Unrest among Students in India

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Society, in which we live, is made of subjects and their interaction with each other. So is true of state composed of citizens. As more the subjects or citizens are enlightened, more the society or state will progress. In these groups of subjects, the most enlightened and still in the process of enlightened, is the section called 'Students', future of the Society. The word 'student' had been derived from the latin word 'studere' meaning 'to direct one's zeal at'. Hence a student can be described as lone 'who directs zeal at a subject or discipline'. As students are the future mental and physical force for state and society, if well organized, they can lead a nation to a progressive one else noxious. Whole society views its bright future in progressive and intelligent student section.

The contributions made by students in socio-economic and politico-cultural transformation have been praise worthy. Due to effective and easy communication and cooperation, student community can organize itself more quickly and is more volatile to collective action than other segments of society.[1] A many third world countries, including India, in their national struggle for freedom have secured, in student power, a close ally to National Freedom Movements. The part played by students in freedom movement in India, Indonesia, Latin American and west African countries; role accomplished in the integration of france, Italy; role performed in socialist movements in Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba and others; part carried out in civil right movements in America in instrumental way and in German nationalist movement of 1848 all are magnificent.[2] As a force for socio-political change "they have played considerable role in the overthrow of Person in Argentina in 1955, the downfall of Perez Jimenez in Venezula in 1985, the successful resistance to Diem in Vietnam in 1963, the massive riots against the Japan-Us security treaty in Japan in 1960 which forced the resignation of Kishi government, the anti Sukarno movement in Indonesia in 1966, the October demonstration for greater freedom in Poland in 1956, and the 1956 Hungarian revolution.[3] The most important and influential reform movement led by students was that of 1918 Latin American Reform

Movement. It originated from Argentina and lasted for about 50 years, spreading throughout the continent.[4]

But what would happen if this progressive, dynamic, educated, powerful youth segment of society would turn into restless? What are the causes of students' unrest in Indian universities and colleges? To which extend socio-economic and politico-cultural setup is responsible for the ready to explode situation? All these questions must be analyzed and answered in a manner that the problem of student unrest could be resolved.

Unrest, as per dictionary meaning, is troubled state of mind, which is not anything tangible but a passion, a way thinking. In his theory of cognitive dissonance, Festinger argues that people strive to achieve a state of equilibrium among various attitudes and behaviours. This is because people prefer consistency or consonance, to inconsistency or dissonance.[5] Therefore, whenever people have a thought, that is not consistent with their behaviour, they experience cognitive discord and are motivated to seek means of resorting equilibrium.

Student unrest may not always involve external behavioural symptoms; it may be latent in the student or be expressed, at times, through their turbulent activities. Whenever we talk about the phrase 'student unrest', it strikes to our mind the demonstrations, the occupation of campus buildings, some violent activities without any legitimate social or academic goal as most of the incidents in recent times prove this. Student unrest (Physically viewed as agitation), nevertheless, has some goals to achieve but either the goals it want to attain or the ways and methods used to attain these goals are questioned. The problem of student unrest is generated in long run, in which many social and psychological factors contribute and usually erupts incidentally due to some on the spot events. "Social unrest causes students unrest, but once they start expressing their disquiet, student and intellectuals have been, in many ways, the vanguard of political change."[6] The events of Chinese students' agitation in 1989, events in December 2008 in Greece, the protests of students in Tehran in 1999 against the closure of reformist newspaper, students' role in Arab Spring, recent events in Hong Kong are examples of it. Of course the phenomenon of student unrest is not new one but in recent times, it has become a social and academic problem, as many times this is not for any relevant transformation but for unimportant issues and also on wrong directions of selfish leadership. Presently,

student unrest has largely been focused on local campus issues than larger socio-economic and politico-cultural issues. Actions are mostly and generally spontaneous and without any sophisticated or ideological analysis.[7] Beyond that, student grievances tended to vary from country to country. Historically it varied from protesting against overcrowding in the universities to what they view as the failure of their parents to confront Nazism properly.

In India, the phenomenon of student unrest can be traced of way back to 1830s. At that time it came out as unrest between western and non-western education, upper caste and lower caste students, Hindu and Muslim students etc on various issues.[8] Student agitation was first seen in 1905 in Eden Hindu hostel, where student youth burnt the effigy of Lord Curzon to show their resentment over the issue of partition of Bengal. In the official report of Sedition Committee (1918), it was stated that from 1907 to 1917, 1986 persons were arrested, out of which 68 were students.[9]

Nowadays, most of the student agitations are only to change any particular authority or provision and not for any relevant social transformation unlike as was in the days of Jaya Prakash Narayan. For example, the unrest happened at Jadavpur University, with students hinting at protesting the authorities' proposed move to curb ragging and disruption in academic activities.[10] Another one is in November 2008 in Dr. Ambedkar Law College in Tamilnadu. One more incident is of Bengal Engineering and Science University West Bengal.

"Student unrest especially in India has been recognized through the behaviour manifestations of students, right from their defiance to authority to violent outburst of damaging the property or even physical assault on their targets."[11] Students are part of society and no social event takes place in vacuum. Each and every social problem has a complex nature with countless roots; still some roots are more important than others. Similarly, student unrest is also a child of conditions social, political, economic, and cultural and psychological.

After independence in 1947, higher education, which was a product for only elite class, became available to large masses of India. Large number of new student from lower, middle and rural class enter into higher educational institutions either to enhance the job opportunity or/and to increase their social status. This huge number of students,

even after 72 years of freedom, is not able to mix up with students educated in modern high standard schools.

"The lower middle class and rural background of majority of students in developing society create a stake for them in the academic experience which is considered as basic to upward social mobility. Lack of it contributes the majority of campus unrest."[12]

To remain in cutthroat competition, they ordain themselves as book worm and do not take part in extracurricular activities, which are also one of the academic ethics. This isolation and alienation from teachers, fellow students, parents and even from education system as a whole sows the seeds of unsocialness in them, which, with time, results in the physiological unrest and physical protest.

The other important cause of student unrest is sense of insecurity of getting employment. It is evident that non availability of suitable job, created a class of unemployed and underemployed in China which radicalized the movement there.[13] Education in India is historically associated with a 'sense of superiority'. Educated one can hardly see himself/herself working manual job or remaining jobless.[14] According to National Sample Survey's 61st round 21 persons out of 1000 in rural areas and 44 persons out of 1000 in urban areas are unemployed.[15] Students are getting out of educational institutions in immense number and availability of job opportunities to them is fully disproportional. Most of the students in developing societies like India are "…a frustrated lot, who have no respect for, whatsoever kind, for laws of government or of the society. University life is a desperate grind for them whose sole aim is to get degree, which hopefully will get them a job."[16] With academic standard declining and competition rising, the university degree is losing its value as a passport to a better life and gathering unrest among students.

Socio Economic backwardness: - The social and Economic of our country has also contributed in the unrest-general as well as students'. Most of the students from poorer families have only seen poverty and hunger, for which, as per their view, government has done nothing praiseworthy. For them, authority's rules and regulations are nothing more than nonsense.

The ideals, on which whole the national movement was based, are not yet achieved, even after long sixty three years of independence. India has also witnessed the corrupt youth as "in India and other countries the idealism of the independence struggle has turned to corruption and cynicism."[17] The socio-economic ideals, which justified the sacrifices, made by the youth at the time of freedom struggle, are not achieved, because, through the best rules are made yet not implemented properly. They feel betrayed by adult nationalists. Students demand more radical social change and feel impatient with present pace instituted by ruling elites, who have sold out the revolutionary potential of movement for stability.[18] The Planned and Mixed Economic Policy and later on the new LPG (liberalization, privatization and globalization) alias New Economic Policy has not been able to transform the social and economic situation of large mass despite the economic growth of country. "…Expectations held by many particularly intellectuals and students, for rapid social change have not been fulfilled."[19] They reckon the struggle and martyrdom of their ideals like Bhagat Singh, Subash Chander Bose, and Chander Shekher Azad as less fruitful than as they ought to be.

Defective Education System: - Mrs. Indira Gandhi in a convocation address on 5th January 1973 remarked, "One of the biggest mistakes we made when we gained independence was not to have overhauled thoroughly our education system and structure. We are paying for it now."

These words of late Prime Minister are as true today as were in 1973, despite much elaborated official list of reforms in education system. That's why many student agitations have been against the education system itself, which encourages only cramming and large-scale coping rather than testing the aptitude and intelligence. Universities were made to provide education and excellence that come from the fusion of talent and motive. Today, to be on top, recognition, through advertisement, personal relations and politic asterism, rather than excellence has become the main objective. In our present education system excellence is quantified on the basis of pseudo-objectivity i.e. most of the student opt Sanskrit not by their interest in that but only to get more marks than Hindi. More over this, the lack of infrastructure, stereotype syllabus ad incapable teachers also contribute in ambivalence and indiscipline among students.[20]

Rabindra Nath Tagore once said, "The Most important truth, which we are apt to forget, is that a teacher can never truly teach unless he is still leaning himself." Incapable teachers, thanks to our corrupt system, do not have knowledge to and know to teach and as such cause the degradation of respect of 'Guru' among students. Policies are favouring education expansion without viewing the good or evil consequences for standards. Numerous colleges are run openly for profit with, teaching posts bargained like anything.[21]

Adolescence: - The fact of adolescence responsible for student unrest is more applicable in colleges than universities. Students enter in colleges in the age of 16 to 18, which is a period of transition-physical, psychological, and behavioral. The sense of insecurity in this age generates unrest among poor and middle class students whereas the sense of full security causes indiscipline among rich students. The students face the hard realities of life-economic, social, and others –in this phase. Most of them don't find themselves able to solve or even understand and accept these arduous truths. These suddenly appeared hard realities make them to think pessimistically.

More over tin the phase of transition, "adolescent feels a great strength in his body. His body organs develop a lot. This sense of bodily strength coupled with a mental attitude of freedom makes a him a defiant."[22] In such a period, the act of some aggressive teachers, who without knowing the psychology of students try to force them to follow their dictates, works as oil on fire. The result often comes as agitation against those particular teachers or authority which tries to protect those ones.

In addition to this, "adolescent's willingness to put his trust in those peers and leading, or misleading, elders who will give imaginary, if not illusionary, scope to his aspirations is only too obvious."[23] In such time, their chances of being misguided by the so called leaders for personal interests are high.

Political Interference: - One most striking element in student unrest, on which most of the writers and even general public may agree, is the political interference. In pre-independence period students were united with the nationalistic political parties. But with time changing, political parties got divided for the dirty politics for power, by which students' community also got affected. Nowadays, most of the political parties have their student and youth wings i.e. congress has NSUI, BJP has ABVP, communist have AISF

and many more. "Thus instead of students being depoliticized, they have been irrationally politicized in a bid to make them toe the party line."[24] These unions are less for students' benefit and more as the test grounds of forthcoming institution. It is, they is why, obvious that to some extent politics will involve itself in the colleges and universities. There is nothing too bad about it but the worst part in how politics exploits the student community.

"The youth factions in colleges and universities are financed, guided, controlled and led by political parties, functioning in the arena of national and state politics. And students have been activity utilized by the party bosses at the time of elections and public protests against government decisions."[25] Most of the leaders of these organizations are 7 to 9 years older than students and stay in the colleges and universities not to study but to play politics. Most of them are from elite class and act as 'gundas' in institution where they are chosen undemocratically or rather appointed by the so called high command. In this way, "instead of urging upon them to contribute constructively to policies, the youth have been dragged and brainwashed."[26] This ambivalent attitude of political parties toward student organizations and student demands has proved hazardous to student community as a whole, making them restless.

"The penetration of the campus by political parties has a two way effect. Every campus issue gets immediately translated into a political issue and any political issue may erupt on the campus leading to a strike and violence."[27] If an opposition party wants to collapse down the government, it took support and force of students. There is nothing wrong in these students organizations till they work for the students' benefit, but the lamentable part is that these organizations do not politicize the students demand but studentize the political problems and political aspirations of particularly party.

Bureaucratic attitude of Administration toward student demands: "Majority of the students in most cases is interested only to complete their study as peacefully as possible Still, minority activists make it possible to gain support of this majority when administration, by and large, behaves intemperately to the genuine student demands."[28]

In present times, university administration has to do large number of functions in to only teaching. For such administration specialists are appointed. The problem arises due to repressive attitude of authority instead of accommodative attitude. This leads to the

deterioration of situation and things always skip out of hand. This bureaucratic attitude of authorities contributes in mutating the psychological unrest into physical agitation and clash between students and coercive forces.

Due to such unrest students got attracted towards sex, violence and addiction. The pleasure, ego-satisfaction and anxiety respectively from these acts provide temporary relief from the psychological unrest. The crisis of identity, caused by postmodern world, also forces them to develop an identity despite good or evil.

"The young aspirants of higher education economic burden back-brokering; they find their path blocked by several undemocratic rules and partially-ridden administration. The education in free India continuous is costlier and dearer and after the completion of their education, they hardly find any interest-sustaining job opportunities. The universities, instead of reshaping the curriculum and the education system, have only attempted to restrict the administration and block the way of young in the higher education."[29]

All these situations have contributed to the aimless and directionless mindset of students, which in turn "has certainly contributed to the general malacies and frustration of young people and has made it difficult for them to express whatever latent idealism remains in them."[30]

Suggestion for Remedies

Large numbers of reforms have been taken before and after the freedom regarding education system and some other measures to curtail youth and student unrest. But as we have viewed, the student unrest is not due only to education system alone rather it has many ingredients. Some steps that must be taken to lessen the student unrest are

Check on Political Interference: -Higher education institutions are made for higher education and research. They should not be allowed to become the playground for political parties. Effective measures should be adopted to check the entry of political parties and their politics in the campus. It does not mean that student organizations should be banned. Student organizations have their own importance in protecting the interests of students, their rights and provide healthy environment for study. Authorities should arrange their elections, democratically and neutrally under its supervision. Students should also be aware about their rights and view the qualities of candidate while choosing

him/her rather than his/her seniority or political approach. Political approach is never necessary if students are united.

Close relation and guidance from Teachers: - In Indian education system teacher is feared and acts 'godlike'. Students fear to ask him/her questions since he/she has to pass them. Lectures are repeated years by years with no change and are 'rule of law'. This attitude develops a covert hostility, which sometimes erupt into agitation.[31] It is the academic as well as moral duty of teacher to provide proper direction and guidance to his/her students. "... the valuable intellectual development is self development and (it) mostly take place between ages of sixteen and thirty."[32] In this period, teachers should not only teach their syllabus to the students but also make them aware of the hard realities of life and guide them how to tackle those else students will got depressed. Teachers should take personal interest in guiding the students to the right path for socio-economic and politico-cultural development. If students would be aware of the facts and terms of problem- social, economic, political, cultural, their minds would remain free form stress and hence curtail unrest as a whole.

Change in the social and educational setup: - Education system often becomes the bull's eye for most of the student agitations. Social efforts are needed to reform our educational setup. It is true that many reforms have already been done, but, dynamic problems need dynamic solutions. Those reforms were more of provisional nature than of permanent remedial. The need is to treat the root causes of the defects of education system. Some measures which can be adopted are

•   Guidance about different streams of education should be provided to students (especially rural and backward) at lower level, so that they may choose subjects of their interest as early as possible.

•   Syllabus should be dynamic and according to the future needs of social; economic and cultural setup.

•   The only criteria of appointing teachers should be their merit- academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular.

•   Government should spend more on education in order to promote research, infrastructure development and extra-curricular activities.

•   Social philosophy along with ethical philosophy should be made a part of

syllabus at university level for the students of medicine, engineering, commerce and otherwise. It would help in ethical consciousness among students and teachers.

• All types of efforts should be made to increase the interaction between students and teachers. For this purpose, provision of tutors can be made so that they can help guide each student individually.

• All types of facilities such as health, counseling, advisory should be provided to the students so that they may feel the sense of attachment with the institute.

• While taking decisions at institutional level, proper participation of students should be seek. This will also increase their attachment to the institute and curtail unrest.

• Parents should not force their children to adopt any particular subject of the (parents) interest rather they should guide him/her properly and leave the decision on him/her.

Employment Generation: - The most important insecurity for student at present time is availability of suitable jobs. To make the students feel secure, it is necessary on the part of government to generate new areas of employment. Many times people prolong their education period because they do not find a suitable job. This results in imminent frustration, which could be curtailed by providing jobs to persons as soon as they finish their studies. Unavailability of jobs is more in humanities and linguistics than sciences and technical education, which results in unrest among the students of former. Without social scientists, social philosophers, historians, linguistic scientists, society would suffer a setback. That is why, this area should also be kept in mind.

Institutional Authority should work with sympathy: - It is the duty of the authority in higher educational institutions to deal students' problems with sympathy, which would solve their problems, and the overall tension in institution would lessen. Another deplorable fact is that, police should be used against students as less as possible. The problem should be resolved at initial level through negotiations. If police force is used, facts state that, a chain of reactions between police and students would start. Authority should try to understand that students are victims of society and not the culprits. Dealing wih adolescents is a very delicate matter for which Indian judicial system has established

special Juvenile Justice Courts. Authorities in education institutions must also understand its delicacy and treat students with sympathy and not harshness.

"Student unrest is a problem of grave concern to every body. In India, students are not only avoiding the class rooms, but also indulging in violent and destructive activities."[33] Student unrest and indiscipline is a multidimensional problem. To solve it steps in different fronts must be taken. "Student indiscipline is a problem of society in transition and cannot be solved by an attack on any one front alone. There has to be an effort in all directions. It needs a change in economic situation simultaneously by change in social values and norms. Religion has to keep pace and adopt itself to the needs of the age, for religion has always been a major agency of social control. The problem may thus be solved as new elements find equilibrium position and the old elements drop out, as the old order change yielding place to new."[34] Thus this academic turned social problem is to be solved with the help of society as a whole including teachers, parents, authority and whosoever is in touch with students. After all students are our future and present should take care of future.

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