CHAPTER X

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We shall now discuss the role of students in the administration of Higher Education in North East India. In all colleges and universities in North East India there are students' unions with substantial financial base. To control the union funds and the young and impressionable minds some political parties like the CPIM, the Jan Sangh, the CPI and the Congress have their wings in universities. They set up party candidates for the key positions in the union and very often they were elected as general secretaries of the unions. In 1968, the Students Unions demanded representation of students in university bodies and they were given representation in the Court in 1972 and not in other bodies.

From time to time they made a number of demands. In 1960, they demanded the introduction of Assamese as the medium of instruction in colleges; declaration of Assamese as the state language; they opposed the proposal of the State Government to start a separate university for Cachar District with Bengali as the medium of instruction; they demanded the abolition of compulsory attendance; the abolition of internal assessment; the introduction of post-graduate
classes in law; the establishment of a law college in the university campus; the establishment of post-graduate class in Hindi; the supply of purified water to the members of the university community; the increase in the number of buses for the transport of teachers and students of the university, introduction of modern advanced courses in Arts and Sciences, the representation of students in the university bodies, the abolition of the principle of nomination by the Vice-Chancellor of students' representatives to the court, to increase the value of scholarships, the construction of indoor stadium and a swimming pool, unrestricted admission of students in the Arts departments, lowering the qualifications prescribed by the State Government for posts of lecturers in colleges, improvement of the administration of the university hospital; the construction of an auditorium, keeping the library open on Sundays, introduction of employment-oriented education; democratization of the students union; construction of additional hostels for the accommodation of students.

Most of the demands are eminently reasonable. The university authorities agreed to several of them. Of course some of the demands are unrealistic. The students knew that there was acute scarcity of purified water but they asked
for the construction of a swimming pool. They knew that the abolition of compulsory attendance was not in the interest of students themselves. Yet they demanded its abolition. When they asked for the introduction of advanced courses of studies in Arts and Sciences they were not definite. Similarly when they demanded for the introduction of job-oriented education they had no clear understanding of the demand. Job-oriented education is intimately connected with population policy. This fact did not strike the student community. Similarly when they demanded that they should have a share in the academic administration they did not understand the implications of the demand.

We think that the demand for their representation in the university bodies is reasonable. This subject has been dealt with by several committees since 1949. The Radhakrishnar Commission said, 'As rapidly as the spirit of responsibility is developed among students they may be entrusted with ever increasing share in self-government'. Beyond this the commission did not deal with students' participation in university administration. That is, certain functions might be delegated to the students' Government-Proctoral System consisting of students and teachers. (P 382).
The Kothari Commission dealt with Students' Union and not with students' participation in university administration (P. 295).

It was the Committee on Governance of Universities appointed by the U.G.C. that dealt with this question elaborately. The Committee said -

'The university is a corporate complex with many constituents .... In this complex, there is no party in power and no party in opposition. Therefore it is from this point of view that the question of participation of students must be considered. ....... The concept of participation of students is to help make university education richer and more significant and meaningful. The contribution of students in determining the shape and pattern of academic life of the university can be very substantial. When students desire to participate in the academic life of the university, and to be intensively involved in their education, when they want to be joint partners in the pursuit of knowledge and co-sharers in the experience of acquisition of knowledge and want to develop a sense of belonging to the university both in regard to its academic and non-academic affairs, it is obviously desirable and necessary to promote and strengthen student participation in the administrative and academic affairs of universities' (P. 11).

While there should be a constant dialogue between teachers and students in respect of all aspects of university activity and institutional machinery for consultation
of students' opinion and ensuring student participation should be established, in each university. But then several questions arise here. What should be the level of participation? Should it be advisory and consultative or decisive? Should students be full members of the authorities of the universities? In what bodies should they participate?

It is admitted that students should have the opportunity to play a leading role in the organization of corporate life. They should be encouraged to give thought to important academic questions like the structure of the courses, the content of syllabus, pattern of instruction and examination. It is in the interest of the university as well as of the nation that students should have an understanding of the problem of management of the universities.

Now the question is about representation of students in the university authorities. We recommend that the students should be given adequate representation in the university court and must be treated as full members. As members of the court they will have full opportunities to express their views on all aspects of university activity. We suggest that students of each Faculty should have representation in the Court, say two each. Such representation will secure adequate
representation for all.

While we agree to the representation of the students in the Court we are not in favour of their representation in the Executive Council. Because the functions of the Executive are complex. Therefore, they should not get representation in the Executive Council. We also think that at present students should not be given representation in the Academic Council. Similarly it would not be desirable to give representation on the Faculties in the interest of maintaining academic standards. But there may be Students' Advisory Committee. The 1975 amendments of the Gauhati and Dibrugarh University Acts have provided for such a body.

It must also be said that there were instances of grave indiscipline on the part of students. On 16 August, 1961, they entered the administrative building and demanded and obtained the resignation of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Registrar, Deputy Registrar and Treasurer. On 22 August 1962 they compelled the Vice-Chancellor to resign. Again they resorted to violence which brought the resignation of another Vice-Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor was subjected to grant humiliation by a section of students in 1974 (1).

Thus, four Vice-Chancellors left office before completing their term. They took away public buses into the campus and would not release them. Sometimes they came in clash with a section of the public and the police. Sometimes such clashes resulted in the loss of public and private property. In some cases things have gone so far that teachers in colleges who were acting as invigilators were attacked when they detected the unfair methods adopted by the students. Apart from such extreme examples of indiscipline, there has been a spirit of general turbulence and rebelliousness among a large section of the students. It was no doubt a part of a general sense of unrest throughout the world due to the destruction of old values and the failure to create new ones in their place. Today even religion has lost its former hold over the student population. They are questioning the old practices. This may be attributed to the spread of rationalism and the development of critical mental outlook on the part of the students. The traditional proprieties are attacked. The trunk of tradition is no longer accepted by students in general particularly by the university students. While the present situation is not satisfactory, it is not beyond control. Effective timely measures may enable us to restore normalcy among students and the younger generation. On the other hand failure to take
effective steps may aggravate the situation and shake the very foundation of society.

Before suggesting corrective measures we must make a correct appraisal of the present situation and have a clear understanding of the causes of unrest among the students. The most important cause of present unrest among the students is due to the role that teachers play. Where the teachers are effective there is no indiscipline among the students. Unfortunately many teachers do not command respect and affection of their pupils to the extent they did a decade ago. For this the teachers alone are not to be blamed. There are other reasons for the unrest. First the non-cooperation movement started by the Mahatma cultivated the spirit of defiance of authority in the individual. When the students see acts of defiance by their elders they think that they too have a right to do so against the authorities and therefore are adopting an irreverent attitude towards the teachers. The moderates warned the Mahatma that resistance to authority would ultimately produce anarchy. Mahatma fasted on several occasions for some reason or other. The students copied this example and are undertaking what is euphemistically known as relay feasting.
Second, a substantial number of teachers are not devoted to their profession. They have taken to teaching since they do not find better employment. The best products of the university are absorbed by the All India Services and as a consequence the rejects are available for recruitment as teachers in the colleges and universities.

Third, the teaching profession, if taken seriously, is not an easy one. A teacher must have the gift of speech and power of communication. But many do not have these qualifications. Therefore many teachers take to dictation of notes. Some dictate notes directly from the text book itself. They do not prepare notes at home after consulting relevant books. What respect a student can have to a teacher who dictates notes directly from a text book?

Fourth, the administration in some colleges and universities is weak and inefficient. This encourages the students to adopt an irreverent attitude towards the administration.

Fifth, discipline would have been maintained if admission of students had been strictly on the basis of merit and limited in number. Good students do not like to be
swamped by huge numbers. They desire the teacher to bestow attention on them. But in a big class consisting of 100 or more students, it is impossible for a teacher to know and understand the personal needs of the students. A good student does not desire to meet teachers in groups but individually. It is not possible for a teacher to bestow attention to individual students. In these circumstances, the good students are frustrated. They have no affection for the teacher and the teacher simply regards them as syllables in the mouth of Allah. Most of the teachers handling big classes do not know even the names of students.

Sixth, in many colleges and universities there are factions-political and communal. As a consequence the teaching community is divided and there is a continuous struggle between the factions for power. The impact of this division is the division in the student community. The existence of political affiliation amongst the teachers and students illustrates the fact.

All these factors were responsible for the deterioration in the quality of teachers. Once the quality is lost, the leadership is lost. There is a sanskrit saying 'Yatha raja tatha praja' - as the king so the people. Thus the
teacher is the king pin of educational administration. The quality of education depends upon the quality of teachers. The recruitment of unworthy persons as teacher does the greatest harm to the teaching profession. Not only does not do his work honestly, he prevents others from doing it. In the Platonic sense there is injustice. Justice means each man must do his work in the station of his life to which he is called by his capacities. There is injustice when an unsuitable person is recruited as a teacher.

There are also other causes for students' unrest. There is tremendous increase in population in North East India. The net increase of population is 30 percent every decennium. The average size of a family is seven. This is due to the fact that the span of life has increased from 27 to 47 during the period 1947 to 1977. As a consequence there is increase in the number of boys and girls in colleges and universities. Many of them are drawn from classes which cannot provide them with their minimum needs. Before 1947, the number of students was very small and they were generally from the wealthier classes. They did not have to face economic difficulties when they were students. Today the situation is different. The students are drawn from classes which are experiencing economic difficulties. Though many
of them get scholarships and financial aids the amount is not sufficient to meet all their needs. Further, if a family has five children all of them are not entitled to scholarship. Only the first two get scholarships. Since the financial conditions of the families are not sound, many students have to support themselves financially either in part or in whole of their college and university life.

Added to this, the grim prospect of unemployment after the completion of their studies induces them to have no respect for the present system of education. We hear sometimes the slogans raised by students at the time of convocations, 'We want jobs, not degrees' although they do not understand the implications of their slogans. Any education which is job oriented like engineering or medicine will become out of date quickly so long there is no population policy.

Again, many students do not have any definite plans for their future. They are simply drifting like a rudderless boat. Therefore their education is largely purposeless. Since it is purposeless they are not fit for any job. A large number of high school students enter colleges and universities without any aim just to postpone the evil day of un-
employment. These students who have no aim and no plans for their future are the main source of trouble and indiscipline. They are not satisfied with the jobs suitable to their talents. They want particular jobs even though they do not have the necessary qualification. If they cannot get them, they are frustrated and promote indiscipline.

Added to this many students live in insanitary and congested localities. Even the hostels maintained by colleges and universities do not provide adequate facilities. Private messes lack even the bare amenities of life. Many students cannot afford to live in hostels because they cannot afford to pay the hostel bills. Thus, there are students who by accident are well placed in life while others occupy a miserable position. Each class has a consciousness of its own. The haves despise the havenots. The havenots fed by the doctrine of equality develop bitterness towards those who are well placed and towards the society and in course of time it ripens into a revolt.

Indiscipline is also due to the present system of education which lays emphasis on examinations and the acquisition of degrees some how or other. The aim of the teacher and taught is the same to pass the examination. The aim of
both is not the acquisition of knowledge. The Boards of Studies prepare the course for each examination. But the entire courses are not covered in the class and the students do not study the entire course. Particularly in places where there is semester system and internal assessment, the teacher teaches certain topics and directs the students to read only those topics and sets questions on such topics. The teaching is therefore not effective. The number of classes that a teacher may take in a semester may not exceed 40 which is a very liberal estimate. The result of all this is indiscipline, both among the students and teachers.

In places where there is no internal assessment and semester system, the situation is not any better. There is only one examination, conducted by the University at the end of the academic year on prescribed dates. Here the student does not read during the whole year. He simply spends his time in meaningless activities during the first nine months in the academic year. During this period he participates in agitations and demonstrations. He begins reading just two months before the date of examination. If he is not able to read even a small portion of the course, he gathers like minded students and starts a demonstration for the post-ponement of examinations. That is the reason why
examinations are held six months after the academic year is over. By such postponement good students suffer. The administration is weak and succumbs to the threats of violence by the mob.

Let us go a little deeper into this matter. Most students do not read the entire course. They select the 'very important' questions which are selected by a process of elimination. Their number is ten to fifteen. They are further classified into two 'very important' and 'important' groups, emphasis being laid on the first. In colloquial language they are called 'common questions'. If the common questions do not appear, one of the two things may happen. Violence may break out in the examination hall on the ground that 'the question paper is stiff', or the examinee may adopt unfair means. Sometimes the life of the invigilator is in danger if the student caught for adopting unfair means happens to be a rowdy. All these are happening because the possession of degree is essential for getting a job.

The insistence on a degree induces many thousands of students to enter the universities though they have neither the capacity nor aptitude for higher education. This will be evident from the high rates of failure in various
examinations shown in Table V. Many of them do not understand what is happening in the class. The presence of a large number such students not only retards the progress of education and the progress of good students but also brings down the standard of education and creates fresh problems for the authorities. There is no problem of indiscipline in a class consisting of students who are interested in the subject and in their studies. Students who are not interested in their studies or who have no ability to grasp the subject tend to gossip and disturb the teachers and students. Since they are accustomed to break rules in the class they also break rules outside the class.

Another reason for the rebelliousness in the students is the loss of idealism and the growth of materialism. The spirit of acquisitiveness, greediness and avariciousness are more prominent after independence than before. Further, since independence the spirit of hatred has been assiduously cultivated in the students. Once the student develops this trait it becomes a habit in course of time and they search for victims of their hatred. Before independence the leaders of the national movement placed before students the idealism of sacrifice for a cause. After independence there is no such idealism. The word sacrifice
for a good cause disappeared in the current dictionary. On the other hand the leaders have become exploiters. The students are copying the example of their elders. The final cause for the loss of idealism is Machiavellism success in life. Success should be achieved by any and every means. Means are not important. End is more important. Ethical considerations must be given a decent burial.

We have so far considered the major causes for the present unrest and indiscipline among students in this region. How to remedy the present situation? How to eradicate the present evils? There are several methods by which it could be done. The most important is the restoration of the leadership of the teacher. If leadership of the teacher is restored, it will go a long way in solving the problem of students' indiscipline. Teachers who are committed to their profession can command the confidence of the students. They can help check the demoralization, the cynicism and fatalism that exist among the students. Once the morale of the teachers is restored discipline is maintained in the student community.

How to restore the morale of the teachers? First, the quality of the teachers should be improved. Second, there should be an increase in the number of teachers. If there is
only one teacher for every hundred students there can be no discipline. Third, academic atmosphere should be maintained in the universities by weeding out square pegs from round holes. Party politics should not be allowed to pollute the academic atmosphere. Fourth, the Vice-Chancellors and the academicians should be appointed for their qualities. We had already discussed the method of appointment of the Vice-Chancellors in the appropriate chapters and it is not necessary to repeat what had already been said.

There are other methods by which the morale of the teachers may be restored. Teachers who had done meritorious service to the cause of higher education should be recognised. Such recognition will induce many to sacrifice their material happiness for a cause. The Bible says 'Ye shall not live by bread alone'. Material factors alone do not induce many to work. Many have an ideal before them and in pursuance of their ideal they work. They sacrifice their material happiness for a cause. True there are some who lay emphasis on material success. But their number is not very great. Thus what is necessary is the search for ideal teachers. They and they alone can strengthen the leadership of the teachers.
When we say that good teachers should be recognised we do not mean to say recognition of those who have good publications alone to their credit. There are some teachers who have a special flair for effective teaching but not interested in painstaking and laborious research. Very rarely one is a Radhakrishnan or Raman who is endowed, in unusual degree with both the faculties. Teachers who have a special flair for effective teaching can create enthusiasm in the students for learning and for the acquisition of knowledge. A university should have both the classes of teachers. It is excellent if a teacher has both the faculties. But that is not always possible. One may be learned but may lack the gift of speech and cannot communicate his ideas lucidly and interestingly. One may talk for hours but in the end the student may be asking himself what is the relationship between Rama and Sita? A good teacher should always see that the student follows him. That he can find out by looking in their faces. But it is true that in a class all the students may not have the same intellectual abilities to grasp what the teacher says. The teacher must look after them.

Again every teacher must increase his knowledge and develop his mind. This can be achieved if he is compelled to go on sabbatical leave on full pay so that he may resort
Further, while recruiting teachers the academic record must be the basis of recruitment. Interview is intended to find out the latent qualities of the candidates and judge the personality. Recruitment policy should not be guided by regional, communal or sectional factors. In the universities merit and merit alone must be taken into account. Any institution of higher learning which does not recognise merit is doomed for ever. All those universities where merit is the basis of recruitment are the great centres of learning. Students from all parts of the world are attracted by them. A university like Harvard, Cambridge or Oxford commands the confidence of the whole world because their faculties consist of men of learning.

Again, no teacher should be allowed to teach the same subject for more than five years. Otherwise they will not be explorers in the intellectual hinterland. Teachers who teach the same subject for more than five years tend to lose interest in teaching. Further, college and university teachers should not be permitted to undertake private tuition so that they may devote their attention to their primary
Finally, there should be periodical training of teachers in the latest methods of teaching and periodical assessment of their performance by impartial experts.

Is it possible to undertake these reforms?

Nothing, nothing is impossible for men of determination.

Nothing, nothing is impossible to men of will.