CHAPTER III

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While in many countries student activism is a recent phenomenon beginning with the 1960s, India has had a long and glorious history of student activism. Student participation forms a glorious chapter in the history of the national movement. At the call of the national leaders, student youth had plunged themselves into the mainstream of national struggle and fired by the tremendous national fervour, many of them had sacrificed their studies and even laid down their lives for the country's liberation. The nationalist and reform movements of pre-independent India provided a semblance of political identity to the Indian students and youth. A brief historical survey of student movement is necessary for analysing the nature and prospects of student politics in post-independence India.

I

As early as 1875, Anand Mohan Bose established a student organisation in Bengal called 'Student Association'. After joining as a member of the faculty in Metropolitan College, Surendranath Banarjee had a feeling that the seed of politics must be sown among the student community in the interest of the country. Later, in the year 1993, students went on strike under the leadership of Ashutosh Mukherjee in protest against the trial of Surendra Nath Banarjee. A section of
Bengal youth, mostly students were dissatisfied with the programme of the Indian National Congress, founded in 1885 and were desirous of achieving independence through revolution. Students of Bengal took active part in the movement against the partition of the Province in 1905. Students formed the backbone of the voluntary corps in the forefront of the ensuing boycott movement. In the wake of the anti-partition movement in Bengal, various associations and societies took shape. In most of them, students were the active participants. Students in Maharashtra and Punjab were also deeply involved in nationalist politics. In Maharashtra, Upendranath and V.D. Savarkar formed the young India League in 1906 and in the Punjab, a group known as 'Nai Hava' was formed to mobilise students and youth for revolutionary activities.

Ever since the outburst in Bengal, students have made meaningful contribution to the cause of the national movement at every one of its epochal phases. They contributed to the 'mass politics' under Tilak and later under Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's non-cooperation movement of 1920 transformed the Indian National Congress into a mass movement. While some of the early liberals like Gopal Krishna Gokhale perceived the dangers of students' participation in politics and had sounded a note of warning against its future consequences, Congress leaders, in general, in the Gandhian era, encouraged students

to come out of schools and colleges and throw themselves into the freedom struggle. Students provided much of the man power for mass demonstrations and in some areas, they assumed the leadership of the freedom movement, when Congress leaders were arrested.

In the early 1920s, student agitation, for the first time came to be directed against the educational system itself. Agitation for national schools and colleges to replace the government institutions was a major issue during the period. In the meanwhile Gandhi himself toured northern India to convince the students that their educational institutions were anti-national. The first All India College Students Conference under the Presidentship of Lala Lajpat Rai was held at Nagpur in December, 1920 to provide co-ordination to the growing student political 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 the Punjab, in Bengal and in other areas. Since the national leadership have visualised the decisive role of the students, such conferences were presided over by no less important personalities than Lajpat Rai, Sarojini Naidu, Bhagwan Das, C.R. Das, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Jawaharlal Nehru. The All India Student Conferences provided Congressmen with leftist orientation with a platform and "the student movement was probably the most
radical element in Indian political life during this period. Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 involved students in an unprecedented scale.

In accordance with Gandhi's wishes, the official end of the Civil Disobedience Movement came in 1934. The 1934 Congress session also saw the formation of the Congress Socialist Party, a radical group within the Congress. The students and youth in general, were fascinated and consequently lent support to the Congress Socialist Party. This was in the background of the frustration in the more radical elements among the students with Gandhi's Satyagraha Movement and facts in general and with his suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement, in particular. Such frustration was to increase with the ambivalence shown by the Congress leadership towards student involvement in politics after the formation of the Provincial governments. In this context, it should be remembered that most of the best known youth leaders of the freedom movement were in the ranks of the revolutionaries and not of the Congress. The growth of the national movement increased the overall political awareness of the student community. India's educational institutions, which had previously maintained neutrality on most political issues, were forced into the struggle by the militant

student movements. Perhaps the most significant development in the history of the Indian student movement in the pre-Independence period was the formation of the All India Students' Federation in 1936. Founded with the support of the Congress, it was conceived as the student wing of the Indian Nationalist Movement. Nehru, in his address to the first conference of the All India Students' Federation at Lucknow exhorted that it was a 'sacred duty' of the Indian students to participate in the national movement. The presidential address at the session held at Lahore called on 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 then under Congress control: a reduction in fees, the introduction of free and compulsory education, the elimination of anti-national ideas from text books, the use of vernacular languages as media of instruction, recognition of the student 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.

The AISF effectively united the student movements for several years while the Gandhians, Socialists, Communists and independent radicals worked in co-operation.

The All India Muslim Students' Federation, founded in 1937 under the auspices of the All India Muslim League, was

a blow to nationalist and radical AISF. Many Muslim students were influenced by Jinnah's call for a separate Muslim State on the Indian sub-continent and joined the AIMS. In reaction to Muslim separatist sentiments, the Hindu right wing founded in the 1930s the Hindu Students' Federation which was similar in ideologies to the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) founded in late 1920s.

After a period of harmony, differences between the Communists on one side, and the Socialists and the Gandhians on the other, came into the open in 1940 making the break up of the AISF inevitable. Thereafter, nationalist students supported the Quit India Movement against the British, while those affiliated to the Communist group supported the British war effort after the Soviet Union entered the Second World War in 1940. The Communists continued to use the name of the AISF, while the Socialist-Gandhian group (nationalists) eventually changed their name to the All India Students' Congress in 1945. In addition, several political parties had their own smaller student and youth organisations like the Samajwadi Yuwak Sabha (the Socialist-sponsored young Socialist League) and the Progressive Student Union (Marxist-led parties).

The most militant and highly organised period of the Indian student Movement came during the 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 closing most of India's campuses for extended period and brought masses of students into the struggle. The struggle provided student leaders with lessons in politics and to the rank and file a sense of political participation. The militancy of the student involvement in the 1942 movement was continued, although on a reduced scale, until the end of the freedom struggle.

II

There has been a dramatic transformation of the Indian student movement since independence. In general, student movement has been unable to regain its sense of ideological purpose. The idealistic objective of achieving national liberation and the broad radical objective of tackling enormous socio-economic maladies have generally been replaced by unorganised and sporadic agitations based on local issues and specific grievances. In 1950, the National Congress leadership called upon students to depoliticise themselves by severing affiliation with political parties and harnessing their energies for

constructive 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 the various student unions). The efforts of Nehru and Jaya Prakash Narayan foundered primarily due to the suspicion of the opposition parties about the move of the Congress. As 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 suggests that there is a gradual depoliticisation and particularisation of protest movements among Indian students. He suggests three reasons for this. First, the increasing heterogeneity of the student population consequent upon the growing educational opportunities and the availability of higher education to broader segments of population which has made the mobilisation of students for any cause more difficult as compared to the nationalist period. Second, the increasing stability of the nation's political institutions has reduced the impact of student politics on national politics. Third, during the pre-independence period, the emphasis in the universities.

was on the liberal Arts and the Social Sciences and students in this area were more concerned with intellectual and political issues and were more available for political protests. After independence, greater emphasis was put on Science and technical education and students in this area are more professionally oriented and less available for protest movements.7

After independence was achieved, "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."8

India is rather unique among Asian Countries in having no massive student movement of an all India dimension after independence. There is no longer a unified student movement in the country and only a small fraction of the student population is involved in the day-to-day operations of student political groups. In general, "the concern of the student movement has shifted from societal concerns to campus ones, although there are dramatic exceptions to the comment."9


Student strikes and agitations have, from time to time, rocked many universities and shaken many State governments. While student protest politics of various kinds and intensity, related mostly to campus-oriented issues occur in every Indian State, some of the States have been affected by major student agitations concerning broader political issues. It is proposed to highlight the major student unrests in some of the States in India which will demonstrate the regional variations and the focus of various movements.

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 activity. Students have participated in a number of mass movements, including the tram fare strike, the Bengal-Bihar merger dispute, several agitations over high food prices and teachers' strike for higher wages. Students have continued to provide recruits for the leftist parties. In turn, radical student groups have received active support from their political mentors outside the campus. Students spearheaded the electoral campaigns in 1967 which brought a non-Congress leftist government to power in West Bengal. Later, however, when the Left front Government was unable to implement a radical programme, frustrated radicals among the student groups 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 presence felt in India with a militant upsurge of tribal peasants in the Naxalbari Police Station area in Darjeeling district. Sections of the students of Bengal—particularly of Calcutta as well as of other States like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Kerala, were involved in this 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 took recourse to terrorist tactics and guerrilla warfare in parts of West Bengal under the inspiring leadership of Chap Manjumdar. The whole CPI(M-L) movement was to become faction-ridden in the latter years. In the meantime, the ruthless repression against the ranks of the movement unleashed by the State machinery started to take its toll. In spite of some spectacular raids on police stations and some successful raids of annihilation on class enemies, the "Spring Thunder of 1967 was to cool almost like a Summer shower". Nonetheless, the Naxalite movement demonstrated exemplary commitment and self-sacrifice by bright young men and women to build up the peoples' democratic revolution in India with the ultimate aim of "seizure of state power".

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Uttar Pradesh, the largest state of India, has been rocked by a special brand of student politics, namely, student involvement in academic crises of the campus. Three of its leading universities—Benaras, Allahabad and Aligarh—have experienced chronic crises on account of students' involvement in factional squabbles on the faculty level and between elements of the academic community and the government. In an analysis of three cases of student unrest in Benaras Hindu University, occurring in 1958, 1965 and 1968 respectively, it was found out by A.B. Roy that these agitations were the product of the forces of parochialization and politicization. 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 parochialization of the campus environment—as contributory 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. University students of Uttar Pradesh and other Hindi-speaking regions of North India have agitated from time to time for the use of Hindi as the national language both in letter and spirit.

Universities in Bihar have been drawn into the vortex of state politics as politicians and teacher-politicians.


use the educational institutions as political platforms to promote their interests. Students have been embroiled in the factional fights among various groups in the universities. Students have taken active part in elections, mostly in support of the non-Congress parties. The Bihar student movement of 1974, like its counterpart in Gujarat during 1973-74 marks the dawn of a new phase in Indian student politics. The Chhatra Sangharsha Samiti, led by Jaya Prakash Narayan, focussed on broader issues like 'save democracy', electoral reforms, eradication of corruption, availability of essential commodities at fair price and reorganisation of the educational system.

There was participation in and support for the movement from a wide spectrum of the Bihar population. But "the Summer of 1974 marked the whittling down of a glorious mass movement for the establishment of democracy in Bihar into a controlled experiment at changing a government". The demand for the dissolution of the Assembly and for the eradication of corruption in government gave the movement a distinct anti-Congress slant. The Bihar movement, just as in Gujarat, was aimed purely against a government and not in fact, inspite of the total revolution concept, against the existing political system.


Student movement in Gujarat 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 Indian student movement, larger societal issues like rampant corruption in high places, black markets, rising prices and unemployment became the crucial issues and the real might of student power was witnessed." With the opposition parties lending support and the middle and the lower classes sympathising with their protest against price rise and political corruption, the student movement swept over the entire State, brought down the Congress government and even pressurised the Prime Minister to dissolve the State Assembly.19

The movements in Bihar as well as in Gujarat during 1973-74 did indeed bring greater cohesion to the political and mass opposition to the Indira Gandhi regime. Yet they failed to bring about any substantial changes in the socio-political system, except for the ephemeral achievements like dissolution of the Assemblies and resignations of the Chief Ministers. As a perceptive scholar remarks: "As the Gujarat 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 the 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 forces of 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 prevailing on the campuses. The anti-fee rise strike in 1951 and student participation in the State wide movement against the States Reorganisation Commission Report in 1956 demanding the merger of two Oriya-speaking regions with Orissa were the highlights of the 1950s. The All Orissa Students agitation of 1964 against the Congress ministry represents the high water mark of student activism in Orissa. With the active support of the opposition parties and the sympathy of the general public, Orissa students sought to focus attention on the alleged corrupt administration by the State Chief Minister and on police excesses which ultimately led to the resignation of the Chief Minister. In 1980, a student movement, sparked by a mere scuffle between some Marwari business men and students over the issue of raising funds for flood relief in Sambalpur town assumed an all Orissa character. The movement was a protest against the exploitation of economically backward people of Western Orissa by powerful business interests. It was directed against black marketeers, profiteers and powerful vested interests.

Students of Andhra Pradesh played a key role in the movement for the creation of a separate Andhra State during the early fifties. Student activists continued to lend support to the Naxalite movement in the State. The Naxalite movement provides a protracted resistance in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. There has been student involvement in the sporadic agitations in the backward Telengana region of the State for the creation of a separate Telengana State.

Student activism in Tamilnadu came to limelight in the State-wide agitation in 1965 against the use of Hindi as India's national language. Protracted student movements in the South forced the Union Government to evolve the three-language formula and the indefinite continuance of English as the associate official language. The language issue signalled the decline of the Congress Party and active student support for the D.M.K. Party paved the way for its assumption of power.

In Maharashtra, students were involved in the '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 in Maharashtra are in the vanguard of the movement for the assertion and protection of the rights of the 'Dalits'. Students of Bombay, in August 1978 seized control of the Bombay University in an unprecedented peaceful coup. The student action was the climax of a month long agitation over the rise in College fees.
Youth and students of Punjab were in the vanguard of student participation in the freedom struggle. They had displayed 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 regions) which was conceded in 1966. Since the early eighties, Punjab is in turmoil. On issues like the transfer of Chandigarh and other Punjabi-speaking areas to Punjab, sharing of water resources with neighbouring states, greater central investment for industrialization and employment generation, there has been wide spread agitations in the State. While liberals and moderates want a solution within the constitutional framework, the extremist group of terrorists, financed and supported by some alien Sikhs and foreign powers, have raised the demand for Khalistan outside the Indian federation. This secessionist movement has threatened national unity and integrity and continues to disrupt normal life in the state. The All India Sikh Students Federation has been divided on this issue consequent upon the fragmentation in the Akali Dal and there is no unified student movement in the state to throw its weight in resolving the stalemate and facilitate the restoration of normalcy.

Students were in the forefront of the movement in Assam for the expulsion of the 'foreigners'. The political
turmoil began in the fall of 1979 when the All Assam Students Union (AABSU) and the Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AGSP), an ad hoc coalition of a few regional political and cultural organisations, started a campaign drawing attention to the problem of illegal immigration to the state, mostly from Bangladesh. The Assamese were apprehensive that they would be a religious, linguistic and cultural minority in their own land. The movement leaders demanded that the Central Government takes steps to identify, disenfranchise and deport illegal aliens. The years since 1979 saw governmental instability, sustained civil disobedience campaigns and some of the worst ethnic violence in the history of post independence India. The commitment and determination of the students forced the Central Government to sign an accord on August 15, 1985 which marked the end of six years of ethnic conflict and political instability in the state. The Assam accord incorporated significant concessions by the Government of India to the movement's demands. The Assam movement leaders combined negotiations with the general strikes and civil disobedience campaigns designed to demonstrate their power capability. The election to the Assam Assembly held after the accord brought victory to the student leaders under the banner of Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) and they are now in control of the State Government. In the history of student politics rarely has student power climax in the assumption of governmental power.

The failure of Mrs. Gandhi's government to solve the basic socio-economic problems was to create more and more protest and dissent from various sections. The movement was led by Jaya Prakash Narayan whose guidance of the Gujarat and Bihar student movements had considerably discredited the Congress Party. The non-Congress opposition parties and students lent active support to the J.P. movement. This led Mrs. Gandhi to impose an internal emergency in the country in June, 1975.

The students, who were in the forefront of the agitations against the ruling party and governments in various States, became important targets of the repressive measures taken during the emergency. Student unions were gagged unceremoniously and activist student leaders and cadres of organisations like the SFI had to face arrests or go underground. Yet, the student movement did not entirely cow down under the repressive measures unleashed by the nineteen months of emergency. The underground movement led by opposition political leaders was complemented by the activities of the students both underground as well as in forums like the Human Rights Movement.

After the abrogation of the emergency, the pent up energies and feelings among the students began to seek immediate release. Unrest in most of the campuses in the

22. The SFI, in Kerala, had a massive signature campaign in protest against governmental interference in Student Union Elections. This is only one of many such instances.
post-emergency period centred on emergency excesses. Students played a leading part in campaigning for the non-Congress opposition parties in the General Elections of March, 1977. For the first time in free India's political history, the Congress was dislodged from power in New Delhi and a combination of opposition parties known as the 'Janata Party' assumed power at the Centre.

III

This brief review of the major student agitations and movements in post-independence India brings us to a discussion of the causes and sources of student political activism. An analysis of the views of perceptive observers of the Indian educational scene is attempted to throw further light on protest politics of Indian students.

Myron Weiner includes four different types of activities under the term 'indiscipline', namely, (a) activities associated with larger political movements in the area surrounding the school, college or university; (b) demands by students upon university authorities; (c) students' demand upon non-university authorities on issues of special concern and sporadic, generally unorganised outbursts by students, only vaguely associated with concrete demands.23

Humayun Kabir, formerly educational adviser to the Government of India, has listed the following general causes

of student unrest in India: the loss of leadership by teachers; growing economic difficulties for a large number of students and prospectlessness of a job after completion of studies; defects in the existing system of education and general loss of idealism in the student community and the broader society.24

Chanchal Sarkar's visit to ten Indian Universities in January - February, 1960, as the Statesman Special Correspondent, has brought out interesting findings on the nature and dimensions of student unrest: (a) 'the demoralised teach the disgruntled'; the most depressed and pessimistic sections were the teachers. They are gravely disillusioned and apathetic and have no faith in the Indian educational system; (b) 'universities and governments': whether one likes it or not, the influence of governments on universities is decisive. Governments and politicians have not only interfered with the universities and destroyed their status and authority, but also wrecked that subtle thing in them which is described as 'atmosphere'; (c) in the eyes of the politicians, the university and its officers are a checker board for the group politics of the State and the students are a fair game for drumming up factional support; (d) university union leaders conceive their roles as that of running an organisation parallel to the university administration.

Office bearers of the unions cast themselves in the role of mass

leaders whose aim is not to understand the course of political thought or social developments but leadership meaning an Assembly or a Parliamentary seat. Margaret L. Carmack suggests three interrelated areas of student unrest in India, namely, political-structural, professional and socio-psychological. Under political-structural causes, she discusses the politicization and bureaucratization of the institutions of higher education; favouritism, regionalism, casteism and political affiliation as bases of appointment and promotion in such institutions; involvement of the faculty and students in party politics; the role of paid student agitators; student unions being used as political platforms, unresponsive authority, inadequate schooling and the stress on quantitative higher education at the cost of quality. With regard to professional factors, she discusses the impersonality involved in the lecture-examination system of higher education; the amenability of academic administrators to outside pressure; faulty administration-faculty relations and facultystudent relations; undertrained, underpaid and overworked faculty members; rigid curriculum; the 'external' examination system, and the Craze for degree and not education. Under the socio-psychological factors, she discusses; ambivalent role of parents in guiding students; lack of association between faculty and students; the lack of personnel-guidance-counselling procedures;

bad conditions in most of the hostels; the lack of proper student government; the psychological immaturity of most Indian students; the impact of the 'peer culture', 'status consciousness' and the disparity between sex mores and sex interests contributed to unreality in Indian university life. Edward Shil's penetrating analysis brings out the following sources of student unrest: (a) Indian universities and colleges, their faculties and departments are crushingly hierarchical in constitution and spirit. Despite the concentration of authority, Indian colleges and universities boil and bubble with intrigue in which political partisanship and internal animosities intensify each other; (b) remote teachers; (c) linguistic troubles: the average student's poorer linguistic equipment places him in a very difficult situation; (d) student unions are rather extreme in their capacity to ignite cheerlessly burning passions; (e) many of the students live in a state of anxiety-ridden poverty; (f) bleak employment prospect—educational out put being incommensurate with the absorptive capacity of the economy; (g) the family system with its preponderance of the elders; the choicelessness of major spheres of life like marriage and vocation; the hierarchical educational system— all engender hidden resistances; (h) the hesitation of the university and college authorities to respond to legitimate student desires.

their remoteness, bureaucratic impersonalities and lack of conviction as to their own validity.\textsuperscript{27}

Philip G. Altbach, a keen observer of the Indian educational scene, examines important institutional variations in student unrest. Institutions maintaining academic excellence and a more satisfactory teacher-student relationship are less prone to agitations. Among the underlying causes of unrest, he mentions the following: the congruence of 'academic' values with the norms of the broader society (caste, regional affiliations and factional politics within the universities bear a marked resemblance to values in the Indian social and political life); the external examination system; generational problem; the economic uncertainty of many Indian students; the inadequate physical facilities for study on account of unplanned expansion of the educational system.\textsuperscript{28}

S.P. Aiyer opines that student indiscipline is rooted in the socio-economic conditions of an underdeveloped country. He examines the more serious elements in the situation which give rise to student unrest: (a) unplanned expansion of higher education—this makes the maintenance of any meaningful standard impossible; overcrowded classes convert students into a crowd which has its own patterns of behaviour; (b) wastage in education:


the indiscriminate admission of students to colleges and universities has a direct bearing on the general unrest. This has given rise to large percentage of failures and educated unemployment; (c) professional students on the campus; (d) students and political life; the behavioural models of the elders are gross violations of democratic norms. With widespread indiscipline, low public morals, corruption in high places and mediocrity all round, it seems futile to expect the student community to have any standards or show any degree of restraints; (e) authority and authoritarianism in academic institutions; (f) university authorities yielding to organised pressures.29

Sushila Mehta attributes the problems of Indian student unrests to the following causes: (a) the defective and inadequate system of education; (b) the generation gap and the alienation of the student community; (c) social changes and the impact of Western civilization; (d) the influence of mass media; (e) gap between planning and performance; (f) unemployment and the absence of youth policy and (g) interference of political parties.30

A correspondent stated four main causes of student unrest: "(a) lack of proper academic atmosphere, (b) absence of respect for authority, parental, educational and governmental,

(c) ideological frustration and (d) political interference. S.N. Sarkar, using the tools of Social psychology examines the underlying causes of student unrest under three broad categories, namely, socio-economic field, academic field and administrative field.

Prayag Mehta discerns the following broad areas as the cause of student unrest from a review of a number of studies of student unrests in various parts of the country: (a) irrelevance of educational system; (b) worsening economic conditions; prospects of unemployment, cost of education, rising cost of living and such other economic factors are an important source of unrest; (c) authoritarian attitudes of university authorities; administrative mishandling; (d) crisis-ridden political environment; (e) authoritarian parental attitudes and values; (f) pleasure-seeking from agitations: student agitations are a source of recreational pleasure for the youth; (g) growing sense of alienation: two important dimensions of alienation, namely, a sense of normlessness and a sense of isolation are visible in student behaviour; (h) weakening of study commitments: lack of study habits and work commitments among the students in general and activists, in particular; (i) small group orientation: most studies have recommended the fact that mass of the student agitations during the period 1969 to 1975 were caused by growing non-ideological

issues, preoccupation with small and non-issues, suggests lack of principles and ideological considerations among student activists.33

The foregoing material on the sources of student activism and causes of unrest in India may be classified into two broad categories—the 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 vast numbers of demonstrations and strikes that take place on the Indian campuses. Rapid educational expansion at the cost of quality has contributed in different ways to student restlessness. 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."34 The basic frustration of academic life coupled with the undercurrent of academic politics have made educational institutions attractive for political parties to compete and exploit.

The Indian student is very much a part of his society and is subject to its manifold problems and pressures. Despite her march towards modernisation, India is still very much a

'society of scarcity'. Student unrest is a manifestation of the prevailing socio-economic conditions and the 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 the "scarcity of socially and economically rewarding opportunities for employment" are conditions of unrests in most Third World Countries. Student have quite often participated in political movements and campaigns when they have felt strongly about societal issues. Students are divided on party lines and the involvement of outside political parties and personalities in the campuses destroy their autonomy and stimulate political activism among students. "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 respects the unsavoury features of Indian social and political life." 

There has been a progressive decline of ideological politics since independence. Post independence student activism in India has generally been based on sporadic, regional, local and non-ideological issues. Moreover, when students have fought

for societal issues, these questions have 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."37 Students have seldom developed a continuous strategy 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 an on-going student movement in most parts of the country."38

IV

In any discussion of student politics, it is important to remember that student activists or leaders constitute only a small percentage of the total student body. There is a sharp contrast between the politically-oriented activist few and the mass of more career-oriented and apolitical

students. Student agitations and movements are, by and large, reflections of those who lead them. The active few influence political behaviour of the student body as a whole and determine the direction of student political action. There is a paucity of data in regard to student leaders in India. On the basis of the literature available on student leaders, 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 to confine his study of student politics and leadership in a single institution, namely, the Allahabad University. He stresses the history of the University and points out that the mass enrolment of first generation 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". After independence, the political competition of political parties has been reflected in the elections to the student unions. The qualities most important for success in student union election are seniority and a


demonstrated ability to fight for student rights. Most leaders are older than the average students. Before independence, the student leader was, like the body of students more middle class and of some academic achievements. Today, he reflects the rural origin of most of the students and is politically-oriented. He displays considerable verbal ability, and a sense of moral indignation, not generally shared by his fellow students.

Another study of Allahabad University by Pramod Kumar analyses certain background factors related with leadership selection. The leadership sample was drawn from the student body who held various elective office in the Allahabad University Union during 1962-63. Of the factors studied, age, caste and length of stay in the university associated significantly with student leadership. The leaders, on the whole, tended to be older, most belong to the higher castes and had a longer stay on the campus. No relationship between income and leadership, and residence and leadership was substantiated.

Robert C. Shaw studied student leadership in the Osmania University, Hyderabad. He characterizes the student leader in Osmania on the basis of interviews with nine prominent student leaders: (a) The student leader comes from a


middle class or above family background; (b) He is not a
good student but has a good command of English language and
speaks well in the public; (c) the leader is older than the
average student. Some of the older leaders fit into the defi­
tion of the 'professional student leader' who have the highest
political aspirations; (d) these 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 strikes 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.\(^{43}\) His study is
based on the information collected from 26 out of 36 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 born leaders.
Only 23% leaders come from politicised families. Since 1957,
the autonomy of the student leader has been affected adversely
in as much as the leaders were 'manufactured' by the profes­
sionals, toughs and the youth organisations. Most of the
leaders had membership of various youth organisations which
were student fronts of political parties. The leaders confessed

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43. Sayeed, S.M., "Politicization of the Student Leaders: A
Case Study of Leaders of the Lucknow University Union
Since Independence", Indian Journal of Political Science,
that almost all the agitations were either sponsored or supported by the different political parties and the union leaders have always received guidelines from the party bosses.

Another study on Lucknow University by Rashid Ali Syed deals with some characteristics of student leadership on the basis of a survey of 220 student leaders, both past and present. The following characteristics of student leadership emerge from the study: (a) the leaders turn out to be older than the non-leaders; (b) An overwhelming majority of student leaders (85%) were Hindus. The caste composition of the leadership also conforms to the country’s wider political leadership picture. Student leadership was monopolised by the upper caste Hindus (93.6%), chiefly the Brahmins; (d) About 68% of student leaders belong to the rural areas; (e) the majority of student leaders were hostellers; (f) most of the student leaders (75%) were bachelors and (g) the number of professional student leaders was very small.

T.K. Oommen’s study of student politics in Delhi University during 1968-69 analyses primarily the socio-economic background of the leaders, their recruitment and political orientation. An overwhelming majority of student leaders were from business families and most of them were urban-bred. Academically most of them were average students and 83% of them

were from the faculties of Humanities, Social Sciences and Law. More than half of the leaders aspired to become political leaders. The leaders had continuous interaction with politicians.

Sushila Singhal's study on "Academic Leadership and Student Unrest" focused on the events of the academic year, 1972-73, in the University of Delhi.\textsuperscript{46} Academic leadership includes both teachers and students, formal as well as informal, who play an important role in campus life. She tested the following hypotheses: (1) academic leadership did affect student unrest; (2) the role of academic leadership in events of unrest, could be explained in terms of socialization and role concepts and the dynamics of their influence understood in terms of group dynamics; (3) informal leaders were more influential than the formal leaders in events of unrest.

Philip G. Altbach's study on student politics in Bombay has confirmed the following hypotheses on student leadership: \textsuperscript{47} (1) Student leadership comes from fairly definable groups within the student population; (2) since 1947, students from upper classes and upper academic levels shun student politics. Much of the leadership has been taken over by students from the lower middle classes; (3) it has become apparent that Science students were conspicuous in their lack of political


involvement; (4) the pattern of student life in Bombay has been one of rhythmic alternation between growth and decline of fairly strong student movements.

S.C. Hazary’s comprehensive study on student leadership in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, the premier educational institution in the State of Orissa, covers an extensive period, from 1938 to 1979. Some of the important findings are as follows: Most of the student leaders had a middle class or a lower middle class family background. Most of them come from rural areas and were high caste Hindus. A majority of them were first generation leaders with no worthwhile political tradition in their respective families. About 80% of them belong to the Humanities and the Social Sciences. About 50% of the students had an excellent or good academic career. Most of them were affiliated to student fronts of political parties but only one third had formal membership of political parties. The survey showed that, in general, student leaders were ‘amateurs’ not ‘professionals’. Only a minority among them (30%) aspired for a career in politics. The present occupation of the student leaders shows that only 19.5% are in politics. Thus, majority of the leaders had displayed careerist orientations with secure occupational aspirations while considering student leadership as an exciting but passing phase of life.

A study of student leaders at Patna University Union by R.N. Sharma provides 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, is polite, sympathises with students and, above all, talks about their welfare. He is also politically-oriented, is interested in politics and desires to join politics as a career. While, on occasions, he may be involved in major campus issues, most of the time he is simply after power, he dresses like political leaders, is indifferent to his own education, he may wear a facade but what he actually wants is to maximise his own gains.

The findings also indicate that manipulation, deception, and exploitation are the main tools of a student leader. He maintains political affiliation as power-mechanism and uses money for exerting influence.

He is rarely motivated by the idealistic objectives. But more often than not he is engaged in his image-management. It seems obvious that the student leadership is strikingly similar to the political leadership which we experience in general walks of our life.

S.K. Pattnaik made an attempt to present the psycho-social profile of a selected group of political activists.

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of Jawaharlal Nehru University. The data revealed that a large proportion of political activists came from predominant (i) upper class families, (ii) male population, (iii) advantaged schooling background, (iv) urban areas, (v) hostelers, (vi) high academic achievers. It was found out by the scholar that all the Presidents of the Students Union since its inception in 1971 came from elite homes and are academically brilliant. A few of them even are educated in foreign countries.

In a study of student political elites from four colleges, namely, Thiruvelluvar, Arcot, Muruga and Kachiappa of Tamilnadu, Chitra Shiva Kumar came to the following conclusions. Caste and wealth emerge as the two most crucial elements in the formation of the student political elite in some of the colleges in Madras city and those elsewhere in Tamilnadu. A considerable section of the elite came from rich families belonging to upper non-Brahmin castes. However, new trends in the social composition in the elite and patterns of elites have emerged: rich students from lower non-Brahmin castes are now in a position to challenge the established upper non-Brahmin castes' elite's authority and also occasionally emerge successful in their bid for positions of leadership and authority. Another


crucial development is the challenge posed by student leaders and their supporters from scheduled castes to positions of leadership and authority within the student power structures in the colleges.

The social composition of the student elite reflects in a significant manner a continuing hegemony of the rich upper non-Brahmin castes, who rose to prominence during the non-Brahmin movement.

Wealth and 'money power' was mentioned by the respondents as another critical variable in the formation of student political elite. Contestants for the offices of student union have to be lavish in their spending if they want to impress and win the support of the general student populace.

Some of the student leaders were either members of or have strong sympathies for a particular political party which they usually kept a closely guarded secret for fear of losing the votes of those who differ. Both student political elites and students in general exhibit a considerable degree of politicization. Again student leaders mainly sought leadership, status and glamour of office and these attributes of the leadership were part and parcel of the general socio-cultural universe of the students.

This brief review of student leadership studies in India by various scholars indicates the difficulty in providing a universal profile of the student leaders. Variables like region,
educational environment, socio-cultural milieu and political situation contribute to a diversified picture of the profile of the student leader in India.

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

Robert L. Gaudino's critique of the 'Indian University' has reference to students and politics. He says that the student union is zealous of its prerogatives. It raises the student voice on a host of issues. Many of the leaders are mediocre students long around the campus, capable of voicing loud dissatisfaction, aspiring to some sort of political future. A student leader may align himself with political interest. A coterie of students may form around a political personality. In India, student union leaders achieve very little of practical advantage for the students.

Anil Baran Ray's study on Benaras Hindu University 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. The case studies of three agitations occurring in BHU in 1958, 1965 and 1968 indicate that professional student leaders who align with

52. Gaudino, Robert L., The Indian University, Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1967.

faculty factions and political parties from 'the main leadership core of the agitations'. Moreover, the pressure tactics that agitating students use are often coercive and violent.

Durgananda Sinha has deplored the emergence of gang culture ('tough-guy-culture') and increasing use of strong-arm methods in post independence student politics. The bulk of student leadership is not conversant with the theoretical base of various political ideologies. Student leadership is very rarely based on ideological commitments. The sustaining forces are sheer opportunism and a philosophy of short-term gains. Such leadership can seldom become the agents of academic reform and social change.

Pradeep Singh's paper states that student leaders are politically aligned. Surely they cannot display insight of a higher order than what their political mentors give evidence of. Student leaders are looked upon as potential recruits by all political parties. He predicts that student leadership in India will continue to show the effects of political pressure and counter-pressure outside the campus.
