

Political Conscience And Political Consciousness In A Democracy: An Exploration Of An Idea Through Youth Participation

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Abstract

The paper aims to explore the idea of politics that the youth of Arunachal Pradesh have in terms of their understanding of political participation, the significance they attribute to being politically conscious, the relation between gender and politics, and the correlation between the field of studies/ discipline and politicisation of their actions. This analysis will be based on a survey the scholar conducted through an online forum. Through this exploration of the underlying subtext, the author intends to articulate the reasons for the lack of conscious participation of the youth in the governance of the state at the micro level, especially related to the female students. Here, the term 'political participation' has been used to denote the deliberate actions of the youth in the decision-making process that directly or indirectly affect their lives in a significant way; therefore, more than just an interest mobilisation of the youth by an individual leader for his/her self-interest ambitions. The paper will conclude with a few possible suggestions through which the state can mobilise the youth's active participation in their governance in a meaningful way to lay the foundation for a future civil society.

Keywords: Political participation, student politics, political consciousness, gendered politics, discipline and politics.

Introduction

'India is a democratic nation.' It can be perceived as a mere statement of fact, or it may lead one to ponder the cost of disregarding the emerging population of the nation in a bubble of self-interest activities rather than fostering their civil consciousness through active participation in the political decision-making process. To further explore this idea, we must first question what democracy is to comprehend what it means for India to be a democratic nation. In an article titled 'WHAT DEMOCRACY IS AND IS NOT', political scientists Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry L. Karl define democracy as, and I quote,

Modern Political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.¹

¹Philippe C. Schmitter & Terry L. Karl. (1991), 'WHAT DEMOCRACY IS AND IS NOT', Journal of Democracy, Volume. 2, No. 3, Summer 1991, pp. 75-88, p.76 stable URL:<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jod/summary/v002/2.3schmitter.html> (15/04/2025 14:40).

Therefore, according to them, one of the defining features of democracy is the established norms through which democratic leaders come to power, as well as the practices that ensure they are held accountable for their actions and behaviour in the decision-making process that leads to the establishment of policies affecting citizens as a whole. This is usually assured through the periodic conduct of elections; in the case of India, this occurs every five years. However, they argue that there is a danger of reducing the complexities of democracy to merely the conduct of periodic elections, while ignoring other aspects of the system and society at large. They tried to conceptualise these limitations with the term 'electoralism'. Their main contention focused on the procedural arrangement for conducting elections that are free from foul play or interference. But my argument is that it is not enough when a majority of the population is unaware of the political consequences of their actions and decisions. In other words, their lack of political knowledge and consciousness beyond their immediate and paltry material gains, sometimes to regional or local benefits. Now the question is, how can we ensure progressive development of civil and political consciousness among the general population of a democratic nation, especially when the entire idea of democracy as a desirable system of governance relies on the understanding that it empowers the common population to participate meaningfully in their governance? To logically answer this question, we must first understand what causes such an attitude, rather than offering a moralistic judgment on human behaviour as a product of inherently self-interested beings. We will explore this through the analysis of the survey conducted among the youth of Arunachal Pradesh. This study has been narrowed down to a few young individuals between the ages of 15 and 35, as it is normative understanding that if we succeed in enhancing and encouraging today's generation's civil tendencies, we might witness better citizens in the future, and perhaps even better leaders, since in a democratic nation, it is by default leaders often more than not reflect their people.

Objectives

This paper aims to analyse the political understanding of the youth and the significance they attribute to being politically conscious individuals. Furthermore, this paper also intends to explore the gendered notion of politics, which is the idea that politics is a 'masculine' niche; therefore, men are more qualified to be actively involved in any such participation that is deemed to be political, and the role of women is either non-existent or, if any, is secondarily attached to a man, that is, in the sense that women either compete for 'secondary' positions in certain structural system, or is second to a leading man who is the face of the campaign and her power and position is, in some significant ways, is attached to him. This paper will also explore how the chosen field of studies, the discipline that young individuals pursue, reflects the significance they attribute to being politically active, including their participation and engagement in the dialogue regarding governing policies. The exploration of these objectives will be based on the presumption that acquiring a better political consciousness and understanding nurtures better civil tendencies and responsibilities within an individual, including an intellectual defence framework against false narration, propaganda and rationale.

Methodology

The survey was conducted via the Google online forum for seven days among young individuals aged 15 to 35, with the majority of participants falling within the 20 to 30 age range. The survey questions were designed to gather information about their understanding of political consciousness, the significance they attribute to it, and their typical means of political participation. Additionally, they were asked whether an individual's gender affects their involvement and engagement in political discourses, including whether a man makes a better leader than a woman. Related to this was the question of how much an individual's field of study influences the aforementioned engagement. Through this survey, the author also wanted to explore what the different means of hindrance are for the young individuals of Arunachal Pradesh in building their political consciousness, and in the process, the development of their civic sense. The main focus is on the relationship between gender, discipline and politics.

Additionally, the contemporary events of student politics in the state of Arunachal Pradesh over the last few years were examined through various secondary sources and first-hand experiences to develop better research questions and hypothetical answers that could be accepted or rejected through further information gathering, in this case, by surveying student opinions and engaging in limited individual interactions. Secondary sources, including literary works, were also reviewed to gather more accurate information about specific concepts and ideas. The theoretical foundation of some arguments, recommendations, and rationale was also based on these studies to further substantiate them.

Research Findings

A total of 55 individuals participated in the online survey, of which 43.6% fell within the age range of 20 to 25, followed by 32.7% and 21.8% in the categories of 25 to 30 and 30 and above, respectively. The gender demographic was skewed towards men, with 70.9% identifying as male, while only 29.1% were female. Out of the total thirteen questions, two were specifically designed to measure the participants' gender sensitivity concerning politics. In the first instance, participants were asked whether they believe one's gender matters in politics. Of the total, 47.3% answered yes, 36.4% answered no, and 16.4% chose maybe. The second question inquired whether a man makes a better leader than a woman. Interestingly, only 38.2% responded yes, while 47.3% and 14.5% fell into the categories of no and maybe, respectively. However, it is important to note that 14.5%, or 8 out of 55 participants, chose maybe, reflecting either their reluctance to provide a definitive answer or uncertainties stemming from their lack of experience with female leaders or politicians.² This further qualifies the 38.2% of participants who responded yes, as opposed to the 47.3% who answered no, based on the

² According to the statistics published by the PRS legislative research, an independent non-profit organisation, the highest number of female legislators in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, since the beginning of its statehood, was elected in the year 2024, when four female legislators successfully made their place in the state legislative assembly. The same goes for the female representation in the student politics of the state. Since the establishment of the 'All Arunachal Pradesh Student Union', not a single female president has been elected, aside from being relegated to the position of the usual sub-sect of the Union under 'women's wing'. The same goes true for all the other unions of the students at the individual tribe level.

perception of the established norm worldwide. This brings the total number of participants who question or would question the capabilities of a woman as a leader to 52.73%. There is a risk, of course, in overemphasising the established norm and global tendency used to justify the scholar's assumptions; however, the larger percentage of individuals acknowledging gender influence in politics and political participation, in response to the first question, supports this assumption to a certain extent. Nonetheless, readers should exercise caution, especially when the sample size is small. This information reflects the traditional understanding of politics as a 'masculine' domain, which directly or indirectly affects female youth's participation in significant discourse related to formal policies. Many political and feminist theorists articulate these effects in terms of supply-side and demand-side concepts. The idea is that gender socialisation is based on the presumption that politics is a 'masculine' field, rendering female students less politically knowledgeable, ambitious, and subsequently less likely to build the skills and temperament required for such aspirations. In the process, they internalise the established tradition and provide substantive evidence to maintain the cycle of tradition. This, they argue, results in a decreasing pool of female aspirants, thereby reducing the supply of formal representation, while the structural and systemic limitations affecting female representation continue to exacerbate these problems.³

The other sets of questions in the survey were designed to measure the influence of discipline on youth participation and the significance they attribute to political consciousness. Among the participants, 54.5% were from an Arts/humanities background, whilst that of science was 45.5%, that is, 25 out of 55 participants. 60% of the participants agreed that one's choice of discipline affects the tendency and frequency of an individual's participation in politics, whilst 78.2% agreed that the students of an Arts/humanities were more likely to be politically active. Out of the 25 participants with a science background, 19 answered that they were more frequently engaged in political dialogue with their friends than through participating in protests and social media debates. Meanwhile, in the case of Arts/humanities students, 16 out of 30 were more frequently involved in conversation with their friends, whilst the rest were involved either directly in protest or all of the above – protest, social media debate and having conversation with their friends. Additionally, when the participants were asked whether being a good citizen requires political consciousness or one should rather focus on their personal goals and ambitions, 56.4% answered both depending on the context, whilst 36.4% answered that political consciousness is important. The other 7.3%, that is, 4 individuals – 3 male and 1 female, 2 from science and 2 from Arts/humanities – answered they would rather focus on their personal goals and ambitions. Furthermore, when they were asked about the importance of involving youth in the decision-making process, 85.2% of the participants answered yes, whilst 11.1% answered with scepticism in terms of its constructiveness and viewed it as a mere formality.

This gives us some idea that one's educational background directly or indirectly affects one's understanding of self within society, and in having an opinion about one's surroundings. When we consider this within the context of our previous educational system, which required students

³ Pamela Paxton & et al. (2007), 'Gender in Politics', *Annual Review of Sociology*, Volume 33, pp. 263-284, pp. 266-267, Stable URL: <http://soc.annualreviews.org> (22/04/2025 16:52).

to choose between science, commerce, and arts after grade 10, we can see that students who do not select the arts stream have limited opportunities to gain a fundamental understanding of our governing systems, besides being burdened with their academic obligations. The less knowledgeable one is about the system they are part of, the less likely they will be conscious of what is fact and what is mere propaganda, what are their legal rights, and what are their legal duties, which leaders represent the true idea of democracy and an idea of India as a nation with unity in diversity, and which leader lacks these ideal and resorts to populism and rhetoric for easy win in the elections. However, these arguments have certain limitations. First, belonging to a science or commerce stream is not the only factor influencing one's political behaviour. When we consider this alongside the relationship between gender and politics, as mentioned above, it seems that men tend to be more politically aware due to their gender socialisation, regardless of their field of study. In contrast, the same cannot be said for female students, generally speaking. Second limitation in this case is the scholar's presumption that those who belong to the stream of arts by default have such awareness – which we know is far from the truth; nonetheless, here the conversation is about whether the opportunities are there or not, the answer to which is they have more than their fair share of it, they just have to grasp it. Fortunately, a more liberal system has been established with the passing of the new education system in 2020.⁴ With these facilities in place, hopefully, we will be able to experience a more 'aware' generation of youth in the future who are simultaneously in tandem with both political conscience and consciousness.

Conclusion

Two important hypotheses were established based on the survey conducted online by the scholar. First, the tradition of the gendered nature of politics, wherein politics is viewed as a 'masculine' trade, negatively affects female students' participation in general political discourses, ultimately impacting the supply of female aspirants who aspire to pursue leadership at formal and structural levels. Second, within the older educational system, students in the science and commerce disciplines faced much greater disadvantages in acquiring a better understanding of the politics and political systems they are part of. This, in turn, impacts their ability to attain greater political consciousness and their eventual engagement in participation.

However, these two objectives are not the only causes of the lack of conscientious political participation among the youth of Arunachal Pradesh. Conscience is emphasised here because being politically aware alone is insufficient when such awareness and its implications are not directed towards common goods beyond self-interested aims. Thus, we can argue that the widespread feeling of mistrust among the youth towards the established political system – most participants in the survey associated this with a tendency towards violence, the deceptive nature of leaders once they attain power, and the nexus between power, politics, and money – remains one of the major reasons, alongside the general perception that the 'encouragement' of youth at formal platforms is merely a formality. Therefore, in response to the question of how we can

⁴ See *National Education Policy 2020*, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, Stable URL: [NEP_Final_English.pdf](#) (25/04/2025 16:58).

increase youth participation to build a better future for our democracy, my answer would be to research the current limitations and then find the solutions to mitigate them at an evolutionary phase, beginning from the above-mentioned limitations. At the immediate level, we could establish a virtual council associated with major institutions in the state to encourage the development of an environment of dialogue and discourse of various opinions and views, and between youth and decision-makers. However, such councils and other forms of formal platforms are inherently limited because of their selective and restrictive nature, which discourages youth from being part of them in any productive manner. Thus, we can build up from ‘everyday informal participation’ of the youths in their local community and in creating common and collective experiences among themselves through the real-time unfolding of the results and changes they are contributing. The state government can encourage this by assigning small but important tasks at the community level to the youths with good incentives. This will not only contribute to their gathering of essential experiences in serving others but also help identify what the problems are through a bottom-up approach, thereby enabling them to contribute better in the open discourses at the formal level.

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