

Exploring the Societal Aspirations of Youth in Himachal Pradesh, Bharat



Nivesh Sharma, Digvijoy Phukan

Abstract: This article draws from a research study conducted on domiciled youth of Himachal Pradesh. The objective of the study was to understand the social aspirations of youth in the state and their plans to contribute towards the society. Mixed method approach was used to fulfil the objectives of this study. The respondents selected for the study were youth who were between 20-25 years of age and were enrolled in professional courses in various Higher Education Institutions located in Himachal Pradesh. The respondents were selected using multistage non-probability purposive sampling technique. Primary data was gathered using a structured interview schedule from 280 respondents and Focused Group Discussions. The study found that the respondents were desirous of serving the society after getting employed. The major areas in which they wished to contribute after settling down in life were welfare of youth with problems, education, and welfare of Gaumata (cows of local breed). The study also found that though a majority of respondents were also keen to become community leaders, very few showed interest in participating in electoral politics.

Keywords: Youth; Aspiration; Professional Courses; Himachal Pradesh

I. INTRODUCTION

Youth are the most active and productive segment for any society; and the quantity and quality of this segment of population determines the ability and potential for growth of any country (Government of India, 2022, [1]). The term 'youth' is a fluid category and cannot be used for a fixed age group (Dubey, 2017, [2][20][21][22][23][24]). Further, the concept of youth is difficult to define as it covers a diverse set of population (Jones, 2009, [7]).

Further, the concept of youth is difficult to define as it covers a diverse set of population (Jones, 2009, [7]). It is a developmental stage and acts as a foundation where attitudes and behaviours are learned and maintained throughout life (Hazarika, 2021, [6]). The concept of youth has social as well as biological meanings because it is connected to both society and the biological state due to the fact that people develop within certain social frameworks and young people play specific roles within society (Spence, 2005, [18]).

The word 'youth' is used in everyday communication and meaning of this word changes according to space and time, sometimes referred to as a stage of development related to growth and sometimes as a socially irresponsible and impulsive stage (Mishra & Pathak, 2018, [11]).

Youth is a stage full of passion, energy, hope, openness to learn, creativity, and motivation (Sharad, 2020, [15]).

For the demographic point of view, youth is an important segment, and this segment plays a significant role in progress and change (Rakeshshrenu, 2023, [13]). Youth are essential for social and cultural transformations and also act as catalysts for economic growth (Thakur, 2023, [19]). Youth act as pillars in building any nation, and power lies in their hands to change the destiny of the country (Kachhal, 2017, [8]). In the context of the global economy, the hopes are on the young people to build a sustainable nation (GoI, 2017, [3]).

In Bharat, 356 million youths fall within the age group of 10-24 years, which is the highest in the world (Kollodge, 2014, [10]; GoI, 2017, [3]). According to the 2011 Census of Bharat, 27.5 per cent of the population is between the age group of 15-29 years. At present, every fifth person in Bharat falls into the age group of 10-19 years and every third person is in the age group of 10-24 years (Kollodge, 2014, [10]). One-fifth of the youth population of the world lives in Bharat (Sharma & Mehta, 2017, [16]). The National Youth Policy of 2014 defined any person in the age group 15-29 years as a youth and 27.3 per cent population of Bharat lies in this 15-29 years age group (GoI, 2022, [4]). This is a huge population with varying needs, aspirations, requirements, and problems (Sanghi, 2017, [14]). At the same time, it can be argued that due to the young population of Bharat, it can aspire to attain progress in several avenues as compared to the other countries which have a relatively older population (Kollodge, 2014, [10]). Development of any country is related to the aspirations of its youth. Aspiration means "a strong desire for something high or great that addresses both present and future perspectives" (Kaur, 2012, [9]). In normal practices all over the world, kids are taught to dream big, aim high, and beat the sky (Greenway & Frye, 2015, [5]). According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, aspirations are dreams, hopes, or ambitions to achieve a life goal. Aspirations are also described as long-term aims or objectives (Datu et al., 2018, [1]) and to do something in the future with the hope that they will motivate actions in the present (Quaglia and Cobb, 1996, [12]). Aspirations are directly related to the concept of hope, and this denotes the existence of goals as well as an approach to achieving them (Snyder et al., 1991, [17]). The aspirations of youth are diverse and are not limited to personal and career aspirations. Aspirations of youth can be sub-divided into the following major types - educational aspirations, career aspirations, financial aspirations, health-related aspirations, marital aspirations, family-related aspirations, and societal aspirations.

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The societal aspirations are those which are associated with the desires of the youth to contribute towards the community where he/she was born and grew-up.

The present study made an attempt to understand the societal aspirations of a particular group of youth i.e. those enrolled in professional courses in Himachal Pradesh. The study was focused on students enrolled in professional courses as they are most likely to enter into employment after completion of their course. The choice of locale of the study is also important as Himachal Pradesh (HP) is situated in Himalayan region of Northern Bharat and most areas are remote. The study assumes significance because exploring the societal aspirations of youth revealed whether this section of the society is willing to contribute towards the community and country; which played an important role in their upbringing. Presence of this type of aspiration among youth is very important for the progress of any society and more so in the context of developing countries like Bharat. Youth who are gainfully employment and successful in their career not only inspire the other youth in their community, they are also expected to directly contribute towards the welfare of their community. The study also identified the areas in which the youth wished to contribute. This is important for the policy makers and non-government organisations who are attempting to find solutions to the socio-economic problems of such remote areas of developing countries by adopting a multi-stakeholder approach.

A. Research Objectives

- (1) To prepare the socio-economic profile of the respondents;
- (2) To explore the aspirations of youth towards society;
- (3) To determine the factors influencing their societal aspirations.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Nature of Study & Research Design: The objectives of the study were fulfilled by adopting the mixed method approach. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected by the researcher. Descriptive research design was adopted as for this study. The conclusions were drawn from both quantitative and qualitative data.

B. Universe: The domiciled youth of Himachal Pradesh in the age group of 20-25 years and enrolled in professional courses at post-graduation level in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) located in the state.

C. Sampling Design: The respondents were selected by using multi-stage non-probability purposive sampling method. The details of the sampling design is as follows:

Stage I- Identification of HEIs in HP: A list of HEIs in Himachal Pradesh was prepared. There are 12 Government and 17 Private Universities. In this stage, 50 per cent of the institutions were selected from each category using purposively sampling technique. Hence, 06 Government universities and 08 (*after rounding off*) private universities were selected. A total of 14 HEIs were selected.

Stage II- Selection of Respondents: From each university 10 male and 10 female respondents were interviewed. A total of 280 (140 male and female) respondents who fulfilled the inclusion criteria were purposively selected and interviewed.

D. Method and Tool: Interview method was used to collect data to fulfill the objectives. Face to face interviews were conducted with the respondents using a structured interview schedule. One Focused Group Discussion (FGD)

as conducted in each HEI. Qualitative data was collected during FGDs using a FGD guideline.

E. Data Analysis: The quantitative data collected from the field was coded and entered in Microsoft Excel 2007. The data was tabulated and analysed. The qualitative data was transcribed, coded, and analysed along with the quantitative data.

III. RESULTS

A. Profile of the Respondents: 50 percent of the respondents were male and remaining 50 per cent were female. This is in accordance with the sampling plan. The age of all the respondents was between 20-25 years. Among the respondents, only 0.71 per cent was married which included one male and one female. 86.07 per cent of the respondents were from joint and the remaining 13.93 per cent were brought up in nuclear families. 73.93 per cent of the respondents resided in rural areas and 26.07 per cent were from urban areas. Majority of respondents, 98.58 per cent were studying in the third semester, while 1.42 per cent were in their fifth semester. More than fifty percent 63.58 per cent completed their graduation from government funded institution, 31.42 per cent attended private funded institution and 5.0 percent completed their graduation from semi-government institutes.

A little more than one fourth of the respondents 26.07 per cent had family monthly income below INR 50,000; the family income of more than half of the respondents (55.0 per cent) was between INR 50,000-1,00,000. 17.93 per cent respondents reported that their monthly family income was more than INR 1,00,000. 96.42 per cent of the respondents were not availing any type of scholarship only 3.58 per cent of the respondents had a scholarship. Table 1 shows the profile of respondents.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents

Characteristics	No. of Subjects (n=280)	(%)
Sex		
Male	140	50
Female	140	50
Marital Status		
Married	2	00.71
Unmarried	278	99.29
Type of Family		
Joint	241	86.07
Nuclear	39	13.93
Location of Permanent Address		
Rural	207	73.93
Urban	73	26.07
Semester-wise Distribution		
Third	276	98.58
Fifth	4	1.42
Last Institute Attended		
Government	178	63.58
Private	88	31.42
Semi-Government	14	05.00
Monthly Income		
Below INR 50,000	73	26.07
INR 50,000-1,00,000	154	55.00
INR 1,00,000-1,50,000	18	6.42
INR 1,50,000-2,00,000	13	4.70
Above 2,00,000	22	7.81
Availing Scholarship		
Yes	10	03.58
No	270	96.42



B. Societal Aspirations of the Respondents: The study found that all respondents were willing to contribute towards their community after they have settled down in their life. By ‘settling down’, the respondents meant finding a stable job in accordance with their educational qualification. Interestingly, few respondents asked the researchers, ‘*what is the point of asking whether one would like to contribute towards the society or not?*’ This was based on their understanding that every person is desirous of contributing towards the society and asking them whether they would like to contribute or not was an unnecessary question. The respondents who asked this question to the researchers were from rural areas. Interestingly, most respondents from rural areas considered it to be their duty to contribute towards their village and community. The respondents were asked to mention one initiative they would like to undertake in future for their community. The responses provided by the respondents are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents on the Basis of Plan for Community Initiative

Initiative	Frequency	Percent
Library	58	20.72
School	47	16.79
Sports Complex	37	13.21
Gaushala (Shelter for local breed cows)	35	12.5
Old Age Home	30	10.72
Combined Old Age Home, Orphanage, Gaushala	29	10.35
No Plan	28	10
Orphanage	16	5.71
Total	280	100

The responses provide an insight into the prevailing mindset among the youth of Himachal Pradesh regarding their aspirations to serve their own community. From their responses inferences can also be drawn about the prevailing socio-economic situation of their communities. As shown in Table 2, 20.72 per cent of respondents wanted to open a library to in their community; this was followed by 16.79 per cent of the respondents who were interested in starting a school. 13.21 per cent of the respondents were interested in opening a sports complex and 12.50 per cent of those who were interviewed for this study expressed their desire to start a *Gaushala*. Starting an old age home and orphanage was the response of 10.72 per cent and 5.71 per cent of the respondents respectively. Interestingly, 10.35 per cent of the respondents were keen to start a premise which provided joint space for stay of older adults and orphans; which also included a *Gaushala*. 10.00 per cent of the respondents reported that presently they had no specific plans to make contributions towards the community.

During the FGD an attempt was made to explore the motivation of the respondents for planning to undertake initiatives for their community in future. Most respondents stated that they are inspired by their family members who have undertaken some initiative or the other for the community. One respondent who was pursuing his Masters in Computer Applications stated that ‘*my grandfather donated his land and also built the school in the village, so that children are not required to cross the river and attend the school on the other side of the river bank. I would like to expand the school building and start a computer lab for the*

children in the village’. Similar statements about the contribution of their family members towards the village and its impact on their societal aspirations were also provided by other respondents. The societal aspirations were also influenced by the socio-economic problems observed by the respondents in their community. One student of Master of Business Administration stated that in the recent times old adults are facing a lot of issues after their children settle outside the village and rarely come back. This has motivated her to construct a home for older adults in the future. Several respondents were also motivated by their own life experiences. ‘*I like to read, but my village is very remote and we do not even get newspapers and periodicals. My father used to buy these for me and my sister whenever he travels to Kullu. I will start a library, so that those who are keen to read stuff other than the school textbooks are not deprived*’. It was also revealed during the FGDs that the respondents were of the opinion that by making a significant contribution towards their community, they will earn respect and make their family proud. FGDs provided the opportunity to the researchers to capture the various aspects associated with the research objectives. It was revealed that in addition to making a significant contribution towards their community, most FGD participants also expressed the desire to improve the community life. In this direction, the five major initiatives that the respondents wished to undertake were protection of environment, promotion of sustainable livelihoods in the Himalayan region, provision of counselling to youth including career counselling and measures to prevent youth from becoming victims of substance abuse, provision of skill training, improving income of farmers, horticulturalists, and crafts people, working for persons with disability, and provision of better secondary health care. Another major aspiration of the youth was to improve the *Mandir* (place of worship of Hindu-s) of their village *Devi or Devta* (Hindu Goddess and Gods). They firmly believed that their success in academics was on account of the blessings of the *Devi & Devta* and it is their duty to improve the facilities in the existing *Mandir*.

Most female participants were also keen to provide support to girls who wished to pursue higher studies, provide financial support at the time of the marriage of daughters whose parents are economically weak, and make girls aware about cyber security and advances of men you try to lure young girls by making false promises. Male respondents expressed their desire to start training facilities for youth who are interested to join the armed forces and sports facilities in their village. One respondent stated that she wanted to start a ‘*Sanskar Kendra*’ (Centre for inculcating Bharatiya values) for children as in the present times, values are getting eroded. Another student wanted to build a covered space in the local *Mandir* for people to perform ‘*Bhajan & Kirtan*’ (devotional songs) as it brings people together and helps gain a positive attitude towards life. An interesting response was that of a student pursuing Master of Social Work, who wanted to act as an agent for channelising the corporate funds towards welfare of people in his community.



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Few respondents, who at the time of interview, could not identify any specific initiative they would like to undertake for the welfare of their community, stated during the FGD that though they did not have specific plan, yet they would also do something for their community.

The respondents were asked if they were undertaking any steps related to their societal aspirations. 67.5 per cent of the respondents stated that they directly undertaking some efforts for the welfare of the society or are associated with organisations who are working for improving the socio-economic condition of people in their area. The students who are not taking such initiatives, and are neither associated with any organisation working for social causes cited constrains of time and money for their non-involvement. Direct involvement was mostly confined to provision of remedial coaching to the children from financial weaker sections and helping students prepare for various entrance examinations. Most of these respondents were associated with the social initiatives of educational institution where they are enrolled and with non-government organisations (NGOs). Such associations are based on the area of interest of the students and also sincerity with which the organisation is working. Few of them have also undertaken short-term internships with these organisations. As part of these organisations they have mostly undertaken activities related to awareness generation on issues like disaster mitigation, cyber security, environment protection, health and wellness, and road safety. Several respondents have also volunteered to collect relief material for disaster victims. It is worth mentioning that one student along with his friends are supporting the education of an orphan child every year since 2022 by collecting funds from their acquaintances who are settled abroad.

Societal aspirations are associated with community leadership. The study explored the aspirations of the respondents to assume the role of a community leader. 72.14 per cent of the respondents stated that they would like to take up such roles in the future and become change agents. Most of them were convinced that they were in a better position to inspire the community to overcome the socio-economic challenges. Few of them also had plans to start an organisation in this direction. Most of the respondents were aware of the fact that if they are employed in the private sector in location which are far away from their villages or towns, their involvement in the matters related to the community will be limited. They envisioned a role of motivator for themselves. Interestingly, one participant mentioned during the FGD that before someone thinks of becoming a change agent for the community, she/he should inculcate qualities of leadership and honesty within oneself, so that people will follow her/him. She quoted the famous line with a smile, '*be the change you wish to see in the world*'. The respondents were also asked if they would like to take part in electoral politics. Only a small percentage of respondents (13.9 per cent) expressed interest in participating in electoral politics. The bi-variate analysis of the answer to this question along with the answer to the previous question revealed that According to them, one can bring about significant changes when one acquires political power. They not only influence people in the local community but can also bring about legislative changes which have wider impact. The lack of desire to pursue electoral politics among the other

respondents stems from their dislike for electoral politics and the perception that a person has to be wealthy to be able to survive in the political arena.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

Analysis of the profile of the respondents show that most respondents fell in the income bracket of INR 50,000-1,00,000, lived in joint families in rural areas of Himachal Pradesh. This is as per the available Census 2011 data; according to which 89.97 per cent of the population of Himachal Pradesh resides in rural areas. This also reveals that strong family ties are still present among people residing in this region. It was found that contributing towards community and the sense of 'giving back' was prevalent among the respondents and this also highlights the connectivity of the youth with their community. Unlike the urban areas where people are residing in colonies where everyone is a stranger to each other, people in rural areas are more connected. Most families are connected to each other by a common ancestor and there are economic ties between families which are not related by blood. Even after leaving their village and being certain that they will have to migrate to other places of the state or country to earn their livelihood as professionals, the respondents were connected to their village community and retained the desire to work for its socio-economic upliftment. The choice made by the respondents regarding one significant community initiative they would like to undertake also provides scope for further interpretation. The keenness to implement initiatives on education (37.51 per cent) shows that in spite of high literacy rate of Himachal Pradesh (82.80 per cent), there is need for further investment in this direction. Improvement in literacy propels demand for books and other sources of information and the desire to open libraries is likely to be an indication of such demands from rural areas of Himachal Pradesh. Libraries can also serve as a place for discussion and intellectual engagement. The presence of additional resources are most likely to enable more children to take up higher studies and professional courses Indian Youth. The choice for investing in sports complex highlights the interest among youth for sports. Rural areas of Himachal Pradesh has produced several international and national sportspersons and this response is possibly linked to the understanding that good facilities for sports at local level will lead to more youth taking up sports as a career. The success of youth from Himachal Pradesh in professional leagues like Kabaddi and Cricket have also encouraged youth to look for new career avenues. Significant number of youth from Himachal Pradesh also join the armed forces. Sports activities are essential part of the training process and this may have also been the reason for this response. The initiatives taken by the Government of Bharat for promoting sports activities like Khelo India School Games, Khelo India Youth Games, Fit India and Khel Mahakumbh may have also played an important role in rekindling the interest among youth towards sports and wellness activities.



The response regarding the keenness to start and maintain *Gaushala* and old age homes throw light on the cultural aspects of the life of these youth. *Gau* (Local breed of cows) are referred to as ‘*mata*’ (mother). They are not just reared for milk and farming, but are worshipped across Bharat as creatures endowed with divine characteristics and are considered as family members. Strong cultural ties with this *Gaumata*, is the most likely reason for the expressing the desire to open sheds for them. The response pertaining to old age homes are most likely to be reflective of the changing situation of older adults in the region. With children moving out and settling down in places which are far away from the villages, older adults are left alone. Older adults find it difficult to adjust to the life in cities and prefer staying in their villages and in touch with their friends and relatives. Since, taking care of themselves and the house is difficult, the preference for staying in old age homes has increased.

Since no previous research has been conducted to collect statistical data pertaining to the interest of youth in Himachal Pradesh to join electoral politics, the findings of this study is not sufficient to conclude whether such interest has increased or waned in this group of population. This study provides a baseline for future studies. It was seen in the last elections in the state to elect panchayat representatives that many educated youth had contested the elections. The voters had elected many young people as their representatives. It is likely that in the near future more youth with professional expertise will also aspire to join electoral politics and work for the improving the condition of people.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study made an attempt to explore the societal aspirations of youth in the context of Himachal Pradesh. The choice of students enrolled in professional courses enabled the researchers to gain an understanding from the perspective of those youth who are being trained to enter the job market immediately after the completion of their course. Since most respondents were from rural areas and lived in joint families, this study captured the perspective of rural youth of Himachal Pradesh who had strong family ties. It can be concluded that youth from rural areas of Himachal Pradesh have a strong sense of belongingness towards their community. This can be utilised by the Government for the success of their community-led initiatives. The success of the recent Government scheme to provide nutritional support to the patients of tuberculosis by a local person is linked to this ‘sense of belongingness’.

The study showed that aspirations are an outcome of the interplay of several factors. The fulfillment of societal aspirations is contingent on the fulfillment of career aspirations, and these aspirations are in turn linked to the attainment of educational aspirations of the respondents during their period of study for the professional course. It is further revealed that environment plays an important role in shaping the aspirations of a youth. As seen in the case of the respondents, their preference for the activity they would like to undertake in future for the betterment of the community was dependent on their family and cultural values, and their life experiences. Youth is the future of any society and it is very important for them to have aspirations which are aligned

to the holistic development of the country. Since, this is the phase of life when a person is full of energy, it is possible that anti-social elements can infuse in their minds aspirations which will cause harm to other human beings. The instances of youth joining terror organisations and indulging in acts of violence is an example of such faulty aspirations. Hence, it can be concluded that children and youth should be nurtured in an environment in which they are motivated to aspire to attain goals which will be beneficial for everyone in the planet. The study underlines the important role of parents, teachers and of the entire community in this direction. Counselling services are only available to the youth who are facing some mental health related issue. The study highlights the need to provide counselling services to the youth where they can discuss their social aspirations.

This study provides the scope for undertaking another study in future to compare the societal aspirations of youth from rural and urban areas of Himachal Pradesh; in order to ascertain if such aspirations are similar for both the groups. Based on the study it is proposed that children from an early age should be told that after obtaining employment they must also contribute towards the community which nurtured them. There is a need for inclusion of chapters in school-level textbooks emphasising on this issue. School and youth social workers must reinforce this aspect, so that in this age of stiff competition and target-oriented life, this important aspect of human life is not lost. Government and Non-Government Organisations must also offer internship opportunities for the youth to make such social contributions. It is proposed that activities under Corporate Social Responsibility must involve the local youth so that they become closely associated with the initiative. An innovative intervention could be the establishment of an ‘aspiration bank’ where ideas for changes at the level of the community are collected from youth across the country and linked with potential funding agencies. The future of Bharat depends on the aspirations of its youth and hence utmost importance should be given to understand their aspirations, give them proper direction, and enable them to fulfill their aspirations.

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