CHAPTER III

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While in many nations student political activism is a comparatively recent phenomenon beginning with the nineteen sixties, India has had a chequered history of student activism as part of the nationalist movement. The nationalist movement for the first time provided a semblance of political identity to the Indian youth in general and student youth in particular. Student participation in social reform movements and in nationalist struggle was considered noble and altruistic. It is proposed to analyse student politics in India by taking into account the highlights of student political activism in the pre-independence period and student protest politics in the post-independence period with regional variations, and last but not the least the profile of the student leader in India, taking into account regional and institutional variations as delineated by some scholars in their case studies.

I

Student movement in India developed in different phases in the last century. In the first half of the 19th century Indian society experienced many social reform
movements in which some students participated and associations were formed with social reforms as their main objective.

After the First War of Independence in 1857, political consciousness developed in Indian society and the student community was influenced by it. As early as 1875, Anand Mohan Bose established a student organisation in Bengal called 'student Association'. Surendranath Banerjee as a member of the faculty in Metropolitan college took steps to raise political awareness among the student community in the interest of the country. Later, in the year 1893, students resorted to strike under the leadership of Ashutosh Mukherjee in protest against the trial of Surendranath Banerjee. A section of Bengal youth, mostly students, were dissatisfied with the moderate programme of the Indian National Congress founded in 1885 and were bent upon revolutionary methods to achieve national independence.

Even before 1905 when the British sought to divide Bengal on communal lines, the spontaneous actions of students in different parts of the country against Carlyle's circular and ordinance on education proposing restrictive measures to prevent students from participating in political activities were widespread. The partition of Bengal

in 1905 may be treated as a landmark in the history of student political activism in India in the twentieth century. Students of Calcutta's Eden Hindu Hostel burnt Lord Curzon's effigy and boycotted examinations to protest against the partition of Bengal. In the wake of the anti-partition movement in Bengal various associations and societies with active participation of students took shape. In Maharashtra Upendranath and V.D. Savarkar formed the Young India League in 1906 and in the Punjab a group known as 'Naihawa' (New Wind) was formed to mobilise students and youth for revolutionary activities.

Ever since the agitation in Bengal, Indian students have made meaningful contribution to the cause of the freedom movement at its epochal phases. They contributed to the 'mass politics' under Balgangadhar Tilak and later under Mahatma Gandhi. Indian students were greatly influenced by the events of October Revolution in Russia in 1917. Students have been exposed to ideological currents from Europe which strengthened their commitment to noble causes.

The 1920s brought both educational and political changes to India. Gandhi's non-cooperation movement of 1920, consequent upon Jalianawalabag Massacre of April, 1919 transformed Indian National Congress from an elite organisation into a mass movement. This movement became the

turning point in the political life of the student community. Congress leaders in general encouraged students to come out of the precincts of the educational institutions and throw themselves wholeheartedly into the freedom struggle. Students provided much of the manpower for the daily demonstrations in the cities and in some areas, they took up leadership of the movement when the Congress leaders were arrested.

During this period student protest came to be directed against the educational system also. Agitation for national schools and colleges to replace government institutions was a major issue during the period. The non-cooperation movement stimulated the formation of a National Student Federation in India. The first Annual All India College Students Conference was held in Nagpur in 1920 under the presidency of Lalalajpat Rai to provide coordination for the growing student political movement. The appeal of Lajpat Rai to the students to be in the forefront of the non-cooperation movement was well received and they played a prominent role in this movement. Similar student conferences took place throughout the 1920s to keep the political spark of the student movement alive. Regional student federations were also formed in Bengal, in the Punjab and in other areas. Student Conferences were presided over by such important personalities as Lajpat Rai, Sarojini Naidu, Bhagwan Das, C.R. Das, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Jawaharlal Nehru. The all
India Student Conferences provided left-wing Congressmen with a platform and "the student movement was probably the most radical element in Indian political life during this period". One of the main campaigns of 1920s was a series of demonstrations against the Simon Commission which visited India in 1928 to look into the problems of Indian self government. Students demanded that the Commission recommend independence for India at the earliest.

1930s witnessed a more intense political struggle in India. Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 involved students in an unprecedented scale. In 1934, a radical group within the Congress - the Congress Socialist Party - was formed and students were attracted by its ideology. The more radical elements among the students were disillusioned with Gandhi's non-violent movement. Such frustration was to accelerate with ambivalence shown by the Congress leadership towards student participation in politics, consequent upon the formation of the Provincial governments.

One of the consequences of the agitations of 1930s was the formation of All India Students' Federation in 1936. Founded with the support of the Congress, it was looked upon as the student wing of the Indian nationalist movement. At its

The first conference at Lucknow Nehru exhorted that it was a 'sacred duty' of the Indian students to participate in the national movement. His presidential address at the Lahore session called upon the students to link their activities with those of the proletarian workers. The AISF addressed a host of academic demands to the seven State governments that were placed under the Congress rule: a reduction in fees, the introduction of free and compulsory education, elimination of anti-national ideas from text books, the use of vernacular languages as media of instruction, recognition of the students unions by the universities, student representation on the governing body of the university, more vocational training, relief for the unemployed and a ban on communal student organisations. Under the banner of the AISF, Gandhians, Socialists, Communists and independent radicals inside the Congress were effectively united and worked in harmony.

In addition to the 'mainstream' nationalist student movement, other important trends existed within the student community. The All India Muslim Students' Federation founded in 1937 under the auspices of the All India Muslim League, pressed for Muslim rights and joined Jinnah's call for a separate Muslim state on the Indian sub-continent. The Muslim student movement shaped the political ideologies of a whole generation.

generation of Muslim leaders even after partition. As a reaction to Muslim separatist sentiment, the Hindu right wing founded the Hindu Students' Federation in the 1930s, which was identical in ideology with Rashtra Swayam Sevak Sangh (R.S.S.) founded in the late 1920s. This communal divide in the student community was a cruel blow to the nationalist and radical AISF.

Worse still, internal conflicts between the Communists on one side, and the Socialists and the Gandhians (Nationalists) on the other, over ideological issues led to a split in AISF in 1940. Nationalist students supported the Quit India Movement against the British, while the Communist group supported the British war effort after the Soviet Union entered World War II in 1940. The Communist group continued to use the name of AISF as their student organisation while the nationalist groups organised themselves under the banner of All India Students Congress in 1945. Several political parties had their own student and youth organisations like Samajwadi Yuvak Sabha (The Socialist sponsored Young Socialist League) and the Marxist led parties the Progressive Students' Union.

The climax of student political participation in the freedom movement was achieved during 1942 "Quit India" struggle. The 1942 movement showed the student organisations at the height of their value-oriented period. Campus and
other educational issues were totally subordinated to political affairs at a time when ideological consciousness of the student community was very high. The student movement succeeded in the closure of most of the campuses for an extended period and involved the student masses into the nationalist struggle. Student radicalism stimulated by the Quit India struggle continued, although on a reduced scale until the end of the freedom struggle. By and large, student movements during the freedom struggle had a noble and precise goal, namely, achievement of political freedom for the motherland.

II

By 1947, when the country achieved independence, the Indian student movement had lost much of its momentum. There has been a dramatic transformation of the student movement since independence. In general, the student movement in India has been unable to regain its sense of unity and ideological purpose. The noble objective of achieving national independence has been replaced by generally unorganised and sporadic agitations based on local issues and aimed at


specific grievances."The decline of ideological politics since independence has led to 'campus politics', aiming to solve specific student problems and to redress student grievances". The major student organisations were not successful in shifting their efforts from an emphasis on political programmes during the freedom struggle to a programme of Gandhian constructive service after independence. In 1950 the Congress leadership called upon students to depoliticise themselves by severing affiliation with political parties and groups and to harness their energies for nation building activities. The Student Congress dissolved itself; urged the Student Federation to do likewise and called for the creation of a National Union of Students (non-political Federation of various students unions). The efforts of Nehru and Jayprakash Narayan in this direction failed primarily due to the suspicion of the opposition parties about the move of the Congress. Myron Weiner observes: "Eager to push students out of politics and into development work, Congress lost ground to the opposition parties, who in the meantime were winning student participation for electioneering work against the government and support for various movements against existing authorities".

Altbach opines that there is a gradual depoliticisation and particularisation of protest movements among Indian students since independence. He suggested the following reasons for this trend. First, the increasing heterogeneity of the student population consequent upon the expansion of educational opportunities to broader segments of population, has affected the sense of cohesion and unity of purpose among the students and made the mobilisation of students for any cause more difficult as compared to the pre-independence period. Second, the spirit of self-sacrifice and commitment to a noble cause almost disappeared after independence and many political leaders became more involved in their career prospect than in national reconstruction. The politics of compromise and expediency followed by political elites in the post-independence period set a bad model for the student youth to emulate. Third, the increasing stability of the nation's political institutions has reduced the impact of student politics on national politics. Fourth, in the pre-independence period, the emphasis in the universities and colleges was on the liberal arts and the social sciences and students in these areas were more concerned with intellectual and political issues and were more available for protest politics. After independence, greater emphasis was put on the sciences and professional courses and the students in
these areas are more professionally oriented and less available for protest movements. After the achievement of independence, "The centripetal forces of patriotism and nationalism started losing their effects and the centrifugal forces of regionalism, parochialism, communalism, careerism and the like started exerting their pressure on the society. Students, being a part of the Indian society, could not keep themselves unaffected by these forces."  

India is rather unique among Asian countries in having no massive student movement of an all-India dimension after independence. There is no unified student movement in the country and student groups are divided on political lines. Only a small segment of the student population is engaged in the day to day activities of the student political groups. All the same student agitations have, from time to time, rocked many universities and shaken many State governments. While student protest politics of various types and intensity, related primarily to campus issues, occur in every Indian State, some of the States have been affected by massive agitations concerning broader political issues. It is proposed at this stage to highlight some of the major student agitations in some of the States in India in order to show the focus of various student movements along with their regional variations.


The State with the most active and radical student movement is West Bengal. Its capital city Calcutta, continues to remain a major centre of student political activism. Students have actively participated in a number of mass movements including the tram fare strike, the Bengal-Bihar merger dispute, several agitations of high food prices and teachers' strike for higher wages. Students have continued to provide recruits for the leftist parties. In 1966 Calcutta was convulsed by student demonstrations in favour of a United Left Front anti-government campaign. Students were in the vanguard of electoral campaigns in 1967 which brought a non-Congress coalition government to power in West Bengal. Later, however, when the Left Front Government was unable to implement a radical programme, disillusioned radical students joined the Naxalite movement with its total abjuration of parliamentary politics.

A new Communist Party - Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) and a new political line made its dent in India with the militant upsurge of tribal peasants in the Naxalbari police station area in Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Sections of the students of Bengal, particularly of Calcutta, as well as of States like Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala were involved in this ultra radical movement.

It is interesting to note that throughout the period between 1967 and 1970 Presidency College and the Hindu Hostel had been the hub of naxalite activities and this college has produced some of the best Maoist student leaders. Students resorted to terrorist tactics and guerrilla warfare in parts of West Bengal under the inspiring leadership of Charu Mazumdar. The movement suffered on account of factionalism and ruthless repression by the state machinery. Nevertheless it demonstrated exemplary commitment and self-sacrifice by brilliant young men and women to build up the people's democratic revolution in India.

Uttar Pradesh, the largest State of India, has been affected by a special brand of student politics, namely, student involvement in academic crises on the campuses. Three of its leading universities—Benaras, Allahabad and Aligarh—have experienced chronic disruption of campus life on account of students' involvement in internal academic crises including factional squabbles on the faculty level and between elements of the academic community and the government. An analysis of three cases of student agitations in Benaras Hindu University occurring in 1958, 1965, 1968 respectively, came to the conclusion that these agitations were the product of the forces

of parochialisation and politicisation. Joseph Di Bona in his study of Allahabad University, highlights two aspects of the changes—the social origin of the increasing number of students and the parochialisation of campus environment—as contributing factors of student unrest. Since independence a kind of mass tradition has developed and along with localism it has contributed to changing values in campus life. Student unrests that swept northern India in 1966 were caused in most instances by local grievances. Students in the Hindi 'heartland' of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have agitated, from time to time, for the use of Hindi as national language both in letter and spirit. In the late 70s, students in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh agitated against the policy of protective discrimination in favour of the backward classes and paralysed academic life for over six months.

Educational institutions in Bihar have been drawn into the vortex of State politics as politicians and teacher-politicians use them as political platforms to promote their interests. Students have been embroiled in the factional fights among various groups in the university. Students have taken active part in electoral politics mostly in support of the non-Congress opposition. The Bihar student movement of 1974, like its counterpart in Gujrat in 1973–1974, marks the

13. See Roy, Anil Baran, Students and Politics in India, Delhi, Manohar, 1977.
dawn of a new phase in Indian student politics. This articulated movement of 'Chhatra Sangharsha Samiti' led by Jayprakash Narayan, focussed on broader societal issues like 'save democracy', 'electoral reforms', 'eradication of corruption and nepotism', 'availability of essential commodities at fair prices' and 'reorganisation of educational system'. There was wide support for the movement from the people at large. But "the summer of 1974 marked whittling down of a glorious mass movement for the establishment of democracy in Bihar into a controlled experiment at changing a government". The movement succeeded in dislodging the government from power, but failed, inspite of the total revolution concept, to achieve a thoroughgoing change in the existing socio-political system.

Gujarat was comparatively free from student political activism till 1973 when a widely supported student movement during 1973-74 became the harbinger of a new phase of student activism in India. "In Gujarat, probably for the first time in the history of student movement larger societal issues like rampant corruption in high places, blackmarket, rising prices and unemployment became crucial issues and the


real might of student power was witnessed. With the support of general public and the opposition parties, the student movement swept through the entire State, brought down the Congress government and even pressurised the Prime Minister to dissolve the State assembly. Student power succeeded in dislodging a 'corrupt government' and in focussing public attention on the crucial socio-economic issues.

The movements in Gujrat as well as in Bihar during 1973-74, brought greater cohesion among the political and mass opposition to the Indira Gandhi regime. But these failed to bring about any major changes in the socio-political system. As a perceptive scholar remarks: "As the Gujrat and Bihar movements proved, students can initiate, lead and sustain momentum of mass action on a fairly wide scale. Yet this capacity should not lead to erroneous analysis that students can be the vanguard of a real revolutionary movement. The forces of social progress are based on the relations of production......Students can only lend support to the workers and peasants. They can never hope to lead or carry on, on their own, a movement for revolutionary change".

Orissa has witnessed some major student agitations despite a general atmosphere of peace and tranquility on the


The strike against fee rise in 1951 and student participation in the State wide movement against State Reorganisation Commission Report in 1956 demanding the merger of two Oriya-speaking regions of Orissa, were the highlights of 1950s. The All Orissa student agitation of 1964 against the Congress ministry represents the high-watermark of student protest politics in Orissa. A well coordinated series of student demonstrations throughout the State against the alleged corrupt administration by the Chief Minister and police excesses forced the resignation of the government. In 1980, a student movement, sparked by a mere scuffle between some Marwari businessmen and students over the issue of raising funds for flood relief in Sambalpur town assumed an all Orissa character. The movement assumed the posture of the protest against the exploitation of economically backward people of western Orissa by powerful business interests.

Students of Andhra Pradesh had played a key role in the movement for the creation of a separate Andhra State during the early 1950s. Student activists continue to lend support to the Naxalite movement in the State. Students have been involved in the sporadic agitations in the backward Telangana district for the creation of a separate Telangana State.
In South India students played a vanguard role against the imposition of Hindi as India's national language in 1965. Students of Tamil Nadu were in the forefront of this movement, which forced the Union government to postpone the implementation of its language policies and guarantee the indefinite continuance of English as the associate official language. The language crisis signalled the decline of the Congress party and with active student support the DMK party came to power in Tamil Nadu.

In Maharashtra, students were involved in 'Samyukha Maharashtra Samiti' in the late 1950s in favour of a separate Marathi-speaking State with Bombay as its capital. The movement ultimately succeeded in 1960. Students of the depressed classes are in the vanguard of the movement for the assertion of the rights of the 'dalits'. In 1978 battle lines were drawn in the Marathwada University between the Harijan students and caste Hindu students over the issue of renaming the University after Dr. Ambedkar. In 1977 students of St. Xaviers' College, Bombay went on a strike against the continued attempts of the principal and the management to stifle free expression and democratic

rights in the College. In August 1978, a month long strike against increased tuition fees culminated in the seizure of Bombay University by the students in an unprecedented peaceful coup.

Student youth of Punjab were in the vanguard of the movement for national independence. They had displayed considerable militancy and sacrifice in fighting against the repressive measures of the British Raj. In the post-independence period, students of Punjab were involved in the demand for the creation of a separate Punjab State covering Punjabi-speaking areas, which was conceded in 1966. Before the mid sixties, student politics in Punjab was largely under the influence of All India Sikh Students Federation, a student wing of the Akali Dal, although the All India Students Congress was as well a force to reckon with. During this period, student leadership hailed largely from cities and student politics was urban based. Student politics from the mid sixties increasingly has came under the dominance of such left organisations as AISF, SFI and the PSU. Student leadership increasingly comes from the rural areas. Student politics in Punjab is marked by a tinge of communal complexion dominated as it has been by such organisations as All India Sikh Students Federation. Student politics is largely dominated by Jat-Sikh student leaders drawn mostly from rural
background. Again student politics in Punjab has failed to become an autonomous force as it has been unable to free itself from bondage to adult political party structure.\textsuperscript{21}

Since the early 80s, Punjab is in turmoil. There has been widespread agitation in the State over issues like the transfer of Chandigarh and other Punjabi speaking areas to Punjab, sharing of water resources with neighbouring States, greater central investment for industrialisation and employment generation. While liberals and moderates want a solution within the constitutional framework, the extremist group of terrorists are demanding secession from the Indian Union and formation of 'Khalistan'. The All India Sikh Students Federation has been faction-ridden consequent upon the division in the ranks of the Akali Dal, and there is no unified student movement in the State to restore sanity and normalcy and to resolve the main issues.

In Assam foreign national issue was raised in 1978. When in April 1979 the Election Commissioner ordered a revision of electoral rolls for holding a by-election, the tension turned Assam into a bloody battle ground. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AGSP), an adhoc coalition of a few regional political and

cultural organisations, started a campaign drawing public attention to the problem of illegal immigration to the State, mostly from Bangladesh. The Assamese were apprehensive that they would be a religious, linguistic, cultural minority in their own land. The movement leaders demanded that the Union government should take steps to identify, disenfranchise and deport illegal aliens. The years since 1979 witnessed governmental instability, sustained agitations and some of the worst ethnic violence in the history of post-independence India. The student movement continued till August 15, 1985 when the Union government was driven to sign an accord with AGSP. The accord incorporated significant concessions by the Union government to the movement's demands. The Assam movement leaders combined negotiations with general strike and civil disobedience campaign designed to demonstrate their power capability. The election to the Assam Legislative Assembly held after the accord brought signal victory to the student leaders under the banner of the Assam Gana Parishad and they were in control of the State government. It is for the first time in the history of student politics in India that student power climaxed in the assumption of governmental power.

By June 1975 the atmosphere was characterised by disenchantment and disillusionment. The failure of Mrs. Gandhi's government to solve basic socio-economic problems was met by more protest and dissent from various sections. The movement was led by Jayprakash Narayan under whose guidance student movements in Gujrat and Bihar had discredited the Congress Party. The Central government grew increasingly repressive. Mrs. Gandhi imposed internal emergency on the country in June, 1975.

Students, who were in the forefront of the agitations against the ruling party and Congress ministry in various States, became important targets of the coercive measures taken during emergency. The Students Unions were depoliticised. Elections for Students Unions were banned and directives were issued for the formation of 'Students Associations' through nominations or indirect election. Student activists and cadres of organisations like the SFI and the ABVP were to face arrest or go underground. Under the 'semester system', students were kept constantly busy with course work and examinations giving them little time to think about agitations. All the same, the student movement did not die under the repressive measures unleashed by the nineteen months of emergency.
It is no exaggeration to say that the most valuable contribution to the resistance movement of 1975-77 came from the students and the youth. After the abrogation of emergency the pent up feelings among the students found immediate outlet. A new wave of student awareness was evident on the campuses and student unrest in the post-emergency period centred on emergency excesses. Students took the elections as a challenge and were deeply involved in campaigning for their respective parties. Students played a crucial role in the defeat of the ruling Congress government in the general elections of March, 1977 and in the election of the first non-Congress government at the Centre.

There has been a sharp rise in student unrest in India since the emergency. In 1977 student political activists demanded action against the emergency excesses. Besides politically motivated agitations, issues like restoration of democratic rights, police excesses, protective discrimination, alteration of State boundaries, re-naming of universities and purely local issues such as bus fare increases have disrupted the normal functioning of academic institutions.

This brief survey of the major student agitations and movements in India since independence brings us to a discussion of the causes of campus unrest and the sources of student activism. These may be classified under economic,
political, social, psychological, administrative and academic categories. The sources of student activism in India may be classified under two broad categories - university as the source and the society as the source. Educational protests concerned primarily with the protection and promotion of the interests of students, account for the large number of protest activities that rock the Indian campuses. Rapid non-planned educational expansion at the cost of quality has contributed in different ways to student restlessness and indiscipline. The academic environment is far from being conducive to the development of a healthy personality in the student community. "One of the most important aspects of university life has been the politicisation of many universities in India. This factor has major implications for student activism and indiscipline". Students, teachers and academic administrators have in their own way contributed to "political factionalism of an academic variety".

The Indian student is very much a part of the society and is subject to its manifold problems and pressures. India, notwithstanding her march towards a modern and industrial society, is still very much a society of scarcity. Student unrest is a manifestation of the prevailing socio-economic situations and deeper problem of social change in India. "The cleavage between generations" -

the older and the less educated generation and the younger generation in attendance at universities,"the restricted range of opportunities for achievement and conviviality", and "scarcity of socially and economically rewarding opportunities for employment", are conditions of unrest in most third world countries. Students have quite often participated in political campaigns when they have felt strong enough about societal issues. Student groups are divided on party lines and the involvement of extraneous political forces in Indian colleges and universities has destroyed their autonomy and academic atmosphere and stimulated student political activism. "The behaviour patterns of elders including politicians have had a disastrous influence on the morale of the student community. Indian educational institutions have reflected in many ways the unsavoury features of Indian social and political life".

There has been a progressive decline of ideological politics since independence. Independence signalled a decline in the spirit of sacrifice and ideological commitment which characterised the nationalist movement. Student activism in the post-independence period has generally been based on sporadic, regional, local and non-ideological issues. In addition when students have fought for and agitated about societal issues, these questions have also been of a relatively limited scope and of a temporary duration and

did not have implications for fundamental changes in Indian society. "Students are neither central to the processes of social change in India nor are they the society's antenna to the future." Students have seldom come forward to launch a sustained movement against a host of socio-economic and political maladies that afflict the Indian society. They have rarely developed continuous strategies to articulate their needs and aspirations and mobilise their energies to achieve well defined objectives. "Periods of massive student activity have been followed by prolonged periods of calmness. Decline of ideological politics, the want of dedicated leadership and cynicism of the student community engendered by the general malaise of the broader society and the corruption of the political system are some of the fundamental causes of the absence of on-going student movement in most parts of the country."

"India fulfils all the pre-conditions for an active and potentially volatile student movement." India's large student population diffused over all parts of the country might at some point play an absolutely critical role in national or regional politics. With the lowering of the voting age to eighteen, youth and students are likely to

27. Hazary, S. C., "Protest Politics of Student Youth in India", op. cit., p. 117.
display greater interest and participation in larger social and political affairs. The campuses as solid vote banks are more likely to be prone to extraneous pressures and counter pressures.

III

In any analysis of student politics it is important to reckon that student activists or leaders constitute a small percentage of the total student community. There is a sharp contrast between the politically oriented activist few and the mass of apolitical and more career oriented students. The active few influence the political behaviour of the students in general and determine the focus and direction of student political action. It is difficult to present the profile of the student leader in India since such an attempt is likely to overshadow socio-cultural, regional and institutional variations. However, on the basis of the limited literature, it is proposed to present the profile of the student leader in India, taking into account regional and institutional variations as depicted by scholars in their case studies.

Joseph Di Bona was perhaps the first scholar to confine his study of student politics and leadership to a single institution, namely, the Allahabad University. He traces the evolution of the university and infers that

mass enrolment of first generation of students from the economically backward region of eastern Uttar Pradesh has changed the elitist character of the university. The character of the student union has changed over the years. In recent years, the student leader is the head of a large, easily aroused and possibly dangerous body. The qualities most important for success in student union election are sincerity and a demonstrated ability to fight for student rights. Student leaders are in general older than the average student. Prior to independence, the student leaders came mostly from middle class background and were persons of some academic achievement. Since independence, the student leader reflects the rural origin of most of the students and he is politically oriented. The leaders display great verbal ability which converts mobs into movements.

Another study on Allahabad University by Pramod Kumar discusses certain background factors related with leadership selection. Of the factors studied, age, caste and length of stay in the University associated significantly with student leadership. In general, the student leaders tended to be older, belonged to the higher caste and had a longer stay on the campus.


Robert C. Shaw's study characterises the student leader in the Osmania University, Hyderabad on the basis of interviews with 9 prominent student leaders. The student leaders come from a middle class or above families; (b) He is not a good student but has a good command of English language and speaks well in public; (c) He is older than the average student. Some of the older leaders fit into the definition of the 'professional student leaders' who have the highest political aspirations; (d) Those leaders have come to the rueful conclusion that all the authorities ignore grievances until a protest movement is mounted; (e) the leader who condones violence during strike is the same one who considers his ethics to be purer than those of the adult world.

S.M. Sayeed's study is based on the leaders of the Lucknow University Union from 1948 to 1970. The study is based on the information collected from 26 out of 32 persons who held the offices of the President and Secretary of the Lucknow University Union during the said period. The study shows that student leaders are made; they are not natural or born leaders. Only 23% leaders come from politicised families. Since 1947, student leaders have been 'manufactured' by the


professionals, toughs, and youth organisations. An overwhelming majority of leaders were the leading members of various youth organisations which were affiliated to political parties. The leaders confessed that almost all the agitations were either sponsored or supported by the different political parties and the Union leaders always received guide lines from the party bosses.

Another study on student leadership in Lucknow University deals with some characteristics of student leadership on the basis of a survey of 220 student leaders, both past and present. The scholar discerned the following characteristics of student leadership: (a) The leaders turn out to be older than non-leaders; (b) An overwhelming majority of student leaders (85.5%) were Hindus; (c) The caste composition of student leadership conformed to the country's wider political leadership picture: student leadership was monopolised by the upper caste Hindus (93.5%), mainly the Brahmins; (d) About 68% of the student leaders belong to the rural areas; (e) The majority of student leaders (60.9%) were hostellers; (f) Most of the student leaders (above 75%) were bachelors; (g) the number of professional student leaders was very small.34 Again the scholar inferred that (a) student protest is less characteristic of science than non-science students; (b) more student leaders (68.2%) come from undergraduate classes than...

from post-graduate classes (31.8%); (c) the majority of student leaders had only an average or fair academic record and about one third had a poor record; (d) Most of the student leaders remain uninvolved with extracurricular activities like sports and drama.  

T.K. Oommen's study of student politics in Delhi University during 1968-69, analyses the socio-economic background of the student leaders, their recruitment and political orientations. An overwhelming majority of student leaders came from business families and most of them were urban-bred. Academically most of them were average students and 83.3% were from the faculties of humanities, social sciences and law. A majority of the student leaders aspires to become political leaders. Student leaders were aligned with political parties and personalities and this affected their autonomy in decision making.  

Altbach's study of student politics in Bombay has confirmed the following hypotheses relating to student leadership: (a) Student leadership comes from fairly definable groups within the student population; (b) Since independence, students from the upper classes and upper academic levels shun student leadership.

politics. Much of the leadership has been taken over by the students from the lower middle classes; (c) Students from science and 'professional' courses were conspicuous in their lack of political involvement; (d) the pattern of student life in Bombay has been one of rhythmic alternation between growth and decline of fairly strong student movements.  

R.N. Sharma's study of student leaders of Patna University Union offers a meaningful profile of how a student leader looks like, how does he gain power, how does he maintain and enhance it. A student leader is socially oriented, polite, sympathises with students and talks about their welfare. He is also politically oriented and aspires to join politics as a career. Most of the time, he is after power and actually wants to maximise his own gains. The student leader makes use of tools like manipulation, deception and exploitation. He maintains political affiliation as power mechanism and uses money for exerting influence. The student leaders are strikingly similar to the political leaders and are rarely motivated by idealistic objectives.  

S.K. Pattnaik presents the psycho-social profile of a selected group of political activists of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. A large proportion of political leaders are ideologically oriented and have a strong sense of identity with the cause they represent.  


activists came from (a) upper class families, (b) male population, (d) advantaged schooling background, (d) urban areas and were (e) hostellers and (f) high academic achievers. It was found that all the Presidents of the J.N.U. Students Union since its inception in 1971 came from elite homes and were academically bright.  

In a study of student political elites from four colleges of Tamil Nadu-Thiruvelluvar, Arcot, Muruga and Kachiappa - Chitra Shivakumar came to the following conclusion. Caste and wealth emerged as the two most important elements in the formation of the student political elites. Large number of the elites come from the rich families belonging to upper non-Brahmin castes. However, student leaders of wealthy upper castes increasingly face challenges posed by student leaders and their supporters from lower non-Brahmin castes and from Scheduled castes. Wealth and money power were mentioned by the respondents as a critical variable in the formation of student political elites. Student leaders who are aligned with political parties display a considerable degree of politicisation. Again student leaders primarily sought leadership status and glamour of office.


Hazary's comprehensive study on student political elites in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, Orissa covers an extensive period from 1938 to 1979. Some of his important findings are: most of the student leaders had a middle class or lower middle class family background; most of them hail from rural areas and were high caste Hindus. A majority of them was first generation leaders. About 80% of them belong to the faculties of humanities and social sciences. About half of the student leaders had either an excellent or good academic career. Most of them were affiliated to student political associations, but only one-third had membership of political parties. In general, student leaders were 'amateurs', not 'professionals'. Only 30% of the leaders aspired for a career in politics, while the present occupation of the student leaders shows that only 19.5% are in politics. Thus an overwhelming majority of the student leaders had taken up secured occupations and avoided the uncertainties of a political career.⁴¹

The foregoing review of some studies on student leadership in India demonstrates the difficulty in delineating a common profile of the student leaders. Such variables as educational environment, region, socio-cultural milieu and

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⁴¹ Hazary, S.C., *Student Politics in India*, op. cit.
political situation contribute to diversity in regard to the profile of student leaders in India.

In addition to the above mentioned case studies of student leadership, the general observations on the nature and quality of student leadership in India by some perceptive scholars may be mentioned.

Gaudino's critique of the 'Indian University' makes a reference to students and politics. He says that the student union is zealous of its prerogatives. It raises the student voice to audible pitch on a host of issues. Many of the leaders are mediocre students, long around the campus, aspiring to some sort of political future. A coterie of students may form around a political personality. He concludes that student union leaders achieve very little of practical advantage for the student community. 42

Ray's BHU study shows that student politics is indistinguishable from faculty politics and party politics. And it is largely a dependent variable of the politics of the professional world. His case studies of three agitations occurring in BHU in 1958, 1965, and 1968 indicate that the professional student leaders who align with faculty factions and political parties form the 'main leadership core of agitations'; moreover, agitating students often use coercive pressure tactics. 43

42. See Gaudino Robert L., The Indian University, Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1967.
43. See Ray, A.B., op. cit.
Sinha deplores increasing use of strong arm methods in post-independence student politics. Most of the student leaders are not conversant with political ideologies and lack ideological commitments. The sustaining forces are sheer opportunism and a philosophy of short-term gains.44

Pradeep Singh's paper states that student leaders are politically aligned. As such they cannot display insight of a higher order than what their political mentors give evidence of. Student leaders are regarded as potential recruits by all political parties. He makes the prognosis that student leadership in India will continue to show the effects of political pressures and counter pressures from outside the campus.45


45. Singh, Pradeep, "Leadership", Seminar (176), April, 1974, pp. 24-26,