to enter politics at some point of time and "Professional Party of India", customized to India's unique demographic, social, cultural and economic conditions is definitely a reason to cheer. The participation of youngsters in large numbers in voters awareness campaign indicates that our youth may be disillusioned but not apathetic towards political life. They have realized that changing dysfunctional behaviour is difficult but not impossible.

As APJ Abdul Kalam opines "Ignited mind of youth is the most powerful resource on the earth, above the earth and under the earth. I am convinced that the youth power if properly directed and controlled could bring about transformational changes in humanity for its progress, meeting its challenges and bringing peace and prosperity." <sup>xiii</sup>

## References

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- <sup>iii</sup>Kirpal Prem, Op.cit, pp. 13-15.
- <sup>iv</sup>Ashraf Ali & Sharma L.N. 'Political Sociology-A New grammar of Politics, Hyderabad Universities Press, 1983, p 135.
- <sup>v</sup>Almond and Verba, The Civic Culture, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1963 PP 13-14.
- <sup>vi</sup>Ashraf and Sharma-op. cit pp. 135-136.
- <sup>vii</sup>Kirpal Prem Op. Cit. pp. 28-32
- <sup>viii</sup>Ibid pp. 28-30
- <sup>ix</sup>Ibid p. 30
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