Chapter - IV

YOUTH RADICALISM IN UNITED STATES AND INDIA - A COMPARATIVE TREND ANALYSIS

Ideas cannot be fought except by means of better ideas. The battle consists not of opposing but of disproving, not of evading, but of boldly proclaiming a full consistent and radical alternative.

Ayan Rand,
in New Left : The anti-Industrial Revolution
The period from 1970 has been seen as a period of youth political apathy in the United States. Scholars, university administrators, and students seem just as surprised by the present period of political quiet on campus as they were by previous waves of activism.¹ The present decade stands in especially sharp contrast to the "revolutionary" 1960s, clearly one of the most active periods on campus.² The general public, which at one period in the sixties labelled student activism the issue of greatest national concern, no longer takes much interest in campus life. While explanations of the previous wave of activism were numerous if diffuse and often unconvincing, few social scientists have posited hypotheses concerning the current campus calm.³

The contemporary campus scene is much more complicated than is immediately apparent. Compared to the 1960s, the seventies and afterwards has indeed been quiet. No major youth movements have emerged, disruptive demonstrations have been rare, and in general students have not seemed to be politically oriented. Yet, basic student attitudes do not seem to have changed dramatically from the sixties, according to opinion surveys. Students remained on the liberal to radical end of the political spectrum. In the past few years, they have

²Ibid., p.38.
grown somewhat more conservative on political issues and somewhat more liberal on life-style questions, but without major shifts. Some sporadic student activist currents were apparent during the decade as well. Kent State University erupted briefly in 1977, resulting in almost 200 arrests. American foreign policy in South Africa -- and university investments there -- stimulated demonstrations at perhaps fifty universities, with some violence occurring in California. And some new forms of political action, such as the environmental movement, the Public Interest Research Groups, and state-wide student lobbying efforts emerged in the seventies. Those involved in activism were more politically sophisticated, having learned from the mistakes of the sixties.4

In many ways, the seventies are much more typical of American student life than was the previous decade. Viewed in historical perspective, university students have not been notably politically active in the United States. Yet, the campus has from time to time played a role in shaping American politics. The major political events of the seventies, such as Watergate, the so-called "taxpayers revolts" and others were played out basically without campus participation. Foreign policy issues,

4Ibid., p.112.
the main stimulus of major student activism, have not been a major factor in the public consciousness during the seventies.  

Youth activism was also not a major political force in most of the European industrialized nations during the seventies. The dramatic West German and French student movements of the 1960s have virtually disappeared from the scene. Small groups of students continued to be politically active, and the focus of the activism that remained was leftist. Italy has been an exception to the rule of quiet, as students have sporadically responded dramatically to Italy's continuing economic and political crisis. Students have been key political forces in a number of Third World nations, and thus there are relatively few cross-cultural generalizations that can be made. Thai students helped to topple a regime, and students constitute a key opposition force in South Korea, Iranian students were a key element in overthrowing the Shah, and students in India and Latin America remain politically involved. The patterns of student activism differ substantially around the world, although the period of relative quiet which is observable in the United States has been repeated in most of the European democracies.  

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"Ibid., p.317."
The Chapter will describe and analyze the current status of student activism in the United States and will offer some tentative explanations for the lack of political concern on the Campus. It will also seek to contrast the present situations with the period of more intense activism in the 1960s.

**Historical Perspectives**

American student activism must be seen in historical perspective. While students were involved in political and other activities at earlier periods, the history of ideologically-based activist movements and organizations stems from the early years of the twentieth century. Students were, for example, sporadically involved in political and other activism in the period following the War of 1812, and later in the anti-slavery movement of the nineteenth century, but no identifiable organizations emerged from these movements (Novak, 1977). In this century, one can see both organizational continuity and several distinct phases of activism. The Inter-collegiate Socialist Society (ISS), founded in 1905, was the first self-consciously radical student organization. It survived, under various names until the 1960s. (Its last incarnation, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), was the most successful national student Organization of the sixties. The saga of the SDS and its pre-decessors, while beyond
the scope of this thesis, illustrates the themes of some organizational continuity and changing campus political styles and orientations over a half-century period.7

The twentieth century has seen several distinct waves of student activism. The "progressive" period prior to World War I was the emergence of the first ideological student organization. The ISS and other groups, such as the Young Intellectuals, saw themselves as educational enterprises, and were not activist in orientation. They were liberal or radical in their views, and conservative student movements had little impact at this time. The nascent movement was strong mainly in the elite colleges and universities and on a few campuses located in large metropolitan areas, so most students were basically unaffected by these groups.8

World War I and the ensuing period of the "roaring twenties" brought an end to the ISS and related groups, although glimmerings of political and social concern continued on campus, especially in the moderate and liberal religious campus organizations which were active at the time (FASS, 1977). The focus of these early student organizations was mainly on broader social, political and cultural questions, including foreign policy. Students had a considerable interest in cultural matters and


Ibid., p.317.
followed the writings of such commentators as H.L. Mencken. Students sought cultural self-definition and separated themselves from what they perceived as a shallow popular culture of the period. In an effort to stimulate widespread support, student activists focused on intramural questions such as ROTC, the censorship of the campus press, and similar issues (FASS, 1977, pp.339-43). Despite major efforts by the small minority of activists, the large majority of the student population was unaffected by either the political or cultural stirrings of the period. Without question, the twenties was a period of general campus apathy.9

The decade of the 1930s was the period of the most intense student activism prior to the sixties. While the decade began with a feeling of social crisis, there was relatively little student activism until late in the decade. As the combined impact of the economic depression and a growing awareness of foreign foreign policy issues such as the rise of fascism in Europe and the changing role of the United States in world affairs, students became increasingly involved in political activism. This period saw the emergence of large-scale ideologically-oriented organizations on the left. While communist and socialist student groups grew modestly during the early thirties, the major student Organization of the decade was most active in the late

9Ibid., p.319.
1930s. The American Student Union (ASU) was for most of its history a united front of socialists, communists and liberals.¹⁰

The major motivating force for activism during the thirties was not the depression with its attendant economic dislocation, the rise of the labour movement, or the other dramatic changes in American domestic life, but rather it was foreign policy which most effectively mobilized students. This emphasis reflected the largely middle class nature of the student population. Peace demonstrations, including several annual national peace "strikes", constituted the main thrust of the movement. While politically conscious students were almost uniformly anti-fascist, there was a strong campus sentiment against American involvement in the war in Europe in the late 1930s. The Stalin-Hitler pact further confused liberals and radicals and damaged the student movement. Unlike Europe, there was no significant right-wing student movement during this period.

There was a short-lived revival of the student movement in 1947 and 1948. Thousands rallied to groups like the United World Federalists, and the presidential campaign of Henry Wallace of the Progressive Party drew substantial student support. The bubble burst quickly. Wallace gathered few votes in the 1948 election

¹⁰Ibid., p.416.
and the bright promise of world government, the United Nations and Soviet-Ameri-
can co-operation ended even earlier.

Student activism began slowly to revive in the late 1950s. McCarthy's re-
pression was gradually discredited and the expression of political opinion of an un-
popular nature became less risky. The election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 was marked by a rhetoric of liberalism and involvement. America was in a mood for change, and the student community wanted to make sure that their rhetoric heroic was translated into action."

The Legacy of the Sixties

Like previous times of intense activism, the major motivating force of the sixties was foreign policy, specifically the Vietnam War. Other elements added intensity to the activist thrust. The civil rights movement stimulated a new consciousness among blacks and an awareness of America's racial dilemma among some whites, especially on the campuses. Higher education, for a number of reasons, assumed an unprecedented position of importance in American society and this focused increased attention on the Universities. An academic degree was seen as the key to professional status and a middle class life-style. Enrolment in post-

secondary education also kept a student out of military service. Thus, enrollments grew rapidly, and unprecedented amounts of money were spent on higher education. At the same time students saw themselves as part of massive and bureaucratic universities at odds with the traditional spirit of American higher education.

Important changes were also taking place in American youth at the time which, at least temporarily, gave rise to notions of generational conflict and stimulated dissent. The growth of rock music coincided with the dissent of the sixties and in some ways reflected it. Rock music was an artefact of youth. The growing use of marijuana and other drugs at this period, on campus and off, was also a powerful symbol of youth dissent. Drugs became an accepted part of the youth subculture, although they were illegal and their use involved some risk. An unprecedented proportion of post-high school youth was going on to higher education, and the traditional middle-class consensus concerning the value and the norms of higher education was breaking down to some extent.12

The war in Vietnam was the key factor in stimulating what was the largest and most militant student movement in American history. However, the movement did not appear in a vacuum. The experience gained in the civil rights movement, the peace movement, and the willingness to engage in activism because of a more

12Ibid., pp.56-58.
liberal political atmosphere in the nation all provided the background to the anti-war movement. But it was the war, and especially the draft, which directly touched the student community and stimulated massive activism. The war convinced many that the entire American political system did not work. Because students were unable to effect political change through peaceful means such as demonstrations, teach-ins, and other tactics, the movement increased in militancy through the sixties. Discontent with the educational system and a feeling among some students that the universities were an integral part of the dreaded "system" grew along with frustration. As a result, there was a willingness to attack the universities themselves as well as other societal targets. Unreasonable responses to activist demonstrations by university officials often further stimulated militancy and increased the numbers of students involved.¹³

While the student movement was a major force on the campus in the sixties and had some impact on American politics, it was seen by many of its participants as a failure. Ideologically committed student leaders had as their goal major social change or revolution, and this did not occur. The rank and file participants in the movement were committed to ending the Vietnam War, and while it can be argued that student pressure was responsible, at least in part, for altering public opinion, students did not end the war.

¹³Ibid., p.69.
The history of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the major radical student organization of the sixties, dramatically indicates currents in the student movement. The SDS grew increasingly strident in its political and tactical approach, culminating its volatile history with organizational splits and an ideology which called for violent revolution. One element of the SDS, the "Weatherman", went underground and attempted to stimulate urban guerrilla warfare. These tactics alienated the leadership of the movement from the large majority of students, and within a year greatly weakened its impact on campus and in society. Issues became complicated and in some cases the response of the student movement unsatisfactory to most students. For example, the movement’s increasingly strident anti-Zionism and sympathy for militant Arab radicals alienated many Jewish students, who had previously been sympathetic. The changing nature of the black movement and the response of the student movement to it also confused many white middle class students.

The student activism of the sixties marked the first time that university students became involved in militant, sometimes revolutionary and violent, political activism. And it was the first time that students turned on the universities as a target for attack because of academic complicity in an "evil" social system. For the first time, "university reform" was raised as one of the slogans of the student movement. Students proved during the 1960s that they could have an impact on national politics,
that they could attract and to some extent use the mass media, and that thousands
could be mobilized for demonstrations."4

**The Current Student Scene**

The seventies, with considerable justification, has been called a period of
apathy on the American campus. Virtually all of the political organizations which
flourished during the sixties have disappeared, and few new have taken their place.
There have been relatively few activist demonstrations or campaigns, and student
energies seem to flow in non-political directions.

During the 1960s, a large number of student-oriented newspapers and
journals contributed to political debate and consciousness. At present, relatively few
of such journalistic efforts exist. Several serious publications which at one time were
to some extent campus based have shifted their focus -- and often their editorial
offices -- away from the universities. Socialist Revolution (which changed its name
to Socialist Review), and Radical America are indicative of this trend. To help the
emergence of a mass based radical movement, left journalists have placed many of
their recent efforts in trying to start mass-circulation newspapers and magazines.
Such publications as Seven Days, Mother Jones, and In These Times are in this

"Ibid., p.76."
category. The underground press, which was popular on campus during the 1960s and reflected alternative political and cultural perspectives, has virtually disappeared. Underground newspapers continue to exist in a few university locales, but in general these publications collapsed.  

While neither the numbers of demonstrations nor their militancy can compare to the sixties, instances of sporadic activism indicate that political consciousness on campus is not entirely absent, and that dramatic issues can mobilize students. Demonstrations in 1977 at Kent State University protesting the proposed construction of a gymnasium at the site of the 1972 shootings resulted in the arrest of almost 200 students. Students in California and in several other parts of the United States have protested against American policy in Southern Africa in general and against the investment policies of universities in particular. Although these demonstrations resulted in several hundred arrests, they led to no lasting movement and were confined to a small number of campuses.  

In the traditional sense of leftist student activism and organizational activities, the present period is a particularly barren one. Some vestiges of the "old left"

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1Bakke, Wright E., "Roots and Soil of Student Activities", Comparative Education Review, 10 June 1966, pp.220-49.

1Ibid., P.256.
student groups still exist and are active on campuses with a strong political tradition, but these groups are very small and have a tiny following. Students are occasionally aroused by a political issue, although even in these cases demonstrations tend to be small and no ongoing organizations or movement are created.\footnote{Ibid., p.257.}

On relatively few campuses are student governments concerned primarily with political questions, but in some cases politics constitutes a part of the concern of governments. This too is part of the legacy of the sixties, when political issues intruded on the once placid student governments. Thus, while student governments have not become primarily political entities in the seventies, the political consciousness and the power of student governments has been enhanced. Although student government bodies are elected by students in open elections, they have not traditionally had much rank-and-file input. This trend continues—and both the elections and the other activities of student governments are not taken very seriously on campus.

At the state and national levels, student government organizations have been active. The US National Student Association (NSA), which almost collapsed after its links to the CIA were exposed in 1967, managed to stay in existence and moved significantly to the left. It took a strong anti-war position in the late sixties,
continues to be well to the left of the general American student population. Its annual national congresses have consistently taken liberal or radical positions on civil rights, drug legalization, and on other topics. The NSA never had much impact on the local campus, and it remains virtually unknown to most students (Altbach, 1973, pp.184-211)."

Campus attitudes do not seem to have dramatically changed since the 1960s. As S.M. Lipset (1976, pp.xxxix) has pointed out, students were radicalized during the sixties, and their politics has remained somewhat to the left of the American political spectrum. In 1977-8, for example, 27 per cent of college and university freshman reported that they considered themselves liberal or radical while only 16.4 per cent labelled themselves conservative. Liberals and radicals were even more dominant in four-year institutions and in universities, the prestige segments of the post-secondary educational system. When queried on specific social questions, such as the use of marijuana, abortion, and similar issues, students were even more dramatically to the left of the general population. Students have unquestionably remained liberal to radical on questions of life-style and culture. Politics, in general, have become a less important concern of American students during the seventies."


"Ibid., p.189."
Some elements of the sixties retain their viability on campuses in the United States. Perhaps in historical retrospect, the major contribution of the 1960s will be the women’s movement and the black student movement. During the 1960s pressure from these movements created academic programs in many colleges and universities, as well as political and social organizations. These academic programs, although under attack from conservative forces and threatened by efforts to cut university budgets, by and large continue and are a focus for community. The organizational aspects of the women’s and black movements have survived better than have the general political student movement although they are significantly weaker than they were during the 1960s. Although the “counter culture” has disappeared from the headlines, it also remains an important force on campus. If anything, elements of the counter culture have been accepted by the broader society. Recent steps in a number of states to legalize marijuana, the pervasiveness of rock music, and social concern about homosexuality and psychological well-being all reflect concerns which were only a few years ago limited to a small, largely campus-based minority.  

The Causes for Decline

Since 1972, very little attention has been given to student activism. The spate of books and articles on the subject has virtually come to an end. And since there

are few demonstrations disrupting the campus or causing public concern, neither academic administrators nor government officials express much interest in understanding the causes for the current decline of student activism in the United States. Yet, some of the facts which have contributed to the decline of student political concern and activism are clear.

The most dramatic change in the American political scene which has affected the campus is the decline of foreign policy as an issue of acrimony and of direct concern to large numbers. Specifically, the end of the Vietnam War and of the draft has taken much of the moral outrage from the student movement. The widespread involvement of large numbers of students -- and the support of a significant section of the middle class ended when it became clear that the war was ending, although it should be recalled that it took several years for the conflict to actually end. This is not surprising, since American students have historically been motivated largely by foreign policy issues, and the Vietnam War, which directly affected the student population through the draft, was an especially dramatic instance. The war effectively combined a moral question with one of political expediency. Liberals, pacifists, radicals and many students who were just outraged by government lying could participate in the anti-war movement. While the movement’s leadership tried hard to give a dominant political tone to the struggle, most students seem to have been "radicalized" only to the extent of opposing the war itself, and sometimes some
of the institutions, like the universities which seemed to be supporting the war effort. Once the war issue was resolved, the movement, as a mass effort, was blunted.21

Although the leadership of the student movement attempted to broaden the anti-war struggle to a multi-issue political movement, it had little success. Indeed, the frustration of the leadership either to directly influence American foreign policy or to “convert” rank and file activists to radical politics led to increasingly strident rhetoric and extreme tactics. These emphases alienated most students, and limited the effectiveness of the movement.

**Trends in Indian Youth Activism**

**The Pre-Emergency Scene**

The history of youth activism in India has been a chequered one as part of the nationalist movement. It is often argued that the nature and content of youth activism have undergone a qualitative change since Independence.22 The crux of the argument runs as follows: While the pre-Independence youth movement had a single goal, namely, independence for India, and was linked to the country’s life and politics, the wave of student agitations since 1947 has not been directly political but

21Ibid., p.140.

22Altbach, 1968, p.17.
has concerned local and non-ideological issues. Also, youth agitations have become basically disruptive and lost the character of a movement.

In the sixties, the colleges and universities were the scene of student agitations. It is estimated that in 1966 there were 2,206 student demonstrations, of which 480 were violent.\textsuperscript{21} The prominent student agitations till 1968 have been recorded by Altbach, and the Vishwa Yuvak Kendra has documented 59 student agitations which have obstructed the normal functioning of academic institutions during 1968.

A close examination of the series of student strikes in Karnataka, Benares, Calcutta, and elsewhere in the sixties, and in Delhi during the early seventies highlights that in the sixties the student agitations started gradually regaining an organized form. Student unions came to be increasingly influenced by political parties though devoid of ideological fervour. But it was only in 1974 that the student agitations started manifesting characteristics of an articulated movement. It originated in Gujarat, spread to Bihar and was later transformed into a country-wide movement. The rising inflation of the early seventies marked the turning point in the economic scene and paved the way for socio-political changes. It is reported that between

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., p.19.
1971-72 and 1973-74 the per capita availability of food grains fell by 11 per cent and industrial production stagnated.\(^{24}\)

Spiralling prices and growing scarcity meant untold hardship to the people, who, especially in the urban areas, blamed the ruling Congress government for this and began expressing their discontent through rallies and strikes. The opposition political parties joined the protest. Instead of stopping the sliding of the living standards of the masses, the Congress government became defensive and resorted to the use of force to quell the protest. During the first half of 1973, the army was called out seventeen times to restore law and order -- a record in post-independence India.\(^{25}\) This only aggravated people's antagonism towards the government. This also marked the beginning towards the Government. This also marked the beginning of the systematic student movement directed against the Congress government, whose first phase occurred in Gujarat.

In December 1973, the resident students at an engineering college in Ahmadabad were asked to pay a 41 per cent higher mess bill the following month. The striking students turned violent and brunt public property. The Congress


\(^{25}\)Race to day August 1975, p.179.
government in Gujarat resorted to ruthless handling of the situation. A large contingent of police was sent to quell the unrest. But this was counter-productive, as the police excesses further widened the existing alienation between the students and the people on the one hand and the government on the other. The movement spread like wildfire throughout the state under the banner of Navnirman Samiti. In the course of four weeks of riots in January-February 1974, engineered mainly by the students, the police had to open fire on people 347 times, three times the annual average for the country as a whole.26

All this led to the imposition of President's Rule in Gujarat on February 2, 1974, but the assembly was kept in suspended animation, with the hope of reforming the Congress government once the tension cooled down. The strategy of the central government betrayed its ulterior motives and another bout of agitation occurred demanding the dissolution of the state assembly and the holding of fresh elections. The students evolved the novel technique of pressuring the legislative assembly members to resign their seats. Seventeen Congress members responded to the students' pressure and resigned their seats. On March 17, 1974 the state assembly was dissolved. This was a great achievement for the student movement.

26Ibid., p.180.
A latent consequence of this movement was the acquisition of a moral halo by the future Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, who had joined the struggle started by the students, and started on a fast unto death supporting the demand for the dissolution of the state assembly. He conveniently described the outcome of the students' struggle as a 'victory of the people's struggle'. "While exhorting the students to carry on their planned reconstruction work with courage and conviction, he pleaded for non-violence.

"Here was youth power channelized to achieve something concrete -- a phenomenon unthinkable till then." The government little realized that it was facing the beginnings of a mass student movement. It was at this juncture that Jayaprakash Narayan realized the significance of student power. The Gujarat incident provided the inspiration that Narayan had been waiting for. Jayaprakash Narayan, an erstwhile non-violent leader, was planning to lead a people's movement against what he described as widespread corruption in the country. Encouraged by the achievements of the student movement Navnirman Samiti in Gujarat, Narayan gradually moulded students of Bihar.


On March 18, 1974, the Governor of Bihar was due to address the Bihar legislature. Narayan and the students tried to prevent the governor and the legislators from reaching the legislature. The state government reacted with an excessive show of police force and the next two days witnessed unprecedented violence. The then Union Home Minister admitted that during those two days the police had opened fire nine times resulting in the death of eight and injury to seventy-two people.

In April 1974 a unique protest march called the Maun Julus took place. Volunteers of various non-violent groups were selected under oath to practice peace, silence, and thoughts of goodwill against the enemy. Led by Narayan they silently marched through the streets of Patna. It turned out to be an echo of the national conscience, and was described as "a deadening calm pregnant with typhoon."

In June 1974, Narayan called on the students to stay away from the classroom for one year so that they could fully devote themselves to the movement. This call was reiterated by the Chhatra Sangharsha Samiti which demanded the immediate closure of all the universities and colleges in Bihar. The state government was determined to hold the annual examinations, which had already been postponed once. The political atmosphere in the state was turning turbulent as the intermediate examination approached.

Ibid., p.168.
It is also important to note the alliances that were forged during this period. In Gujarat, the student wing of the right Jan Sangh combined with that of the Socialist Party to form the Navnirman Samiti, and the Congress (O) supported the Samiti. The same combination clicked in Bihar under the banner of Chhatra Sangharsha Samiti. The ultimate fruit of such a combination was the development of a united opposition political front, which became the Janata Party which later took power at the Centre and in a few north-Indian states. It is "a kind of political illogicality that went way beyond the rational understanding of those who had learnt to play politics only in the Western ways".

The "Internal" Emergency and Suppression of Student Activism

Whatever may the explanation about the events leading to the Emergency, the period will go down in the history of India as a brutal and ignominious one. We shall confine ourselves to the plight of student activism during this period. Recognizing the disruptive potential of the student movement, Mrs. Gandhi's government dealt harshly with student activism and jailed many key student leaders.

The various measures taken by the Congress government to suppress student activism may be broadly categorized into direct and indirect. Among the direct

*Ibid., p.172.
measures. At the outset, the government arrested, detained, and tortured the student leaders belonging to or sympathetic to the opposition parties. In some universities, such as Delhi University, intelligence agents were enrolled as students to discover the secret structure of student activism and underground resistance. Students who were found to be in any way sympathetic to the opposition party or showing opposition to the ruling party or its programmes were blacklisted and thrown out of the college or university or denied admission.

Secondly, the students' unions were depoliticized. Elections for students' unions were banned, and directives were issued for the formation of student "associations" through nominations or indirect election. The functions of such "associations" were to be purely cultural. Finally the government propagated the idea of the "constructive role of students in the implementation of the '20 point' programme and national development."

While the foregoing dealt a death blow to the nascent student movement, other measures were instituted under the subterfuge of educational reforms. The universities were advised to semester-wise courses starting with the first-degree level. Not only was the so-called "semester system" a sham of the system working in the Western countries -- as it involved a change neither in the content nor in the method of teaching, but only the multiplication of examinations and greater control over the students -- but it was also introduced almost overnight with absolutely no
preparation. Under the semester system, the students were constantly kept busy with course work and examinations, giving them little time to think about anything else.

Secondly, the government tried to appease the students belonging to the so-called "Backward Classes" by proclaiming measures -- like reservation of seats, concession in fees, etc., -- in addition to the existing constitutional reservations and facilities for the benefit of students belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. This resulted in a discernible cleavage among the students whose interests now stood divided, and this had pernicious consequences for the student movement.

Finally, in some states, such as Maharashtra and Karnataka, the governments promulgated ordinances reorganizing the structure and functioning of universities, resulting in the curtailment of academic freedom within the autonomy of the universities on the one hand, and the increased governmental interference in, and the undemocratic functioning of the universities on the other hand.

Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) Under the Emergency

JNU in New Delhi is one of the India's most prestigious universities. Focusing on post-graduate study and with a small and highly articulate student population, the university has been one of the most radical in India. It was not surprising that government repression was especially intense at JNU, starting with
the arrest of sixty student leaders in July 1975, and continuing for the entire period of the Emergency. These arrests marked the birth of a resistance among the students, led by the Students Federation of India (SFI), which engaged in underground activities. It kept a steady stream of handouts, bulletins, and other materials going in order to inform students of government actions and to keep the spirit of dissent alive.

With the onset of the Emergency, university authorities acted to restrict the Students’ Union, which was somewhat unique in India in that it was completely independent of the university administration. Membership, which had been mandatory, was shifted to voluntary, thus weakening the organization. The university also imposed “norms of behaviour for students” without student input, and this was also condemned by the students. Finally, university authorities expelled a number of students who were sympathetic to opposition groups. The Students’ Union called for a boycott of classes on August 22, 1975 and the faculty supported this boycott. While the boycott was almost completely successful, the university kept up its pressure and continued to deal harshly with dissidents. Another student strike was called in September, and this was also successful. University authorities called in the police and more student activists were arrested.

While most students supported the resistance and heeded the boycotts and strikes, the student community was not completely united. The All India Students
Federation (AISF), which at the time supported the Emergency, denounced the resistance and advocated a return to normalcy on the campus. The continuing factional disputes between the leftist SFI and AISF no doubt played a role in this situation, which resulted in the loss of support for the AISF.

New university policies reduced the Students' Union to a cultural association, eliminated the democratic structure of the organization, provided academic authorities with power to nominate individuals for union positions, and in general changed the nature of the organization. The right of the union to protest university decisions was eliminated, and the union was provided with a staff advisor who had veto power over all decisions. The university took authority to dismiss any student from the union or from the university. After implementing these new regulations, the Registrar of the University informed the Students' Union leadership that they had been ousted and the existing union "derecognized".31

The dissolution of the Students' Union meant success for the university authorities. On November 7, the "ex-president" of the Students' Union was expelled from the university for six months and on November 11 he was arrested and detained under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA).32

31Pamphlets released by SFI and AISF JNU unit from 1975-77.
32Ibid.
In this situation, the AISF abruptly changed its stand. In its pamphlet entitled “The Truth About ‘Resistance’” it vehemently criticized the SFI-led resistance, and accused the SFI of working against its candidate in the Delhi University Students’ Union elections. It appealed to the honest section of the SFI-influenced students to “down with left opportunism” and “professional hoodwinkers”, and return to the broad democratic left movement.

Thus came to an end the saga of resistance which nevertheless continued once the Emergency was lifted. It is the commitment of the SFI to the resistance and vacillation of the AISF during the Emergency that accounts for the immense popularity of the former and the weakness of the latter on the JNU campus today. While the saga of suppression and resistance in JNU was unique for its sophistication, the suppression of student activists in Delhi University and elsewhere was also significant. The case of Hemant Kumar Vishnoi is noteworthy. Vishnoi was closely associated with the rightist Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (hereinafter Vidyarthi Parishad), which had captured about seventy per cent of the students’ unions in the university, and was the target of government surveillance. His election as Secretary of the Delhi University Students’ Union immediately caught the attention of the government, since Vishnoi and his Vidyarthi Parishad associates had won the university elections on issues involving the Gujarat-Bihar movement.
On the eve of the Emergency, Vishnoi was away in Rohtak attending a students' camp. On his return to Delhi he had to go underground as he learnt that the President of the Delhi University Students' Union had been arrested and that the police were looking for him. Since most of the leaders had gone underground, it was difficult if not impossible for him to establish contact with his fellow Parishad leaders. A meeting with the General Secretary of the Vidyarthi Parishad resulted in rough plans of action. The police, however, sensed the situation; the underground office was raided and the General Secretary of the Vidyarthi Parishad was arrested.

On the eve of the reopening of colleges the police rounded up about fifty leaders who were considered to be influential. The Sangharsha Samiti issued a pamphlet condemning the arrests and urging the students to fight such repression and called upon them to observe July 25 as a "close-the University demand day". With more policemen than students on the campus, July 25 and 26 proved to be days of terror. In all 186 people were arrested, including some 120 college teachers.

In the light of the increasing difficulty and risk involved in communication a new method was evolved. Picnics were organized in open places and parks where underground people could meet and exchange information. At one such "picnic", following information leakage, Vishnoi was arrested along with other students. Then followed the inhuman third-degree methods of torture of Vishnoi and his associates to get secrets about the underground movement.
This, however, was not an isolated incident; the suppression of student leaders was almost a national phenomenon.

Held under the Defence of India Rule or Maintenance of Internal Security Act, they [student leaders] came from universities and colleges -- an incomplete list alone contains over one hundred institutions...from one end of India to another. 33

Thus, the largest and most valuable contribution to the struggle of 1975-77 came from the students and youth. While the government apparently controlled and contained the students unrest through repressive tactics and by creating a fear psychosis in the community of students, the continuation of such a trend only aggravated the latent anxiety and anger of students. The pressure burst once Lok Sabha elections were announced and student leaders released. A new wave of student awareness was evident in early 1977. The students took the election as a challenge and became involved in campaigning for their respective parties. The students played a crucial role in the defeat of the ruling Congress government and the election of the first alternative government in the political history of India since Independence. It is not all surprising that a segment of a society’s student population should be involved in activism that is militantly directed against the status quo.

It can be strongly argued, as C. Wright Mills argued, that students are the one group who will continue to supply recruits for such

causes, even when no other stratum is available. A completely inactive student body is a much more curious phenomenon historically than one which is involved to some degree in activism.

The explanations about the causes, content, and nature of student unrest are never the same or uniform in all the cases, because the manifestation of student unrest in any society is not ahistorical or isolated from its socio-economic milieu. Analyses of student unrest in India have highlighted various causes, from “high jinks” or the desire for ‘fun’ on the one hand to acute politicization of academia on the other. A recent survey of student indiscipline by the All India Committee of World Brotherhood lists the following causes:

...to much leisure time, political participation, sex problems, poor student-teacher relation, lack of facilities for representation of complaint, anxiety over examination, student frustration (anxieties, separations from friends or family, hurt feelings, unsatisfied ambitions, financial difficulties), inadequately handled student misbehaviour, and emotional immaturity.”

According to Singhal, in addition to the economic factors, organizational climate and political interest in the campus, belief in agitational tactics and faith in violence, perception of political and governmental interference, and absence of a

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code of conduct are significant causal variables. Ghosh has argued that student unrest in the country is being deliberately fostered by certain foreign agencies.

As regards the form that the unrest takes, expression of resentment (both verbal and written); boycott of classes and walkout from examination halls; demonstrations, rallies and courting arrests; strikes, dharnas and gheraos; and damage to public property, assault and intimidation are found to be salient. The students invariably attack disconnected symbols like vice-chancellors, district collectors, police officers, post offices, railway stations, etc., rather than the center of the system, namely, the government or the regime.

Generally, student agitation fits into Shils' characterization as a manifestation of juvenile delinquency. The manifestations are severe and recurrent as some impunity is always assured. But in the absence of official patronage and support, they tend to be unstable and short-lived.

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*Ghosh, S.K.,* “Student Rebellion in India”, *Quest 70*, pp.51-54.

This chapter observes that student unrest is not always necessarily a manifestation of delinquency, and given certain conditions, it can develop into a concerted social movement. We have seen how the sixties witnessed a spate of student agitations, how in the early seventies the student agitations developed into a mass movement to be ruthlessly suppressed during the Emergency, and how, once the Emergency was lifted, the sixties' type of agitations have reappeared. What accounts for this rhythmical alternative between growth and decline of a student movement?

According to Smelser, a society must be structurally conducive to the development of the type of elementary collective behaviour that will lead to a social movement before one can arise. In other words, the condition of the society must be such that new types of behaviour are possible, or are likely to appear. He identifies the presence of structural strains accompanied by feelings of anxiety and frustration as characterizing such a situation. This situation must have a common meaning for those who share the strain, so that they are willing to act, and there must be a dramatic event to precipitate action. Finally, there should be leaders who are able to sustain the movement until it becomes formally organized. At every point in this development, the instruments of social control, such as the government, the police, or public opinion, may play a decisive role in lessening or increasing the activity. They may also be important in determining its length and severity.
We may supplement this structural theory of social movement with an approach which stresses the role of specific politically relevant historical events as catalysts for student movements. This approach seems to confirm the views of those revolutionary theorists like Bakunin and Blanqui, who stressed the role of intellectuals and students as the inspirers, leaders, and often mass troops of the revolution. In the light of these theoretical frameworks it is easy to comprehend the origin and development of the student movement in the pre-Emergency period and its evanescence since then.

The Indian economy is characterized by a tension-ridden imbalance; the educational output is not commensurate with the absorptive capacity of the economy. Thus, between 1956 and 1974, the number of unemployed shot up from 5.3 million to over 15 million. The number of registered unemployed (only a fraction of the total) increased from 335,000 in 1951 to 9,315,000 in 1975 -- a twenty-eight fold increase in twenty four years. Nearly half of the registered unemployed had some educational qualification, including many with a university degree.  

The ineffectiveness of the Constitution and the inability of the ruling party to solve any of these problems, combined with its incessant desire to remain in power, are glaringly exposed by the fact that between 1951 and 1971, the
Constitution was amended twenty-two times, on an average once every eleven and one-half months. Between 1971 and 1974, there were fifteen amendments, roughly one every eight days. Almost all these amendments had very little to do with the welfare of the people and were basically designed to strengthen the government's particularly the ruling party's, position.

In 1974, the student movement was ably served by a leadership which was both experienced and commanded respect. Moreover, the movement started by the students developed into a broader political movement with the government as its target. Also important in this context were the dramatic events of 1974-1975 -- such as police firings, imposition of President's Rule in Gujarat without dissolving the state assembly, the defeat of the Congress party in the Gujarat mid-term election, the Allahabad High Court judgement declaring the election of Indira Gandhi to the Lok Sabha null and void, etc., -- which provided the necessary élan to the movement.

Given the course of events, the student movement could have become full-blown. But, the government, realizing what was in store for it, ruthlessly crushed the movement during the Emergency. Student leaders were arrested, detained, and tortured. Student unions were converted into nominated associations for cultural activities. Resistance to this suppression was systematically destroyed.
When the Emergency was lifted after the defeat of the Congress Party in the March 1977 Lok Sabha election, the student movement had lost its raison d'être. But there were innumerable student agitations resembling those of the sixties. What are the prospects of the re-emergence of such a movement? The post-Emergency socio-economic scene being a continuation of the pre-Emergency one, one should only expect the reappearance of such a movement. But whether this expectation would materialize or not will depend on other conditions. In the first place, after joining hands in a movement and being responsible for the formation of a new government, the students seem to be obliged to refrain from any attempt at resurrecting the movement, at least in the near future. Even if they attempt it, it will not be blessed by the political leaders who are in power.

Further, the various student and youth organizations which were once united seem to be clearly divided. For example, in Bihar, the Chatra Sangharsha Samiti, which had led the 1974 movement, stands divided into four sometimes feuding camps. Added to this is the parallel opposition force of the left-wing students organizations like the AISF, the SFI and the Bihar Students' Association. However, the left- and right-wing opposition is not uniform throughout the country, or even in one state. In the recent JNU Students' Union election, the SFI and the AISF joined hands and this alliance was opposed by the Yuva Janata, whereas in the Delhi University Students' Union election, the SFI joined hands with the Yuva Janata to
fight the Vidyarthi Parishad. But invariably the Congress-controlled National Students’ Union of India and the Young Congress are the weak enemies of both the left-and the other right-wing student organizations.

As it stands today, student unrest has the necessary infrastructure for its transformation into a movement, and the potentiality of students in this regard has been indubitably proved. Whether such a transformation takes place in the near future depends much on the role of instrumental conditions, which at the moment seem to be unfavourable.