



Panel's title : Student Politics: Movements and Mobilization in Contemporary India

Coordinator: Jean-Thomas Martelli (King's College London), Khaliq Parkar (Symbiosis International University)

Language: English

Topics: Politics, Political Sociology, Social Movements, Politics and Society

Panel presentation :

This panel focuses on contemporary student politics in India. Based on contributions for a forthcoming edited volume (*Student Politics: Movements and Mobilization in Contemporary India*) the papers attempt to encapsulate the multiple voices of what would potentially be a new phase of student mobilization in India. We hope to make sense of current student politics through considering pre- and post-independence history and contribute to the revival of a neglected field of study. Contributions explore, through various case studies, the possibility to consider cohorts of Indian students as a distinct political category, while keeping in mind its subnational diversity – including states such as Telangana, Kashmir and Assam.

Our empirical ambition is to survey contemporary trends in both elite and marginalised educational institutions in a context of growing enrolment. Student movements are getting more visibility in traditional and social media owing to large public participation – this was evident in the very recent Jadavpur University *Hokkolorob* movement, the Film and Television Institute protests, the Rohith Vemula agitation at Hyderabad Central University, and the Jawaharlal Nehru University mobilization as well. Thus, there is an observable *re-politicization* of the educational institution in the public imagination.

At a conceptual level, contributions assess the relevance of campuses both as territories of socio-political reproduction and as creation of alternate spaces for political experimentations. We explore how educated youth, set apart from spheres of family and work, renegotiate their political attitudes through prolonged exposure to a university campus environment. Survey studies (Kumar 2014) show that the young generation has a similar voting pattern when compared to other life stages. We are interested in looking at educated youth as cultural agents engaging in political activities apprehending notions such as (un)employment (Jeffrey 2012), gender and caste assertion (Lukose 2008; Subramanian 2015), liberalization (Liechty 2003) and civic engagement (Krishna 2013).

Key words: Indian Politics; Student Politics; Youth; Generation; Campus; Socialization; Case Studies; Social Movements

Participants :

1) **Names:** Khaliq Parkar (Symbiosis International University) and Jean-Thomas Martelli (King's College London)

Communication's title: The Campus as a Site of Politics? Literature Review and Theoretical Considerations

Language: English

Presentation :

We have two objectives in mind – first, to provide review the four prevalent approaches to the study of youth politics in India, focusing specifically on student activism; second, to discuss existing lacuna in the literature, i.e. the inadequate level of attention given to everyday political arenas in



university settings. Residential universities of higher education (like JNU and IITs), need to be understood as mediated spaces between students and society, and prove useful in providing students with new understandings of socio-political issues in resonance with a specific campus culture – informed by either dominant or alternative narratives of contending ideologies.

This paper starts with a demographic overview of youth in India before introducing various approaches to youth-led politics, conceptualised as 1) revolutionary forces, 2) deviant generations, 3) relays of representative democracy, and importantly as 4) cultural agents. This overview presents youth as a specific category, before identifying the cultural realm of youth in its own right. Educated youth can be understood as a specific political category – through debates that inform the study of campus political life. We also present theoretical considerations on the study of campus politics, drawing on Bourdieu's concept of habitus and field. In this research we understand youth politics as one form, which doesn't claim the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force (Weber 1919), nor as a competition between agents for capturing state power and producing laws. Rather we emphasise on the symbolic character of youth politics as a theatre for performative representation of the socio-political world (Bourdieu 1978; Wacquant 2004).

Key words: Literature Review; Political Sociology; Indian Politics; Student Politics; Youth; Generation; Campus; Socialization; Case Studies; Social Movements

2) **Name:** Kristina Garalyté (Vytautas Magnus University)

Communication's title: From Class to Caste Struggle: Dalit Students in the Telangana Movement

Language: English

Presentation :

Drawing on the ethnographic field work from the universities of Hyderabad, this paper analyses the nexus between the Dalit and the Communist movements as it unfolds in the context of the Telangana movement and student politics, which places Indian university campuses at the centre stage of the present day political experimentation. In 2014 the Indian government approved the establishment of the Telangana state which became the 29th state of the federal Indian union. The demand for the separate Telangana goes back as far as 1946 and for years had been nurtured by the Communist movement which represented the Telangana movement through the perspective of class struggle. However, the story of the Telangana movement was recently re-told. Reflecting the broader shift in Dalits' regional political orientation towards the "autonomous" Dalit political movement (Berg, 2014; Gudavarthy, 2005, 2013; Srinivasulu, 2002; Satyanarayana, 2014), the lower caste students on university campuses of Hyderabad underwent political transformation from communists to Dalits, simultaneously re-shaping the discourse of the Telangana movement from class to caste struggle. This paper suggests that recently intensified notion-wide Dalit student political mobilization has a strong base in the regional Telangana politics and Dalit students' former exposure to the Communist movement.

Key words: Telangana; Indian Politics; Student Politics; Youth; Dalit; Left

3) **Name:** Sarbani Sharma (Delhi School of Economics)

Communication's title: Being Men in Kashmir: Moorings of the Masculine Young Men

Language: English

Presentation :

Ethnographic narratives that emerged out of my research on the everyday understandings of *Azadi* (Freedom) in Kashmir Valley often displayed the enormity of loss that young people in Kashmir



University have incurred in the process of asserting their demands for the right to determine political future and life of dignity. While extensive documentation on the nature and magnitude of courage and loss has been available to develop a perspective on the society and polity of Kashmir, we have less to gain insight into how the students operated through the institution of Kashmir University Students Union in order to articulate their demands. During the fieldwork conducted for this research, Kashmir University Students' Union (KUSU) was officially banned by the University administration in order to keep the university campus 'apolitical' and 'free from disturbances'. This article will attempt to show how despite the infamous ban on the students' union and the techniques of surveillance that the university administration had put in place to stop all forms of students' activism, the disbanded union continued to operate through various smaller factions to articulate their demands and aspirations on various issues. The article will chart out the modalities of protests subscribed by the KUSU student activists to register their voice in tune with the larger resistance movement from the valley and the gendered nature of the disbanded student activists' workings. Together both of these features reflect upon the everyday life of Kashmir University. What part of the student activist's life becomes prosthetic to the wider Kashmiri movement for Azadi and at what point does the idea of individual-self wrapped with paradoxes and contradictions become available to themselves-these are some of the processes that this article will attempt to address to comprehend everyday life in Kashmir.

Key words: Kashmir; Gender; Azadi; Indian Politics ; Student Politics ; Youth ; Campus

4) **Name:** Kaustubh Deka (University of Delhi)

Communication's title: Student as a category of change: the being and becoming, the case of Assam

Language: English

Presentation :

Based on ethnographic field research in the state of Assam in Northeast India this paper emphasises on the complexities involved in the establishment of the students as a political category of change and campuses as sites of political action. In the hill town of Halflong, the headquarter of Dima Hasao hills districts in Assam there are dormitories for students maintained in the style of traditional tribal dorms run by Dimasa Students Union (DSU), an ethnic student organisation of the Dimasas, one of the larger tribes in the region. These dormitories are used by Dimasa youths coming from remote hill hamlets to study in the handful of institutions in Halflong or to prepare for their next phase of career often in terms of migration to metros across the country. These students are thus embedded in the project of the construction of a modern Dimasa identity anchored around the aspirations for an ethnic Dimasa homeland- a '*Dimaraji*'. In a context like northeast India where the state is simultaneously the target, sponsor, and antagonist for social movements, the paper argues that student groups in Assam are functioning as 'social movement organizations' that play an important role in keeping movements 'moving' by maintaining debates, supporting events, nurturing leaders during ebbs in movement activity, and more generally in helping produce submerged networks or latent social movements (Townsend 2004).

Key words: Assam; Student Movement; Identity; Indian Politics; Student Politics; Youth

5) **Name:** Jean-Thomas Martelli (King's College London)

Communication's title: Campus as a Political Sounding Board: Exploring the Changing Language of Welfare and Warfare in Student Politics

Language: English



Presentation :

This paper contributes to the understanding of campus as a political site and as a space producing changing narratives of the society surrounding it. This paper is divided in two distinct sections. In the first one, I am presenting an overview of a recently digitalised database of more than 70,000 political documents produced since 1973 in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) – a predominantly left-leaning institution in New Delhi. I introduce JNU pamphleteer rhetoric of rival left organizations and how it operationalises a vituperative type of discourse based on competitive-argumentation, slanders and truth-claiming.

In the second section, through concentrating on the transition of power between two communist student organisations on campus, I show how the public expression of secular Marxism differs in the way political emotions are played out. While one party gives the premium on concrete welfare and student-based issues, the emphasis of its rival is on cases of social oppression. Along with its relative lack of emphasis on the betterment of daily amenities, the latter has brought about the re-enactment of ideological idioms inspired by its past as a Maoist guerrilla organisation in Bihar, a state in North India. I suggest that the variability of the emotional language of the left on campus, and the establishment of a divide between a “Marxism of reason” and a “Marxism of heart” is an important marker of differentiation between various left movements in India, which is just as meaningful as ideological cleavages and personal rivalries.

Key words: Indian Politics; Political Sociology; Student Politics; Ideology; Marxism; Text Analysis; Discourse Analysis; Elite Campus