

**YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IN
SRI LANKA, “UNDERGRADUATES’ PERSPECTIVE”**

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ABSTRACT

The area of this research is the democratic process in Sri Lanka. The objective was to find out how Sri Lankan youth were treated in the process. Since the research topic covers a vast area it was narrowed down and restricted to Sri Lankan undergraduates. Accordingly an effort was made to find out how the university students feel about the youth participation in the democratic process in Sri Lanka. Therefore findings of the research are from Primary Data obtained from some undergraduates of the University of Colombo and University of Kelaniya, and also from Secondary Data obtained from some relevant scholarly articles.

The purpose of this research was to probe in to the question whether the authorities in the past have attempted to involve youth as partners in the democratic process. Sri Lanka has a reputation for its political rhetoric and being tokenistic on issues of this nature. Further, there have been two youth insurrections and a separatist movement which wasted an enormous amount of resources and time which could have been directed towards the development of the country. Had youth in Sri Lanka had the opportunity of participating in the democratic process the above large scale destruction could have been avoided.

The findings were based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained by the researcher from the individual interviews and focus group discussions. For this purpose interview Guidelines with appropriate study areas aptly framed were used to find out up to what an extent the present day undergraduates are enjoying democracy in Sri Lanka. Secondary data was found from relevant scholarly work. The guidelines were such the findings of the research were obtained from two aspects namely political and Social. Majority of them mentioned that their economic status of their families do not permit them to come forward to get in to the electoral process particularly under the present electoral system which demands colossal sums of funds to carry-out a campaign. Further, greater part of the undergraduates was of the view that the present day youth do not experience media freedom. The rest of them say that there is media freedom to a little or certain extent.

Concerning the disturbances in the South, almost everyone was of the opinion that it was due to the wrong economic policies and mishandling of youth by past governments. Some of them criticized the extension of parliament by a referendum in 1983 thus side-tracking the youth and depriving them of political participation. Bulk of them said that the unemployment problem and unequal distribution of resources created a big gap in the income between rural and urban. In relation to the disturbances in the North and East; they didn't speak with racial feelings. Widely held view was that the governments in the past made various mistakes like implementing wrong language policy (Sinhala only act) and university entrance standardization etc. A few of them blamed the past Tamil politicians for instigating Tamil youth with racial feelings. About young women coming forward to take part in the electoral process; bulk of them were not convinced that the young women of present day will be allowed by the politicians to engage in political activities peacefully. They say that this is a male dominated society and particularly under the present system with full of intimidation and violence. Regarding freedom in the campus, half of the group gave negative answers which indicated that they do not enjoy democracy in the campus.

Concerning social mobility, the vast majority stated that it is a hard task to progress in the government sector without the support of the politicians. But they were positive that one can progress in the private sector on his/her merit. In relation to English education and social mobility in Sri Lanka; more than two thirds of the students expressed that they were underprivileged and at a disadvantage as they come from poor rural backgrounds who do not speak English in their homes. About greater investment for education in Sri Lanka, all undergraduates were of the opinion that government should increase its investment on education as they feel that they are deprived of many facilities that they should have been given.

This study to a great extent revealed that majority of the undergraduates who took part as respondents is not content with the status-quo of youth participation in the democratic process in Sri Lanka. It was also evident that the secondary data cited in the findings chapter were also supportive of the notions of the respondents of this research.