

What Young India actually wants?

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Community Youth Collective has galvanised youth into preparing a 'unmanifesto' to be presented to political parties ahead of the 2014 general elections.

One of the easily forgotten themes of debates that have surrounded the upcoming elections is the lack of youth participation and absence of genuine representatives in Parliament.

Indian history has witnessed many young people leading the country towards independence; both Gandhi and Nehru became politically active at a young age.

However, over the last few decades, our enthusiasm seems to have been muted, arguably due to deep-rooted corruption and government insensitivity towards various social issues.

Although it is true that the biggest success of our democracy is attributed to its representative character, the striking absence of the youth in the political arena has been largely overlooked.

A youth representation (age group 25-40 years) of only 6.3 per cent in the current Lok Sabha, even though 50 per cent of the population lies in that age bracket, can't be called parliamentary presence? Can it? What is it that "Young India" actually wants?

As a part of an endeavour to create spaces for youth where they can engage in politics all the year round in every twist and turn of the political story and not just on voting day, an event titled, My Space; My Unmanifesto was held on August 19 at Vishwa Yuva Kendra, New Delhi. We've all heard of 'manifesto' but what is an 'unmanifesto'?

"Just like Humpty Dumpty's un-birthdays in Alice and Wonderland, which are celebrated throughout the year except on the day of the birthday, we want young people to participate in democracy all year around, not just on the day of the elections and create a participative democracy rather than a representative one," says Arjun Shekhar, Founder, Community Youth Collective (CYC).

CYC along with around 26 other national youth organisations galvanised the youth online, and on the ground, into preparing 'Unmanifesto', the manifesto of the youth, to be presented to the political parties ahead of the 2014 general elections. Through workshops and online dialogues that were initiated in another event in February, 2013, they successfully collected thousands of young voices, wherein young people have spoken clearly and emphatically about what they would like political parties to promise in the coming Delhi elections and next year in the Lok Sabha elections, if they want to secure their votes.

Besides the 5,000 promises collected (on ground and online), there were about 600 young people present at the event to add to the list. An interim list of the top ten wishes of youth was presented to parliamentarians — Meenakshi Natrajan, MP, Congress, and Manvendra Singh, BJP.

Along with Amitabh Behar, ED, National Foundation for India, who moderated the panel discussion, the parliamentarians were engaged in a deep dialogue with young people who were a part of this

campaign. "This process is not to do away with political parties. We have to collaborate with them and they are not our enemies," Amitabh said.

Though there is a palpable sense of frustration about government inaction, young people who strongly believe that the only yardstick for participation cannot be representation alone thronged the venue. For them it's not about who gets elected and how, but about actions that are taken on behalf of the people and for the people. It is as if they instinctively understand that their elected representatives have no major role to play, other than smiling through billboards that greet us on festivals. "Mandate 35 per cent reservation of youth in legislative assemblies and cabinet equivalent bodies along with 33 per cent reservation for women," said Dibya Ranjan Mishra, who presented the young people's manifesto to Mr. Manvendra Singh.

Access to education

One of the highest voted promises that young people seek from their leaders is that integrated India gets educated for a better and brighter future.

One of the strong demands that featured high on young India's list is the allocation of 5 per cent of GDP on education.

Further, they feel that vocational training, strengthening life skills and job placement should be mandatory in every institute for higher education. Initiating an 'Employment Guarantee Scheme' that provides respectable work to young people right in their home towns is one of the suggested ways that can possibly transform 'big' dreams into reality.

On burning issues such as reforming our education system, the youth wish to voice their aspirations; they want to actively collaborate with the governing bodies to create better education facilities and a more student-friendly education system.

They also believe that reservation/quota should include financial criteria along with caste.

The MPs promised to carry these youth voices to their respective manifesto committees.

A strong advocate of youth leadership, Ms. Meenakshi Natrajan said, "I have learnt a lot from this process. And I approach such spaces with humility with an open mind. I feel development is about uplifting the last person in the line. Sometimes people think our connection is through problems — they demand and we solve these problems for them. But in reality I am not here to solve others' problems. I am a collaborator in a project in which you have to solve your own problems. The role of an MP is about legislation and not execution. I'll ensure that we have an interface between the youth and the manifesto committee."

Mr. Manvendra Singh agreed, "Some of these promises are familiar but others are new to me and have opened my eyes to some of the issues we should be focusing on."