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Impact of student politics on democracy

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ABSTRACT

Student politics provides a platform for students that allow them to raise their voices and concern over issues that affect their body as a whole, thereby encouraging the engagement in nation building process. Through student political organizations, students not just represent their rights and identities at a local level but also at a national level. Majorly, these political organizations consists of student members who are associated with student politics, often have background political connection and inclination towards politics mostly due to their parents, peer groups etc. Student activism has played an integral role in one of the most significant events in the history such as the movement of freedom, civil right etc. Even though there exists perceptions of student politics having a negative influence on the system, there are several shreds of evidence in the world that suggest that it drives agents of positive social and political change in many nations.

Keywords: Student Politics, Democracy, NGO, Government Institutions, Political Leaders, Primary Research, Secondary Research, Ministers, Autonomy, Rights, Opportunities, 21st-Century Skills, Student Unity, Education, Nation-Building, Opinions

1. INTRODUCTION

Politics refers to the involvement of more than party or group into actions that range from civic engagement to participation in mainstream politics. The justification for student politics revolves around as an engagement that allows attainment, preservation and protection of the rights that students hold and work towards common goals of student unity. Student politics therefore refers to the political involvement of students within their campuses during their tenure at educational institutions. Student politics provides a platform for students that allow them to raise their voices and concern over issues that affect their body as a whole, thereby encouraging the engagement in nation building process. Through student political organisations, students not just represent their rights and identities at a local level but also at a national level. Majorly, these political organisations consists of student members who are associated with student politics, often have background political connection and inclination towards politics mostly due to their parents, peer groups etc. Student activism has played an integral role in one of the most significant events in the history such as the movement of freedom, civil right etc. Even though there exists perceptions of student politics having a negative influence on the system, there are several evidences in the world that suggest that it drives agents of positive social and political change in many nations. For instance, in 1955 student unions acted as a backbone for the breakdown of Per-on Grasp in Argentina¹. It also played a major role in Hungarian revolution in 1956 etc. History revelations highlight events that clearly represent roles of student politics that caused undermining democracy rather than strengthening it . The students throughout history have never supported a particular ideology. Collective action is what drives them towards a democratic or anti-democratic ideology. For example- Mussolini received support from the students in young Fascist movement (Che-Guevara) held the supports of students for the communist Guerrilla movement in Latin American Nazi Students who supported Hitler². Therefore, student activism has been accounted as a key issue in the third world developing countries. The idea of effectiveness of student politics in making a democracy stronger in terms of social, political and economic factors , is therefore what kindled my interest and laid underpinning for my engagement activity.

2. DESCRIPTION OF ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY

The engagement activity dealt with delving deep into the intricacies of the role of student politics in strengthening democracy, within the purview of national level politics. Therefore, analysing various perspectives on the same that would help forge a global perspective and interpretation of the politics of both educational institutions and governmental organisations. Activities were held in Delhi NCR and entailed surveying and interviewing experts in an NGO that deals with promoting student politics in educational institutions. Since the activity provides primary understanding or insight into the factors associated that inspire social reform, it can be said to constitute the primary research. The research entailed details of the extent to which promotion of student politics is undertaken by educational institutions, the way student activism inculcates 21st century skills required, the process of development of political leaders of tomorrow, the prevalence of student politics and amenability of government institutions towards the same. In order to generate adequate data for analysis and evaluation to underpin the understanding of the topic, I

considered surveying 2 experts from different organisations and 15 members of the NGO I worked with. The expertise and experience held by the experts and diverse knowledge held by each member surveyed was what fuelled the decision of surveying them and led to detailed and analytical responses. The need for diversification of perspectives was taken into consideration as it provides a more realistic overview of role of student politics. This was evident by surveying those with not a very strong background in the subject. The experience garnered by associating myself with the NGO not just allowed to me to gain a deeper insight into the pros and cons of student politics but also provided me with opportunities to observe the responses of educational institutions towards the same.

3. ANALYSIS WITH REFERENCE TO THE POLITICAL REASON

In order to understand their intricacies of major aspects associated with the role of student politics in strengthening a democracy, following questions were asked in the survey that involved long and evaluative responses:

- To what extent do you think educational institutions of today promote student activism? ^[1]_[SEP]
- Do you think student activism instills 21st century skills within the students? If yes, then how? ^[1]_[SEP]
- How does student politics lead to development of political leaders of tomorrow? ^[1]_[SEP]
- Comment on the prevalence and trend of student politics in academic environments today? ^[1]_[SEP]
- How do you think does student politics influence academic pursuits of universities? ^[1]_[SEP]
- How amenable have the government institutions been towards student politics in India? ^[1]_[SEP]
- To what extent do you think has social media contributed to the promotion of student activism? ^[1]_[SEP]
- How successful do you think has student politics in educational institutions been in producing ^[1]_[SEP]robust political leaders? ^[1]_[SEP]

With the popularity of student politics increasing in the world, students are provided with opportunities to get engaged under different platforms for several socio-political ends. Considered imperative and salient from the eyes of the universities, universities charge a certain meagre of fees so that it gets utilised for different activities responsibly. Problems unravel themselves when one considers the bleaker side of the revelry. Student unions are blamed for demonstration of unrest, protest, revolt and for the downturn of regimes and a variety of violent behaviours in the campuses. Many mainstream political parties create their student wings in order to raise awareness and promote their political agendas in the campuses. “These actions are often considered acts of exploitation of student rights and adulterates the true purpose and meaning of student activism”. The student wings are frequently blamed for their outlandish actions that lead to unpalatable environments for academics. Student unions tend to have involvement in various academic based activities which causes them to often have meetings with the university administration to discuss the issues faced by the students. From solving accommodation issues associated with newcomers in guiding the students to understand the systems, student union does it all.

“Student unions usually have students with not a great background in academics. Students who fall under this category lead the union to figure out illegitimate actions that provide them with the clearance of examinations without attempting them”. This showcases the most basic form of corruption that comes as a price tag of such student unions. The level of corruption intensifies further to an extent that the student wings are accused of being involved by several malaise and ill- gotten activities ranging from illegitimately distributing the hostels to boycotting the papers to harassing faculty members and illicitly changing of textbooks. The prevalence of such activities in the student union is what fuels the spark of corruption within the students who become the politicians of the future and continue with the same unfair practices. “Students graduate often with lack of developmental attributes due to weak socialisation patterns.” Developing nations have more influence of student politics on national policies than developed nations. However, student activism renders students soft skills which are integral part of the 21st century skills. “By providing the students with the opportunity to voice their opinions and raise awareness about their campaigns, students tend to burnish their skills ranging from communication, collaboration to critical thinking which realistically speaking determines their chances of success in the future. “

With these skills instilled in university level education, students graduate with fully developed and well-rounded personalities that help them become successful political leaders of tomorrow. A prominent example is the story of Mr. Arun Jaitley, the Finance Minister of India who actively involved in political activities of Akhil Bhartiya

Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). His career as a student political leader stands an epitome for the development of a success political leader.

The political interests and participation of students vary in terms of developing and developed nations. Whilst colonialism was its peak, students from Africa and Asia played a big role in promotion of national sentiments and held multiple social movements that translated as intense changes in the developing world. For example- In Latin America, India, China etc. ‘Students from the developing countries of the world tend to employ Marxist and leftist approaches.’ In accordance with the sociological perspective, one can consider the fact that ideological motives play a significant role in student activism in particular. Many students in the union, don’t possess democratic attitude and therefore, they tend to stick with leftist politics in their universities or other educational institutions. Since there is a significant difference between the standards of educational institutions in developed and developing countries, student politics ultimately differs. What lays the difference between the student politics in developing countries and developed countries is the fact that higher education institutions in developed countries are situated next to metropolis and federal areas. This translates into greater opportunities coming in the way of students of developed countries that provide them with exposure of the political world. Another factor that differentiates the two is the combination of political and social forces in the society. Student organisations in countries undergoing development are often become the victim of outer politics by becoming exploited. Socio-economic conditions of campuses also are accountable for the development of student politics in the developing countries such as lack of facilities, scholarship, failure in administration etc. In several developing

countries, student unions are dealt ruthlessly by the authorities at power. Leaders of student organisation are expelled and even taken behind the bars in some cases, for example in the Jinnah Institution in 2013. Developing countries follow the collectivist cultural paradigm. People in these countries, have strong intimacy and extended family relations in which members of family adopt political, social and religious values in society. Family is the basic institution of society in which its members are voluntary attached to it. Especially, in developing countries students are member of family at large rather than member of society. Students adopt the political values, norms, and attitude of the family. It is a fact that students possess similar political behaviors and ideologies as their parents have, and students' activism is greatly affected by family politics, social class and religion. Students from lower class family are more inclined to join the left wing groups; on the other hand, students from upper class join right wing political groups.

'Social Media serves as powerful platform for exercising soft power and lays a challenge to the state authority and has its foundation built on paradigm shift and cultural influences.' It leads to the removal of barriers between identity and segregation on the basis of caste, nationality and gender that believe and support a common cause.

With several instances recorded where violence and intimidation were utilised to stifle voices against the ideologies supported by the student unions, the role of student politics tend to defeat the purpose of universities as a platform that encourages freedom of expression, exploration of varied perspectives and a place where learning constitutes the most integral aspect. 'Differences in views and beliefs ideally should be addressed via discussions with open mindedness.' However when considering the case of ABVP, it can discerned that the attitude of the ABVP is opposite. It believes that those not with them are against them or anti-national and therefore, their demeanour is simply unacceptable. It doesn't possess the right to silence those not with them as universities lay its foundation on reason and tolerance. Cases of silencing others, like these are termed as the act of political intrusion in universities. This has gained momentum in the past few decades and incentivised state government to intervene in universities keeping in mind the best interests of the society. Many political parties have turned many universities into its spheres of influence where students, employees and teachers became instruments for their political advantage. With speculations of independent voices in universities becoming a problem for the political leaders in the future, many of these voices were put to a stop. These factors led to a major decline of public universities in India. For example- Allahabad, Lucknow suffered the brunt from political parties. However, JNU and DU continue to stand as epitome for facilitation of student politics in universities in India even though they are slowly declining in quality.

It is significant for governments to discern that provision of resources to universities does not render them rights to exercise their control over them or influence their decision making. The interventions and rising political intrusions become the root cause of the absence of World-Class Universities. For example- Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Indian Institute of Management (IIM) etc. have been thriving rapidly as politics is kept out of their academic environments. Therefore, governments and political parties must withdraw from their roles of influencing decision making and stop turning universities into political battleground. Universities should therefore take a step towards reclaiming autonomy from political parties in power, which requires collective action from universities.

4. SYNTHESSES AND EVALUATION

This exploration does have both strengths and weakness associated with it. One of the major strengths is the portrayal of extensive analytical information that helps one delve deep into the role of student politics in strengthening the democracy. The credits for this goes to the extensive range of secondary and primary sources referred. However, one of the major shortcomings of it is that it doesn't focus on a specific geographic location or region rather gives the audience a holistic insight. This means that the outcome for different regions might differ to an extent to what is showcased.

5. CONCLUSION

Student politics even though comes with several opportunity costs ranging from lack of adequate education quality to chances of corruption, it certainly enables attainment, preservation and protection of the rights that students and unites and drives them toward a common goal of student unity. It provides opportunities to students to voice their opinions and thereby instills 21st century skills within them. However, for student politics to render best results for nation building, educational institutions must regain their autonomy in order to avoid intervention from political parties for their political benefits.

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