

Youth and Peace Volunteering in Manipur

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ABSTRACT

Future lies in the hands of youths. The National Youth Policy 2003 reiterated the strong commitment of the nation to the composite and all-round development of the young sons and daughters of India to face the challenging task of national reconstruction. Unfortunately, many youths of the country became easy prey in the hands of religious and communal despots despite having blessed with the capacity to lead. Similarly, the local conditions of the youths are also in a state of uncertainties as the state is under the grip of insurgencies and intra communal clashes. But we need peace and integrity above everything for which we need to erase the inequality and mistrusts amongst diverse communities. Here, it may be recalled Vision 2020 produced by the Development of North East Region (DONOR) showing the State policy makers should bring change in the administration so that more youth can participate in the process of decision making.

Keywords: Volunteerism, peace volunteering, youth participation

When asked what would be his goal in education for the youth of the country, Mahatma Gandhi answered, "Character building. I would try to develop courage, strength, virtue the ability to forget oneself in working towards great aims. This is more important than literacy; academic learning is only a means to this great end."

The United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000 declared: "We have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level. As leaders we have a duty therefore to the entire world's people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs."¹

India has one of the largest youth populations in the world, which is poised to increase further in the coming decade. This pool of youth population needs to be engaged in the development of their

communities. We have to ensure the realization of our demographic dividends. Further, the National Youth Policy, 2003 reiterates the commitment of the entire nation to the composite and all-round development of the young sons and daughters of India and seeks to establish an all-India perspective to fulfill their legitimate aspirations so that they are all of strong body, mind and heart in successfully accomplishing the challenging tasks of national reconstruction and social changes that lie ahead.

The process of social integration is important for young people who need to experience a sense of belonging and responsibility to become productive citizens and participants in society. Social integration harnesses youth potential and creativity, which is necessary to meet societal objectives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is in this context of the SDGs this paper will delve on the possibilities of youth participation for a peaceful and inclusive society in Manipur.

¹General Assembly Resolution, A/RES/55/2, United Nations Millennium Declaration (New York, 2000)

Youth Volunteerism for a Peaceful Coexistence

A look at the pages of history and one cannot miss the role the youth have played in national movements. Be it the young M.K. Gandhi in Johannesburg South Africa or the role of Martin Luther King Jr in the United States of America, the contribution of the youth in national movements cannot be overlooked. History proves more than once that so many great leaders of the world successfully made their political fortune by exploring the youths. The Indian freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi saw the participation of youth – both men and women – in large numbers.

It was Mahatma Gandhi who wrote in *Young India* way back in 1928 on how the students worldwide were playing important roles in shaping and strengthening national movements and he wanted the student community to come and join political struggles for the nation.

In many parts of the world, the youth are exercising their power and voice to address issues confronting them, their community and their society. Studies show that young people “yearn to be part of society and to be respected for their contributions” and in many cases “possess the desire to play an active role in improving their countries.”²

But the growing trend of youths in our country is that despite having blessed with abundance of power and grit in their capacity to lead, many of them are found meekly surrendered to blackmailing and caught in the anti-social nexus. Many youth become easy prey in the hands of communal and religious despots, thereby fanning terror and violence.

The condition is not very different in Manipur, one of the seven north-eastern states. Rich in culture and traditions, Manipur has seen anti-government movements over more than two decades. At least 50 per cent of the anti-government civilian movements in the state were the articulation of the civil societies comprising of youth. The immediate causalities of these movements are the poor peasants, laborer's

²(Yates and Youniss, 1999 in UNV, 2006)

and daily wagers who had been left idle and hungry due to frequent bandhs, blockades and violence. Extortion is a common feature in the state.

These instances represent a fragment of the fundamental problems facing the common people or otherwise a manifestation of the ruthless attitudes which is the characteristics of the youth of the modern Manipuri society. Perhaps it is the repercussion of an erratic social structure due to so many social and political misgivings, which have played a significant role in making the youth develop a tendency to be arrogant and frustrated.

Figures indicate that in many parts of the world young people are still not seen as legitimate role players in community decision making and participation. This is evident in the low profile of youth and the absence of youth-responsive policies in the public policy landscape of many countries. It means that societies miss out on the inherent creativity, inspiration and vision of young people for a better future.³

Moreover, in the case of young women or youth from marginalized groups, such as migrants or people living with disabilities, the effects of exclusion are profound.

Social integration is therefore critical to building the resilience of young people and supporting their life transitions from school to productive adulthood. It empowers young people to function as partners of policy makers and programme managers, and to contribute meaningfully to achieving development goals such as the SDGs.

At the same time, it is most likely that these angry young men have the right potential to emanate their powerful energy for the good of any society or otherwise use it as a tool for destruction. In other words, either youth force is like a double-edged sword that can be functional for the good or the worst, perhaps a product of the societal misconception gradually developed during the last two decades.

³Youth Volunteering, social integration and decent work: Inspiring Leadership – United Nations Volunteers. Retrieved on 15 June 2013 from <http://www.unv.org/en/news-resources/resources/on-volunteerism/doc/youth-volunteering-social-integration.html>

It is well known about the contributions of the youth in the field of culture, games and sports of the nation. It was like a dream fulfilled what Manipuri boys and girls had displayed in the last XIX Common Wealth Games in India and the London Olympics.

The challenge, however, is how the same youth force shall be engaged for the service in peace volunteering. Two critical questions might arise – the first being why ‘peace’ is failing and secondly, what are the issues preventing us from having a ‘peaceful existence?’

One may recall the great ancient sage and philosopher Chanakya who cited in his *Rajniya Sastra*, “One should not stay where the five do not exist: means of livelihood, security, sense of shame, courtesy and philanthropy II101II⁴.

Renowned Tamil poet Avvaiyar said: “When one is poor and unable to get his food, he loses everything, i.e. self-respect, nobility of his birth, education, liberal nature, wisdom, ability to donate, to pursue his aims, excellence, diligence and love” (Nalvazhi 26).

The principle of co-existence or ‘Sadvabana’ would be the first choice of anyone who decides to give peace a chance in our society. Virtually, it is like the preliminary proceeding to a ‘Mahayagna’ and for which a congenial environment with public support is needed to lay the foundation where people can exist without caste, colour and class prejudices.

Equally important is to bridge the gap between the have and the have-nots. Poverty reduction will require a multi-pronged and creative approach. First, we need to invest resources to motivate and train young people because we need real leadership at the village level with development activists and human rights defenders. We have a huge youth population across Manipur and we have to channelise their energy towards addressing deprivation, corruption and poverty reduction. We just need to provide help and facilitate this process. Second, we need to create a powerful mechanism at the bottom that brings together elected representatives, government

officials and the voluntary bodies into a task force with mutual accountability and checks and balances to deliver on promises to the people.

Also, the multi-dimensionality of human well-being needs to be fully acknowledged because it may constitute the basis for the definition of goals and targets. The post-2015 goals should be based on principles of equity, sustainability and human security and address key contemporary challenges such as climate change, inclusive economic development, peace and security, decent employment. The model of destructive development has not only been environmentally unsound but also has exacerbated inequity, political and civil unrest and threatened the sovereignty of nation-states forcing the youth to adopt destructive methods.⁵

It was Dr S Radhakrishnan who observed: “In the progress of societies three stages are marked, the first where the law of jungle prevails where we have violence and selfishness; the second where we have rule of law and impartial justice with courts, police and prisons and the third, where we have non-violence and unselfishness where love and law are one’.

The third is the ideal launch pad for the initiative towards peace, though it appears to be too saintly and a dream-like fantasy against the backdrop of a chaotic and restless modern society. But, a situation as such, or nearest to it will be a key point to everyone who choose for a peaceful civilized nation and for which many individuals or group of individuals whose mind is absolute, self-contained, free from inhuman instinct, who have the capacity to build a welfare society is a must.

It is equally necessary to create an atmosphere for dialogue with the anti-forces, as this would in the end enliven the task for peace keeping because, greater evils are needed to destroy the lesser evils.

In the context of Manipur, the rigorous exercises of the security forces, right groups, women activists including Meira Paibeas, civil societies, Gandhian peace workers and other non-government

⁴Subramanian, V. K. (1996). *Maxims of Chanakya*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi

⁵Shaping Our Shared Future Beyond 2015 – Perspectives from the Global South. Retrieved on 18 June 2013 from [http://www.wadanatodo.net/download/Reports/Post2015/Shaping Our Shared Future Beyond 2015 Perspectives from the Global South.pdf](http://www.wadanatodo.net/download/Reports/Post2015/Shaping%20Our%20Shared%20Future%20Beyond%202015%20Perspectives%20from%20the%20Global%20South.pdf)

organizations for the last many years are all mixed up only to worsen the situation. The momentum of the intra-factional conflicts is escalating and the problems are multiplying. Democracy is throttled in such a condition that there is none to respond to the cries of the poor.

Insurgency in Manipur is the product of history, more due to misadventures and repressive policies of a ruler who had misread the public sentiments at a time when the youth were in a transitory period and thereby became remorseful with sense of vengeance consequently to Manipur's merger to India on 15 October 1949.

The aborted revolt of Hijam Irawat during 1950s was another cause to reckon. The first salvo of revolutionary was fired in 1953 under the name 'Manipur Revolutionary Party (MRNP)', which drew good public support, though not widely published. In many areas of the hills and valley, people came out openly protesting to end the politics and violence of gun culture and exchange of verbal abuses among insurgent groups. But these initiatives were completely ignored by the Government as well as the civil society resulting in unrest and a chaotic environment.

The Nagas and Nagalim is another cause of peace disruption following demand of Integration of Naga inhabited areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Myanmar by the NSCN (IM) taking advantage of the Naga Peace talks with the Union Government, despite strong protest by Manipur. The Government of India also rejected the Nagalim demand as stated by the Union Home Secretary in his media briefing at New Delhi during Muivah's home coming imbroglio. But the Naga leaders stuck to the demands with spurt of violent campaigns targeting the valley of Manipur.⁶

Another dubious record is that, the Nagas and the Kukis are at loggerheads in a sinister design to grab each other's land. The Kukis were on the defensive when the Nagas, masterminded by NSCN (IM), attacked them to wipe out from their villages. It was

⁶The tribal groups of Nagaland have been demanding for separate statehood. The demand is considered to be a setback for the outfits like NSCN (IM), which is now engaged in peace negotiations with the government after leading a six-decade-long bloody insurgency movement.

the worst Naga-Kuki clash ever seen in recent years. The fight was over, but the stigma of the gruesome arson, looting, and killing on both sides haunts the memory of hundreds, licking their wound.⁷

The present state in Manipur is promoting sectarian groups on communal line, which has taken over the whole concept of sub nationalism. This has aggravated the difference between the hills and valleys, contrary to the past heritage of a strong bond of unity and love that existed.

There is a need for peace in the state of Manipur. This is not only because of her geo-political, economic and cultural interests, but also for the unity of the multi-ethnic communities nestling in her bosom. Restoring peace in fulfillment of the hope and aspirations of the people, therefore, lies in the hands of the youth and their contribution towards development of an atmosphere of amity and coherence. There is a need to foster a culture of volunteerism amongst the young community, since it is through their undaunted will power, they can transform mindsets and bring in a culture of peace, which has long been forgotten by the warring factions in Manipur.

The growth of inequality and ever-expanding gaps between diverse tribal communities and valley-dwellers should be mended permanently to prevent further backlashes. They must act to see that no one is allowed to destroy efforts of peace by taking advantage of the false propaganda mechanism as a means for their (political) gains. It is equally important to keep peace and integrity above every other thing without interference.

Mahatma Gandhi said that in the field of politics, in the spiritual, moral sphere, the strategy of social

⁷The ethnic conflict in Nagaland, in northeastern India, is an ongoing conflict fought between the Nagas and the Manipuri Nagas (Tangkhuks, thangal, etc). Initially it started in Manipur between the Tangkhuks, (who wanted to overthrow/drive away the Kukis living in Ukhrul district of Manipur) and Kukis in Manipur. The various groups involved in this conflict include, among others, several rebel groups, the "National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah)" aiming for a Christian religious state based on Maoism, the "National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang)", aiming to establish an independent "greater Nagaland", and the "Naga National Council (Adino)". The first insurgencies occurred in the early 1950s. They subsided gradually or were repressed in the early 1980s. In 1993, violence erupted again between the Nagas and the Kukis. (Source http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_conflict_in_Nagaland).

solidarity means the rejection of confrontational ideologies and the adoption of ethics of sustainable development of the basics of tradition of humanistic values, collectivism, mutual aid and labour self-rule.

As far as the growing unrest in Manipur is concerned, these words of Gandhi find their rightful place in giving direction to the youth for peace and volunteering.

True volunteering requires a strong will power, determination and enduring capacity to play an effective role in combating the socio-political barbarities in any society. Gandhi suggested seven useful measures as means to build up the character of youths. He called them as 'Social Sins' and cautioned the youths to be aware of it. He wrote: *Politics without principles, Pleasure without Conscience, Commerce without Morality, Knowledge without Character, Science without humanity, Wealth without work and Worship without sacrifice*.⁸

To bring peace, the demand of the situation is a responsive government, truly, serious committed and ready to listen to the grievances of the people and also to stop the atrocities, so that tension and mistrust among common people can be reduced. The youth should be given a chance to regain their self-confidence. Employment opportunities must be created for them.

According to the Draft Report of the 'Peace Progress and Prosperity in the North East Region: Vision 2020' produced by the Ministry for Development of North East Region (DONOR), the problem in the North East is because of weak governance. It is, therefore urgently needed that the State and the policy makers act to bring change in the administration so that a new hope with positive vision is created and the young community be made stakeholders in governance and decision-making processes.

⁸Young India, 1925.

The problems of young women and men, as well as their vision and aspirations, are an essential element of the challenges facing today's societies and future generations. In all parts of the world, young people, living in countries at different stages of development and in different socio-economic situations, aspire to live full lives in their societies. Certain elements would help in this process, such as ensuring education, access to employment opportunities, adequate food and nutrition, a physical and social environment that promotes good health and protection from disease, enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, participation in decision-making processes, and access to cultural, recreational and sports activities. Young people represent agents, beneficiaries and victims of such changes, which will inevitably affect them into the next century.

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