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The Student movements in an age of colossal digitalization: An emerging bellwether for student activism in India

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ABSTRACT

The student movements in contemporary India are surrounded by fatal politicization even at the educational level .These movements cannot have an apolitical and a non-sociological stand. When any student movement enjoys the support of one/more political party/parties, the remaining political party/parties automatically step forward on the other side to condemn. These movements and their political aspects have been therefore revealed very easily in a few recent student movements with the use of the most easily available tool of this era that is, the digital media. This research paper is aimed at referring to a few controversial student movements that have happened recently in India and how these movements started and were propagated to achieve national support and awareness via digital media. We will also discuss how the wide influence of ruling parties and social media has given these movements an inclusive socio-political positivity and negativity (despite the fact that the media is supposed to remain unbiased). Data presented in this paper has been collected and analyzed using case studies, reading research papers and through in-depth content analysis. This is the elementary approach of this paper.

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to discussing a specific discourse like student movements, one should first try putting certain values to terms like 'student' and 'social movements'. It is, of course, the preliminary level on which the analysis of the title depends on, answering - what is the definition of student and what do we understand as a social movement? In that light, the analysis should also give way to further arguments like, does a student possess the credentials of taking forward a phenomenon like a social movement? Also, how is the social media being useful in these movements? In order to arrive at a logical conclusion, we will start by answering such basic questions.

STUDENT AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT: DOES A CORRELATION EXIST?

Madhubanti Mitra of the department of communication and journalism, in electronic media of university of Mumbai, in her research paper titled *Student Movements of India in Recent Times and the Role of Digital Media in This Context'* states that the term student is *"a very relative term"* and adds that the certain values we attach to them might differ from each other in a larger sense. On a similar note, we will also view students as persons registered under any of the *"legitimate Universities and Institutions"* for the sake of more precise discourse.

Let us now look into the term social movements.' As stated by Madhubanti Mitra *"a social movement, by its instinct, is an awaited consequence of civil disobedience or civil protest."* She further adds that a civil protest is defined as *"a non-violent resistance against government (or authority) imposition."* What we can conclude from this is that a social movement is a non-violent protest against existing socio-political structure in the society that is geared towards achieving a definite social change.

I believe that since these movements are a result of civil agitation, it is unwise to assume that student community can remain completely untouched by such a radical collective action. Thus the entity 'student' is conclusively inseparable from the very phenomenon called 'movements. For

instance: The 'civil disobedience movement' in 1930s led by Mahatma Gandhi, was an excellent and one of the foremost repose of people coming together from almost all walks of life (including student community) in India to step up against the various social, contextual and political paradoxes that interfered with their democratic rights and way of life. In my view, such is the encompassing nature of the social movements that no section of the society is perhaps left uninvolved.

SOCIAL MEDIA: A TOOL FOR MOBILIZATION AMONG THE STUDENTS IN INDIA.

The most significant evolution that the world has gone through in the recent times is the creation of possibility of having access to digital media all the time. Almost everyone with a digitally modified cellular phone is eligible to become not only a constant passive media consumer, but also a standard active media producer. This level of easy production and easy consumption of media and its abundant information daily is creating an accessibility bias (Iyenger, 1990) among the consistent consumers creating the desire of being a producer of media content. This is a global-level communication platform that builds strong consumer-producer relation of media contents produced for a larger mass. The communication platform is also much more advanced than that of a one to one communication paradigm. With such enhanced options at hand, students of all age today are ready to step into a world where they can preach their ideologies, ideas and biases without much ado. It is a widespread view nowadays that "movements should be regarded as networks or as network of networks"(Swain, 1993, pp. 12-15) .This contemporary notion of social movements being "network of networks" is what throws light upon the indispensable role of digital media to gain a broader base for mobilization.

Madhubanti Mitra very aptly points out in her research that *"Even though every movement has its own history and perpetuity, the timing of its collapse defines its quality."* This implies that greater and broader the mobilization, more popular and successful a movement will be.

"Social media has influenced the socio cultural regime of the society by social media activism" says Muhammed Atheeque PP. & Dr. M.Thavamani in their research paper titled *Social Media and JNU Azadi Movement- Asociological Analysis of Student Movement in India'*. Further they add that in India, social media has helped both online and offline movements in highlighting the

problem, in spreading the news with *"immediate effect"*, in crowd-making, into pressuring the government to accept the demands made and finally in succeeding.

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp messenger- are a few digital ways through which these movements gain shape, support and mobilization rapidly than ever. Holistically speaking, the advent of digital media platform has led to a major paradigm shift in the current socio-political structure through student movements in India.

JNU AZAADI MOVEMENT: ONE OF THE RECENT EXAMPLES OF A DIGITALLY AND SOCIALLY ACTIVE STUDENT MOVEMENT IN INDIA.

Introduction:

JNU Azaadi Movement started in 2016 after the Students' Union President Kanhaiya Kumar (Dalit) was allegedly arrested along with his colleagues on charges of sedition for conducting a protest on campus to voice against the capital punishment of Maqbool Bhat and Afzal Guru. The movement demanded the release of allegedly arrested students and the arrest of the actual culprits.

What actually happened?

During the protest, some people raised slogans that were later tagged as "anti-India" slogans like "Kashmir ki azadi tak Jung chalegi, bharat ki barbadi tak Jung chalegi" ("War will continue till Kashmir's freedom, war will continue till India's demolition") and "Pakistan zindabad" or "Bharat ke tukde karenge." There was controversy over the identity of the sloganeers. Although initially the organizers and the students of JNU were blamed for shouting the slogans, an investigation by the university later stated that the provocative slogans were raised by outsiders.

Arrest of the students.

Subsequently, four days after the initial event took place, the Delhi police arrested JNUSU president Kanhaiya Kumar on charges of sedition and criminal conspiracy under section 124 of the Indian Penal Code dating back to 1860. Moreover, Umar Khalid, Anirban Bhattacharya, Rama Naga, Anant Prakash and Ashutosh Kumar, were also arrested.

Erroneous and purposely flawed media trail.

The arrest of Kanhaiya Kumar and his colleagues was a result of incomplete enquiry of alleged anti-India and pro-Pakistan sloganeering. The youtube video clearly concluded that the members of the ABVP (Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad) were involved in sloganeering, but some media channels continued running an organized propaganda against Kanhaiya and JNU. The video clips aired by them (in which students raised anti-India and pro-Pakistan slogans and Kanhaiya was shown to have taken part in demonstrations) was later on proved to be doctored. One of the renowned journalists of a leading news channel went berserk in his studio debating over his false claims. Another journalist blamed JNU to be wasting tax payers money by educating 'anti-nationalists.'

On February 14, the then Union Home Minister said the protesting students in JNU had the support of LeT chief Hafiz Saeed. Apparently, his claim was based on a tweet by a fake Hafiz Saeed account. Hearing this, the Delhi police swung into action against LeT's support for students. After it emerged that the minister's claim was based on the tweet, he tried to salvage himself saying he had intelligence reports.

"Twitter is our weapon": JNU students massively fighting hashtag wars

They were taking their battle online. Almost a day after six JNU students facing sedition charges entered their college campus, Shehla Rashid, the student union vice president delivered a speech in which she called upon her colleagues to voice their agony digitally. *″[We must] use our Facebook and Twitter profiles as weapons against the demonization of JNU students and spread correct information,″* she said. She insisted that the false narrative in the media of incidents *″needs to be countered with facts and sense.″*

All supporters started using #StandWithJNU along with the ones like #JNURow and #JNUcrackdown. As students and supporters united, many social media pages and handles sharing information on broader themes cropped up. Among these were @Zinda_Democracy, @NotYetSilenced and @Armoured_Buddha.

In my view the difference between earlier social movements and modern social movements is marked by such influence and impact of social media. Young people, more specifically higher education students make use of social media technology to spread the information and share it with no wastage of time. Hence, despite many challenges student bodies are operating more efficiently than before. However social media is also responsible for the clashes within the student communities. Whether social media could be channelized for the betterment of the society is what bears a big question mark. Slogans are passed through social media, videos are shared and political knowledge profoundly reaches students. To justly sum up, the second decade of the 21st century unleashed the use of social media for knowledge making, commercialization, detaching from the clutches of the facist forces, using the freedom of speech and other human rights. The impact of social media has its ramification on youth movements even though its negative effects on psychological and social aspects of youth can be neglected. The influence of the dominant political parties on digital media to spread their ideologies and activities upon student must be brought under control. Else, Indian youth in the future may face socio political distraction.

CONCLUSION:A NEED FOR MAKING A PRUDENT CHOICE.

It is this colossal digitalization that has changed even the shape and form of student activism across India. Nevertheless, one of the least noticed barriers of such endeavors used to be, or has been since a long time, the communication gap between the people participating in the movement and the people organizing the same. Earlier not many people used to get the air of these incidents by word of mouth. How can you expect hundreds of supporters back up your notion of activism if at first sight they are not even aware of the issue for which such an action is being taken? However, this gap has been overcome by the giant leap of our civilization from old media to new media. One can produce media content and publish it anytime on his/her social media network, from anywhere. The warm support (or heartless criticism) of the millions is just a login ID and password away. The active participation of digital media in the day-to-day livelihood of youth (and others) in India has brought about a new level of dependence towards itself building a new platform for mass opinion. The movements are now being built, carried forward and concluded via social and digital media platforms in a large scale. Even for future references, student-dependence on social media marks a new era of political interdependence

between social media and the state. To use this interdependence as a boon or a bane is completely in our hands.

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