HAVE POLITICIANS SUCCEEDED IN EARNING RESPECT AMONG THE YOUTH IN SRI LANKA? PROBLEMS AND DYNAMICS

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Abstract

Sri Lanka has been practising representative democracy in which people receive an opportunity to elect the candidates nominated by registered political parties for parliament. In principle, these candidates represent the wishes of the voters. But recent experiences have proven that elected politicians are behaving against the mandate given by voters and also democratic principles, as a result of which there are many allegations against their improper behaviour. This paper attempts to ascertain the attitudes of youth towards politicians of the country. The trust of the voters in general, and youth in particular, is very vital for a healthy democratic system of a country. The past experiences provide concrete examples which explain the reaction of young people towards the failings of the political system of the country. The discussion will be based on a field study conducted by the author. The findings of the study show that the youth covered in the study are not satisfied with the behaviour of politicians. Their trust in politics is weakening steadily. There is a significant gap between the expectations of youth and practices of the politicians. According to sociological theories on political violence, such a context can lead to conflicts in society. Young persons are not satisfied with politicians, political parties and the political process of the country. They feel that politicians do not do justice to their positions since they take to politics as a "means to earn an income". However, the positive aspect of youth perception is that they still have a hope of creating "good" democracy in the country through socially acceptable democratic means.

Introduction

Young people are a vital element of any society. They are the present and the future of a society. In the past, we have seen how they have strived to change society through youth insurrections in 1971 and 1988-1989 in the south. Furthermore, the current "ethnic conflict" or the "terrorist movement" led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has a significant youth dimension. Whatever the causes that they struggle for, these movements emphasise the power and capacity of the young people of the country.

In the democratic system of Sri Lanka planted by the western nations, especially the British who ruled the country for over hundred years, people elect representatives to stand for the rights and needs of the public. This system is called Representative Democracy. The representatives were expected to abide by the mandate given by the people in terms of the policy and vision documents offered at the elections. Just before Independence, this system was introduced in parliamentary politics and was later introduced to the provincial government system as well. People expressed their preferences to their candidates by electing them to parliament or the representative institutions.

Today, politicians have created a situation in which they represent neither the people who voted for them nor the party from which they contested. They themselves decide what they should do, what view they should represent, and what plan they must approve. This is clearly evident in the recent mass crossovers and the justification given by the very politicians. Apparently, it is a very simple action but when one delves into it further and analyses it, one understands this is done against all norms and accepted standards of democratic practices. This paper tries to discuss the make-up of the attitude of youth towards the politicians of the country discussed under a broader study conducted by the author to find out attitudes of youth on democratic institutions of the country.

Research Background

Unlike Sri Lanka, most of the developed countries conduct youth surveys annually. The Shell Study in Germany is a good example. The inadequacy of research on political institutions in Sri Lanka has naturally limited our understanding of multifaceted behaviours in the political system and various socio-cultural-political tendencies. Nevertheless, it is shown by some studies conducted in the past that the youth of this country are not happy with the existing democratic institutions.

According to the National Youth Survey conducted by the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo, in which the writer also served as a national coordinator and trainer of research assistants, in the year 2000, it was apparent that a considerable percentage of youth favour communist/ socialist ideologies. Nearly 63 percent of youth favoured communist/ socialist ideology. In a way, it could be interpreted as a preference towards the political institutions of that ideology. They

preferred the politicians, and administrative methods of a leftist inclination.

The Thirteenth Shell Study has shown that German youth have lost their trust in the political hierarchy (Thomas 2000: 7-8). There is a remarkable similarity between the political behaviour of youth in Germany and in Sri Lanka, in that most of the Sri Lankan youth rejected politics and identified themselves with democratic institutions. The German study found out that "young people's distance from politics depended upon whether or not they believed they could cope with their future" (Thomas 2000: 7). The increasing negative attitude of youth was reflected in the low turnout of the young Germans at elections.

Chari (1994) discusses the process of institutionalising democracy in India concentrating on five areas-political leadership, political parties, parliament, bureaucracy and the electoral process. He notes how democracy is deteriorating in India. The main intention of the political parties is to get power and retain it by some means or the other. Further, he discusses the development of a corrupt nexus between politicians, criminal elements (smugglers, drug traffickers, arms dealers), pliable bureaucrats (Police, Customs and officers dealing with crimes), and crooked businessmen. He mentions how political leadership is prepared to get support from anyone as long as they can maximise the chances of winning. He discusses at length the institution of parliament. Just electing members of parliament does not assure the healthy functioning of that institution. Politicians should actively participate in decision-making; they have to participate in discussions and debates actively. Some of the members of parliament have not spoken for more than a few minutes in their entire five-year tenure (Chari 1994: 43-44). In discussing the electoral process, he highlights the use of monetary and muscular power in influencing voters, capturing and preventing voters in exercising their franchise.

The Literature Review

In a study of this nature, questions raised by Uyangoda (1992) provide some common sense to the researcher on the complexity of studying political behaviour of the youth. The questions posed by him with regard to the political dimension of youth unrest in Sri Lanka were;

Why is it that the youth political mobilisation has assumed a counter state character? What is the explanation of their intense hatred towards the existing state? Why is it that they treated the political

mainstream with disdain and formed a substream? What explains their choice as the primary means of achieving political objectives?

The existing dominant political hegemony considers those with different opinions and those thinking in line with pure democratic tradition as a threat to the privileges enjoyed by politicians. In general, most of the politicians in the ruling parties opt for suppression as a convenient method of countering those with different opinions rather than wasting time on how to enlist democracy and people's participation in creating good governance.

Political socialisation through family, schools, friends, and media play a vital role in forming attitudes in youth towards democratic institutions (De Silva 1988). For example, if a family is supporting the SLFP/ UNP/ or JVP, children in that family most often tend to favour that party. They become the main critics of the ruling party if it is not the party that they or their parents voted for. Most researches that have looked into the political behaviour of youth using sociological perspectives, feel that there is a need for proper political socialisation. Ratnapala (1981) points out that "the younger generation deserves an opportunity for training and experiencing before political power eventually comes their way". Lalith Athulathmudali, the late politician, stressed the fact that the youth of the country must be given political education and training on better democratic practices. Furthermore, Athulathmudali believed that youth must be able to take the responsibility with an intellectual grasp but not mechanically (1981: 33). He explained that young people were educated and that they are intellectually more mature than the youth of previous decades. Many years after Athulathmudali's death, we have more educated youth with a critical view of what is happening around them. But, the intellectual grasp and responsibility of youth have shown towards the development of democratic practices and good governance of the country have not reached a satisfactory level.

The concept of political culture is also important in this context. Gabriel A. Almond says, "every political system is embedded in a particular pattern of orientation to political action" (Pye 1965:7). According to him, this gives a meaning to the polity, discipline to institutions, and social relevance to individual acts in an operating political system. The concept of political culture suggests that the traditions of a society, the spirit of its public institutions, the passion and the collective reasoning of a citizenry, and the style and operating codes of its leaders are not just random products of historical experience

but fit together as a part of a meaningful whole and constitute an intelligible web of relations (Pye 1965:7). On the other hand, the political culture provides controlling guidelines (a) for effective political behaviour, and (b) for collectivity. Sidney Verba indicates in the last chapter of the book Political Culture and Political Development that political culture, "consists of the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which define the situation in which political action take place" (Pye 1965: 8). Political culture could be divided into two. They are mass and elite political culture.

The Sri Lankan situation can be understood in the light of the above theoretical explanation of political culture. The existing political culture can create negative or positive opinions among the people about democratic institutions or democratic principles. This common opinion created by the existing political culture will act as either a push or pull factor of a democratic institution. For example, in general, Sri Lankans believe that politicians are corrupt, and do not fulfil their obligations properly for instance, they ignore people after winning elections and so on. As a result of this established opinion, people who do not have firsthand experience or substantial evidence about politicians' behaviour also tend to believe that all politicians are corrupt. The rational way is not to believe anything without valid reasons. These dominant opinions are successful in preventing active participation of people, with skills, motivation and vision, in democratic institutions. In the absence of "accomplished" people, unsuitable candidates may be elected because the voters usually tend to select "the worse one among the worst". On the one hand, going further from the concept of political culture with regard to the Sri Lankan situation, the politicians misinterpret the democratic values and principles for their benefit. Today citizens believe that many politicians do not have a proper family life, that they are corrupt and that they bring undue influence on the bureaucracy. The majority of youth who can think rationally, irrespective of their ethnicity, criticise democratic institutions, and refrain from actively participating in politics as responsible citizens.

The J Curve theory of James J. Davis and the Relative Deprivation Theory of Ted Robert Gurr can be considered as major socio-psychological theories about political revolution. They point out that frustration plays a key role in a revolution. In addition to revolutions, frustration also leads to rebellion according to the political theorists. These theories have been used by writers like Samaranayake (2002) to analyse the JVP led insurrections on two occasions when they took the form of a revolt. If disillusionment about politics and democracy of the country continues to exit side by side, it would lead to a rebellious
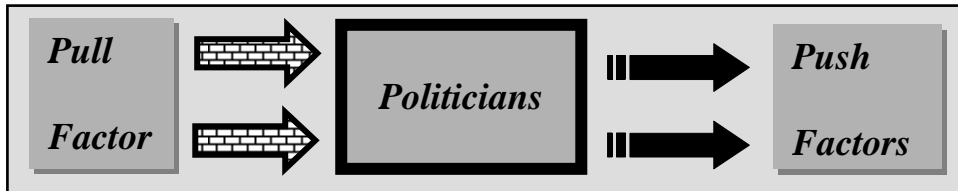
situation. Many campaigns of protest are persisting even now. Most of the slogans used at these protesting campaigns show the dissatisfaction of the people and their cynical attitude to democratic institutions. The writer does not suggest that the existing frustration about democratic institutions would create a revolution in the country. The youth have got used to the situation as a result of which tolerance has increased due to many reasons. However, these groups have revolutionary potential as ruling parties change with no real development visible in the country.

Hettige (2005) takes a critical view of politicians in the article Towards a People's Charter on Good Governance. He starts with a very interesting point: if we inquire from an average politician on his opinion on what politics is for, he would say it is for the betterment of the average citizen. But the conduct of the politicians does not show that they are behaving in a manner befitting the definition that they bear. He states that politicians use undemocratic means to come to power as a result of weaknesses of civil society. The divided nature of civil society has led the politicians to behave in a totalitarian manner. He suggests that the political process of the country should provide a framework for co-existence and solidarity among diverse groups and different strata in the society. By reaching a broader consensus in society, one can pressurise the politicians to practise good governance. Hettige introduces a few areas where consensus can be built. They are democratic values, discipline, law and order, public policy, social justice and equality of opportunity, institutions of good governance, and finally restrain in the use of violence. When Pareto put forward his Theory of Elite Circulation, he believed that the modern democratic system of politics could facilitate elite circulation in society. He might have meant that the ruling elite has to constantly reconstitute itself by absorbing new talents, while expelling mediocre and socially irresponsible members from its ranks at the same time (Hettige, 2005). But unfortunately this situation cannot be seen in Sri Lankan politics as a result of which youth are frustrated with politics of the country.

After carefully examining the above-mentioned literature, the author adapted the push and pull theory borrowed from the theory of migration to explain the political behaviour of the youth. The theory discusses two factors; push and pull. Firstly, there are some factors that attract youth towards politicians. For example, if there are "good" politicians who work genuinely for the development of a society without any corruption, people may vote for them, and get actively involved in politics at any cost. Secondly, there are some factors that push sensitive youth away from politicians. If politicians, political parties, people trusted at the elections turn out to be corrupt, not trustworthy and not

performing according to democratic principles, the very same voters would reject them and lose faith in the political process.

Figure 1.1 Push and Pull Factors

Politicians also adopt various tactics and political gimmicks in winning over the trust of voters by distorting information through controlling media, misinterpreting concepts, roles and functions. Failing this, politicians in power resort to the military and the police in controlling the opinion of the people.

Research Problem

Youth's trust in democracy has deteriorated rapidly over the past few years. As was described earlier, it is not a satisfactory tendency for any country. This discussion is based on a sub-question explored under a broader study conducted by the author with an intention to find out the nature of Sri Lankan youth's attitudes towards democratic institutions. Losing trust in democracy starts with rejecting politicians and political institutions, and finally losing trust in the entire system. Therefore, this paper attempts to discuss what the youth think about politicians.

Research Methodology

Against this background, a field research was conducted to ascertain the attitudes of youth towards politicians. The study was conducted in a few selected locations in twenty-two districts of the country from September 2004 to October 2005. Random sampling technique was used to conduct the survey. Unmarried persons who belonged to the age group 18-32 years were identified as youth for this study. The survey covered 692 persons through an interviewer-administered questionnaire, which was supplemented by 110 in-depth interviews.

What is the General Perception about Politicians?

According to the study, it appeared that most of youth do not respect politicians and do not trust them. Of the total number of respondents, 16.9 percent (117) answered affirmatively, 47 percent (325) negatively while 35.3 percent (244) revealed that they respect politicians "somewhat". Trusting someone "somewhat" shows that they did not have complete trust; still they have some suspicions. There are many terminologies which denotes "somewhat"; in Sinhala "tharamak" "tikak" and in Tamil "oralawu" or "konjam" are among them. These terms are used to show dissatisfaction as well. This is one of the contextual problems that Sri Lankan researchers have to necessarily face.

Cross tabulation of the attitudes of young persons based on ethnicity shows that youth of all three ethnic groups do not respect political leaders whom we have today: 42.1 percent of Sinhala, 59.2 percent of Tamil and 50.4 percent of Muslim youth have clearly pointed out that they do not respect any political leader. Young people are frustrated because politicians are not delivering the goods to the voters who extended the trust upon the politicians. Youth believe that the politicians tend to forget the voters once they are elected and behave as a species that exists in isolation. This will be elaborated further as the discussion develops.

Are Politicians of the Country Excessively Privileged?

Today, there is a discussion among the general public as well as scholars and researchers on abuse of power and excessive privileges of politicians. The voters have no quarrel about politicians having reasonable lifestyles, but not luxurious lifestyles, at the expense of the public. The current trend is "to enjoy all the comfort at the expenses of the public." The respondents were asked whether they think that politicians of the country are excessively privileged. Answering the question a majority of the respondents (92 percent) believed that the present politicians enjoy excessive facilities and privileges in the name of democracy. Males (92 percent) and females (91.8 percent) of all the educated categories and ethnic groups of the sample endorsed the above answer. Today people tend to think of a politics as an "easy livelihood". The citizens of the country should have access to politicians to communicate their problems. If this does not happen frustration would increase and the trust in the democratic process would be eroded. A considerable number (326) of young persons mentioned that they have

no way of contacting politicians. Young women explained how politicians are excessively privileged:

Each and every politician irrespective of his or her political party is excessively privileged. They steal facilities, donations allocated to- us the ordinary poor- without giving it to the people who deserve (24 year old woman, unemployed, Ampara).

Only 7 percent of the young people stated that the politicians are not enjoying that privilege while 1 percent of the respondents have not answered to the question.

Can Youth Communicate Their Needs to Politicians?

Among the total number of respondents, 52 percent accepted that they can communicate their needs to the politicians while 47 percent of them rejected it. Of the sample, 1 percent of the youth have not answered this question. Gender cross tabulation of the question shows that more females (56 percent) than males (49.1 percent) believe that they can communicate better with politicians. More Sinhalese (55.6 percent) stated that they are able to communicate their needs to politicians as opposed to Tamils (42.3 percent) and Muslims (50.4 percent). The major reason for this situation is that most of the politicians are Sinhalese and the key posts such as president, premier, and key ministers are all held by Sinhalese politicians while only a few positions are held by the representatives of other ethnic groups. This has relevance for the Tamils who opted for rebellion since the Sinhala leaders did not pay satisfactory attention to solve their various socio-economic problems. There is a negative relationship between the level of education and the ability to communicate needs to the politicians. When the education level goes up the young people believe that they cannot convey their needs to politicians. A slightly high percentage who have studied between year seven to eleven (yes 20 percent, no 16.6 percent) and passed G.C.E. O/L (yes 41.4 percent, no 39.3 percent) expressed that they can convey their needs to politicians. On the contrary, a significant percentage who have passed G.C.E. A/L (yes 26.4 percent, no 27 percent), and got university education (yes 9.7 percent, no 10.4 percent) mentioned that they could not communicate their needs to politicians or that politicians do not listen to them. This trend could be seen across gender and ethnic identification of the respondents. When the education level goes up, they tend to believe in a standard system through which they can get things done without pleading with anyone or using political awareness. The understanding of ideal politics is higher

at this level of education when compared to those who have lower educational background. This trend could be highlighted from a research finding. A youth from Kegalle explained his experience in meeting politicians as follows:

I went to meet a minister of UPFA government. There were a lot of people there to meet him. He normally gives an appointment to anyone who wants to meet him. He just listens to problems of those who come to meet him as if he is a dead body (24 year old businessman, Sinhala Buddhist, G.C.E. A/L passed).

The reasons as to why the young people cannot communicate their needs to politicians were investigated in the study. Among them were: "once they come into power they cease to be sensitive to the needs of voters" (28.9 percent), "distance between politicians and voters is high" (28.7 percent), "no (access) way to meet politicians/ high security" (29.6 percent), "politicians always listen to their party members only" (3.1 percent), "politicians always treat known faces and relatives only" (2.6 percent), "they give false promise/ cheat people" (5.7 percent). The general tendency of the Sri Lankan politician is to ignore all promises once they come into power and this is well proven even by the study. "They are always busy with work" (1.0 percent), "They discriminate against minorities" (0.4 percent). Of nearly 100 people met in Jaffna in October 2005, almost all of them described how Sinhala politicians gave them a lot of promises and broke them. As a result, young people started telling others not to vote in the presidential election in November 2005. Politicians try to keep people at a distance. After winning elections they get very strong security; their mobility with the people is highly limited, and soldiers aim guns at the very people who voted for these politicians, when these politicians address a meeting or when they travel. Once politicians get power, they tend to treat voters as his party people known as "mage minissu" (my people), "mage pakshe aya" (my party members), "mata udawu karapu aya" (my supporters). All the other party supporters are consider as "anit pette āēyo", "wiruddha wādeen", "anit pakshe āēyo". In addition to that there are some people well known to the politicians and they are considered as "known faces"; "danna aya", or "andunana aya". These factors solidify the distance between politicians and the people, hindering communication of people's needs to the politicians.

Do Elected Members Care for Needs of the Youth?

Young people were asked whether the elected members care about the needs of voters. In response, most (56.9 percent) believed that the politicians do not care for their needs while 15.2 percent of the respondents pointed out "yes"; 26 percent did not have any idea about this aspect while 1.9 percent did not respond to the question.

Gender-wise, more males (16.3 percent) than females (13.7 percent) believe that the politicians address their needs once they come into power. Both males and females equally believe that politicians do not solve problems of the people who vote for them once they come into power. Ethnic-wise, more Muslims (15.9 percent) and Tamils (23.2 percent) as opposed to the Sinhalese (12.4 percent) believe that the politicians address their needs once they come into power. On the other hand Tamils (38 percent) and Muslims (42.5 percent) have more uncertainties on whether the politicians fulfil their needs or not than the Sinhalese (17.8 percent). More Sinhala youth (68.6 percent) have clearly stated that the politicians do not address their needs after getting elected unlike Tamil (36.6 percent) and Muslim (37.2 percent) youths. Practically there are Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim politicians to represent views of the communities.

Have You Ever Contacted any Politician?

Many aspects of life from birth to death have been politicised in the Sri Lankan socio-political culture. A considerable percentage of youth have contacted politicians for various public and personal needs. The voters consider attendance of a known politician to a wedding or a funeral as a prestige. Of the respondents 230 (33 percent) young people have contacted politicians whereas 454 (66 percent) young people have never contacted any politician. In the meantime, 1 percent of the sample have not responded to this question. It is very difficult for an ordinary person to meet politicians today. Among the young people who have met politicians for various purposes, male (38.6 percent) participation is significantly higher than the female (25.9 percent) participation. Meeting politicians is considered an unpleasant chore because anyone who wants to meet a politician has to go through a local supporter of the party. Especially females are scared of meeting politicians individually and consider it as a starting point of other problems. Undesirable behaviour of some of the politicians has earned all of them a vile

reputation. This fear may have frightened away the women. On the other hand, most of the politicians in the country are males and that too reduces the women's chance of meeting politicians. It may be a part of a culture where free communication between male and female is blocked to some extent.

Ethnicity-wise shows that Sinhala (35.9 percent) youth met politicians more often than Tamil (29.6 percent) and Muslim (27.4 percent) youths. On the other hand, more Muslim (70.8 percent) and Tamil (66.9 percent) youths than Sinhala (63.8 percent) youth reported they never neither met nor expected politicians to fulfil their needs. Tamil and Muslim politicians are very few in the country and Sinhala youth have more options when compared with minority youth groups. This might have made it possible for Sinhala youth to meet their representatives more often. When education level increases, the meetings with politicians diminish significantly. Of the respondents, 32.6 percent with G.C.E. O/L, 29.6 percent with G.C.E. A/L pass and 12.6 percent degree holders met politicians. When the education level is high the possibility of getting a job and the empowerment of the person increases and it does not create a need to meet politicians. From those who met politicians, 32.3 percent believed it was successful, 48.2 percent expressed it was not successful, and 13.1 percent felt that they were cheated. Nearly 61.3 percent of young people wasted their time, money and effort and finally were frustrated. It shows that the majority of young people believe "going behind politicians" is a futile activity.

Do Members of the Prominent Families Represent Voters Well?

There is a notion in society that people coming from prominent families represent the views of the voters well, which was examined in the study. On the other hand, the chances are very rare for a person coming from grass root level to shine politically in the South Asian political arena. Generally people in South Asia expect their electoral candidate to be of a particular background of an established prestigious family of high class or caste. But, according to the study, nearly 89 percent of young people rejected the assumption of electing a leader from a prominent family. Yet, to establish a mechanism in which a person from grass root level can become a leader of the country requires a drastic attitudinal change. Against the above trend, a youth presented his idea as follows:

Deployment of thugs by those who have money, at election time can be avoided if we get candidates from prominent families. Prominent family members do not engage in mean work, they behave decently since they are high–born. When they come into politics we can have a more stable government unlike today. We have few elections within a very shorter period. They really disturb our normal lifestyle. No development activities take place. All these thugs come from ordinary families. Members hailing from prominent families behave decently and responsibly. They do not release terror. I would say the more we get politicians from the prominent families the less our troubles will be (30 year old, miner, studied up to G.C.E O/L, Sinhla Buddhist, Ratnapura).

Have You Ever Canvassed for any Politician?

It is very important to understand active political participation of young people. Therefore, respondents were asked whether they canvassed for any politician. Of the respondents 72 percent (498) mentioned that they never canvassed for any politician while 27 percent (186) canvassed for a politician. Furthermore, about 1.2 percent have not answered the question. Gender-wise, more men (78.5 percent) have canvassed for politicians than young women (21.5 percent) as expected. Out of 399 young men, 36.6 percent (146) have canvassed while 13.7 percent (40) of young women out of 293 have canvassed for a politician. When women canvass for politicians the society does not approve due to established socio-cultural beliefs. At the same time, women are targeted in election violence. More Sinhala (33 percent) youth have participated in canvassing for politicians than the Tamils (17.6 percent) and Muslims (15 percent). On the other hand, Tamil (81 percent) and Muslim (83.2 percent) youth have not participated in canvassing for any politician as Sinhala youth (66.1 percent). Since there are more Sinhala dominated political parties, Sinhalese have much more opportunity to get involved in politics. As regards education level, ones with higher education do not engage in canvassing. There are 36.6 percent with G.C.E. O/L pass, 25.8 percent with G.C.E. A/L pass and 9.7 percent with degree among the young who canvassed for politicians. Youth with higher education do not need to meet politicians since they are in a position to obtain employment in the public or private sector.

Would You Canvass for a Politician if You were Asked to?

It is clear that many young people did not wish to canvass for any politician. Is it that they did not get a request from politicians? They were asked whether they would support, or canvass for any politician if

they were requested. According to the research findings, most (78 percent of them) do not want to canvass or support any politician even if they are asked. Only 18 percent reported that they liked to support politicians, if they were requested to do so. These may be the ones who have already supported politicians. Some tend to resent politicians altogether. Among the respondents, 19.8 percent of young men and 15 percent of young women are ready to support politicians if they are invited. There are more males among those willing to canvass for politicians. Of the males 75.7 percent (302) and 82.6 percent (242) of females would not engage in politics or support politicians even if they were asked. Only a small number of Muslims (11.5 percent) compared with Tamils (14.1 percent) and Sinhalese (20.6 percent) ready to support politicians if they are asked. In general, Muslims (84.1 percent) and Tamils (83.1 percent) do not like to support politicians as the Sinhala (75.7 percent) youth.

Who are the Political Heroes of the Youth?

It is useful to identify the political heroes of today's youth. They would indirectly project their desires about politicians and politics through these political characters. Most of the adults mentioned "we had better politicians those days" etc., and it is interesting to see how young people got acquainted with these political characters. Many young people considered D.S. Senanayake (19.8 percent), R. Premadasa (18.3 percent), S.W.R.D. Bandaranayake (17.8 percent), Lalith Athulathmudali (4.6 percent), Sirimavo Bandaranayake (3.9 percent), Gamini Dissanayake (3.8 percent), C.W.W. Kannangara (2.8 percent), Wijaya Kumaratunga (2.6 percent), and N.M. Perera (2.4 percent) as their political heroes. They believe that these leaders were committed, and sacrificed a lot for the development of the country. And they believed that socio-economic development of the country took place when these leaders were ruling. Though the respondents have not seen most of the politicians whom they mentioned, nevertheless the political socialisation have played a significant role in their opinion formation. However, they seem to prefer committed, genuine, decent leaders with a vision to develop the country.

Are Most of the Members in the Government Honest?

Respondents commented on honesty of the members of the government. This is vital as the trust is developed according to their perception of the members. Among their responses, 3.2 percent (22) believe members in the government are honest, 45.5 percent (315)

assume only a few members are honest, 38.2 percent think members of the government are not honest, and 11.4 percent (79) indicated that they were unaware of the fact. They believe that most of the members in the government are not genuinely committed to the development of the country. Head and deputy head of the state, ministers, deputy ministers, members of parliament come under responsible members of the government. One described his idea about government leaders as follows:

All of them cheat people. They spent millions of public money. The only thing that they do is to try to protect their power (A 23 year old male, student, G.C.E. A/L qualified, Colombo).

Can We Approve of Monks Becoming Members of Parliament?

Buddhist monks coming into active politics in the last ten years can be considered as a turning point in Sri Lankan politics. Some of the Catholic priests of the country have given their blessings for Tamil politics especially in the north and the east, but they have not contested at parliamentary elections. Similarly Buddhist monks started taking an interest in active politics, apparently to protect the country and the religion from terrorism and to save the country from unnecessary international interference. In addition to that they endeavoured to create a peaceful society for Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims.

The large majority of young people (70 percent) do not like to see monks engaging in party politics. Furthermore, about 7 percent believed that the monks have cheated them while 19 percent of them justified and are happy about the monks becoming MPs. Another 4 percent of the total respondents have not answered this question. A significant percentage stated that the only politics Bikkhus have is to create a calm and peaceful society. They believe that Buddhist monks do not uphold the character of an actual Buddhist monk by engaging in politics. More females than males have disapproved of Bhikkhus' participation in politics due to cross tabulated data within gender. Ethnic-wise, Tamils (78.2 percent) reject the Bhikkhus political involvement than Sinhala (71.9 percent) and Muslim (55.8 percent) youth. Youth of all education levels have disapproved political involvement of Buddhist monks. They pointed out multiple reasons for and against monks' becoming members of parliament. Those who approved of Buddhists monks contesting at the parliamentary elections pointed out multiple reasons for their stance. Among them were that they were genuinely committed to the development of the country (2.5 percent), responsible (2.9 percent), honest, educated, trustworthy (3.2 percent). Their approach was totally

democratic and being disciples of the Buddha abhorred violence (5 percent). Yet another reason given was that they could protect rights of the Sinhala Buddhists (2.3 percent). They feel it as their traditional duty and their right (2.3 percent). They were also very hopeful that the monks would create a peaceful society by solving the ethnic conflict (0.6 percent). Many stressed the need of creating reliable, honest leaders. A significant percentage of youth believed that a Buddhist monk had a democratic orientation based on the religious training that they received.

On the contrary, those who opposed the monks' entry into political wilderness gave reasons such as Bhikkhus losing their respect or rather the people not respecting the Sanga (26.7 percent), there is no need for monks to enter into politics (21.8 percent) to serve the country since there were other ways of doing so. Yet others felt that it was not fit for monks, as politics is located outside the purview of Buddhist doctrine. Their goal being supra-mundane (24.8 percent), they could serve the people by creating a peaceful, better society, while remaining in robes (1.9 percent), it is not fit for learned monks to go and hob nob with undisciplined politicians (1.2 percent), it will create religious, ethnic clashes and finally this measure would create factions in the Sanga. Those who believed that monks cheated them expressed that politics did not come under the purview of a monk, and that monks were only concerned with their own comfort as they were unable to adhere to proper and decent policy. All these imply that the young are truly interested in a secular democracy.

What Do Youth Expect from a Good Politician?

Respondents mentioned qualities that they expect from a good politician. Each respondent was asked to give three qualities that he/she liked most. The qualities that they consider in selecting a candidate at an election are; honesty, genuineness, trustworthiness (27.7 percent), ability to take proper decisions boldly (19.8 percent), responsibility and commitment (11.4 percent), a sound education (8.7 percent), his or her own vision/ plan/ capabilities (6.6 percent), approachability (6.1 percent), keeping promises (7.5 percent), the service he or she has rendered so far (4 percent), policies of the candidates' party (2.7 percent), caring of all groups (ethnic & other) (2.5 percent), love for the country, religion, ethnic group (1.4 percent), refraining from thuggery (1.3 percent) and the economic capabilities/ wealth of the candidate (0.3 percent).

Today, the politicians seem to cheat people as a habit. They do not take decisions frankly and with transparency. They always think about the number of votes that they lose or gain before making decisions. The youth expect politicians to be leaders not mediocrities. According to them, many politicians have not taken steps to develop or solve the problems of the country. Instead they just pass the time, five or six years, by earning money and enjoying fringe benefits. Politics has become a hobby and a way of life for most of the politicians in both Rightist and Leftist parties. No one likes to have a thug as one's leader. They should be intelligent enough to understand problems of the people and give practical solutions. We as a country have been dragging the ethnic conflict for more than three decades since we do not have committed leaders to solve it. Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and the other minority groups have to undergo many difficulties and hardships as neither they themselves nor we create good, strong leaders with a vision. It is very difficult to meet a politician for an ordinary person. If he or she wants to meet a political leader, he/she has to go behind "henchmen" sacrificing a lot of time and money. Young people mentioned; "politicians and their supporters come begging for votes before the election but once they get power all they do is support only a few friends and family".

What is Your Opinion about the Way that Politicians Behave in Parliament?

The general public is very critical about the way politicians behave in Parliament. 79.5 percent do not approve of the way politicians behave in Parliament, while only 4.3 percent of respondents approved of their behaviour. 13.4 percent were indifferent about the politicians' behaviour in Parliament while 2.7 percent of them did not answer the question. There is a wide gap between the two answers: those who agreed and disagreed with the manner the MPs behaved in Parliament. Whenever there is an argument, they tend to behave as children. They sometimes assault each other, and they have a habit of using un-parliamentary language not setting an example to their followers. The future politicians also will take the cue from the current MPs since there is no way to check their unseemly behaviour. 9.2 percent of respondents revealed that they like the way JVP politicians behave in Parliament. A young Muslim lady presented her views about politicians' behaviour in the parliament:

They are supposed to be role models for the people. But they behave in the most unruly and indecent manner (A 19 year old woman, teacher, G.C.E. O/L/ Kandy).

Are Politicians Responsible for the Increasing Criminal Activities in the Country?

Crime is considered as one of the main social problems by the youth. In the recent past, people have started discussing the close relationship between politicians and the so-called "underworld" gangs. They commit any crime under the protection of political power. In highly competing party politics, power-hungry politicians exploit these gangs. Answering the question; "Some say there is a relationship between politicians and underworld gangs. Are you agreeing with this statement or not?" 87.2 percent believe that there is a relationship between these two groups, while 4.6 percent rejected it. Within the ethnic groups 95.2 percent of Sinhalese 2.5 percent of Tamils, 74.3 percent of Muslims believe there is a nexus between politicians and thugs. In addition to the ethnic groups, both male and female equally believed that the above statement represent the local realities.

Should Politicians of the Country Hold the Responsibility for the Collapse of Government Institutions?

A significant percentage of youth were of the opinion that government institutions are corrupt and they do not get a satisfactory service from them. One respondent declared:

All the government institutions are corrupt. We have to wait a long time to get a service. If we want to get anything done, we have to bribe all the officers starting from the peon to the boss (A 23 year old man, computer operator, G.C.E. A/L passed, Galle).

65 percent mentioned that politicians are directly responsible, and 20 percent stated that they are partially responsible for creating this pathetic situation in government institutions. According to the cross tabulated data within gender, 66.2 percent males, 63.1 percent of females point their finger at the unethical behaviour of the politicians in government institutions. Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim youth too accepted the response of the majority. Of the respondents, 56.8 percent (393) believe government institutions are fully politicised and 26.4 percent (183) of respondents think government institutions are partially politicised. A Kurunegala resident gave his idea as follows:

Politicians are directly responsible for the corruption of the government institutions. They do a lot of illegal business jointly with top

officials. Officials too do not have a strong backbone to oppose unacceptable suggestions and unauthorised demands of the politicians. Expecting a promotion, officers too support whatever the unethical requests of the politicians (A 29 year old young man, G.C.E. A/L qualified, employed, Kurunegala).

Do you have Trust in Politicians?

Parliament, provincial councils, local government, urban and municipal councils are considered as vital decision making and implementation bodies of the country. The perception of the young towards the politicians in these institutions is critical in a discussion of good governance and democracy of the country. According to the research findings, there is little trust in the politicians in all these institutions. The "trust" in politicians in above institutions is between 10 percent and 12.5 percent. "Somewhat" trust is between 31 percent and 36 percent. The highest "somewhat" trust is shown with regard to the Members of Parliament. Respondents between 42 percent and 46 percent have shown dissatisfaction about politicians in the above layers. As a whole, young persons are inclined to reject almost all politicians. This would increase if we add at least half of those who showed "somewhat" trust to the negative sample. This category is more prone to negative attitude towards politicians as it is observed during the period of study.

Summary

Attitudes of youth play a crucial role in society. The study revealed that their attitudes towards the politicians of various levels of the country are not that positive. The study findings have clearly shown that the principles of representative democracy are hampered by the elected politicians, which have led to the loss of trust of people, in general, and youth in particular, towards politicians. According to the findings of the study, politicians have failed in winning the trust of youth. This is a very serious situation we encounter today in the democratic process of the country, to which the authorities concerned should pay urgent attention. In comparing research findings with the recent political realities, it was obvious that the situation seems to move from bad to worse. The initiatives to arrest this situation can emerge from a determined person or a party with a broader vision and mission. But given the socio-political realities, this may be not realised in the near future as there is no vibrant democratic and political culture in the country. This situation may lead people, in general, and youth in

particular, to release their grievances in various forms such as crime, malpractices, and finally rebellious and conflict situations. Furthermore, the existing socio-cultural-political context of the country indicates that future generations are likely to be left with a legacy of frustration and aggression. But, it is significant to note that the youth are inclined to create good governance through the accepted democratic means.

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