

## Revolution in India: The rising of a half billion citizens

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As the year 2017 comes to a close with high voltage political drama at both state and national levels, I propose to undertake a retrospective on the role of youth in Indian realpolitik. Since the 2014 general election political parties both young and old continue to persuade youngsters to vote for them on the pretext of jobs, free wifi and, of course, the over-used idea of 'Development'. This has become entry point for this group to become a part of the political system. More than 150 million youngsters between the age group of 18-23 years were debutant voters in the humongous Indian democracy.<sup>1</sup> YOUTH- an anomic pressure group- marked its presence on the political landscape with a plethora of objectives ranging from FTII (Fashion Technology Institute of India) appointment, Patel agitation (led by Hardik Patel and Patidars community), the amendment of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code to Pinjra Tod (Breaking the Barriers) and Queer Movements. Youth involvement in politics can be seen as a mere reflection of the erstwhile Moderates and Extremists in action during India's struggle for Independence. It is nonetheless often labelled as a 'sack of potatoes' for its unstructured means of agitation and unprecedented demands.

Because India is a Prismatic<sup>2</sup> society, a combination of Fused and Diffracted groups, it can be clearly postulated that youth involvement in politics is highly selective in nature. Youth associations capitalize on issues that remain outside the purview of mainstream political scenes

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<sup>1</sup> Virmani, P., 'Note to India's leaders: your 150m young people are calling for change', *Guardian*, 8 April 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/08/india-leaders-young-people-change-2014-elections> (accessed on 7 October 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Riggs, F., *Administration in Developing Countries: The Theory of Prismatic Society*, Houghton Mifflin Co, 1964.

and are the abused by the Media, Political Parties and State institutions because of these powers' own vested interests. For example, under the Badal(s) (or India's Nelson Mandela<sup>3</sup>) reign Punjab youth was struggling with drug rehabilitation programs<sup>4</sup>, the abrupt withdrawal of #FTII protests in Delhi, and the unleashing of State instrumentality on Jadavpur University protestors of #Hokkolorob (Let there be Noise) Movement in Bengal, all of which created a sense of panic and fear amongst the #OccupyUGC supporters and many others to name and recollect.

Unlike other movements, these demonstrations live by their exemplary power itself, as well as the extensive usage of number sign- HASHTAGS (#). These forces take advantage of social media by posting pictures and regularly updating the web pages with bottom-up analysis of the means and ways the political authority handles or deals with social issues such as religious conversion, shutting of meat shops, saffron politics, gender biases, caste tensions, university onslaughts and others. Thus, in no time they receive gregarious support from the imagined community per se. As a result, protests like the FTII or Occupy UGC become trendsetters in politics when supported by opposition parties, pan-India student union organizations and/or foreign Institutional pressure groups.

The fourth estate in Democracy- the Mainstream Media- does an extensive coverage of these protests as long as the Television Rating Points (TRPs) are directly proportional to Social Media trends. They do this even if that means delaying the coverage of Assam/Chennai Floods or focusing on a polymorphous high- profile murder case in Mumbai<sup>5</sup>. This passive-revolutionary nature of the movements marks a departure from the Jayprakash Narayan Andolan (Struggle) in Bihar and Gujarat (1974) in the pre-Emergency days. The actors in question consciously believe in means such as Jail Bharo (Fill up Prisons), Dharna (Protest) Politics, Walk to Parliament and screaming and screeching at Jantar Mantar<sup>6</sup> followed by preventive detention and water canon attacks. Yet the desire to fulfil expectations persists

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<sup>3</sup> Chinna, M., 'PM Modi calls Parkash Singh Badal the Nelson Mandela of India', *Indian Express*, 12 October 2015, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/pm-narendra-modi-compares-parkash-singh-badal-to-nelson-mandela/> (accessed on 4 October 2017).

<sup>4</sup> The issue was an election agenda amongst the political parties that promised to wipe out the drug and electricity mafia from the state. The new state government led by Captain Amrinder Singh from the Congress Party has assured to fulfill the demands as stated in the party's manifesto.

<sup>5</sup> The Sheena Bora Murder Case- <http://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai-news/sheena-bora-murder-case-10-things-we-know-so-far/story-UCJFenreMz5xTlCLcfEGjM.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Located in the heart of the capital and was built by Maharaja Jai Singh II of Jaipur, Rajasthan. For more information: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jantar\\_Mantar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jantar_Mantar) and Benette, J., 'Jantar Mantar is the place to protest in India, where people go to extremes in order to be heard', *ABC News*, 13<sup>th</sup> August 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-13/power-of-the-peaceful-protest-remains-strong-at-jantar-mantar/8788520> (accessed 4 October 2017).

only as long as the Media clings on to the idea, being otherwise only fed by occasional visits from lawmakers that are nothing more than photo opportunity moments!

In the midst of hyperbola and agitation, there are exceptions of those who don't indulge in mud slinging duels but rather let their work speak for itself. Such are Chawwi Rajawat, MBA turned Sarpanch of Soda village in Rajasthan, Prashant Kishore, former UNDP officer on Health turned Political Consultant for Election campaigns, or Mhairi Black, the youngest MP from the Scottish National Party in British Parliament. Out of 1.8 billion (world youth population) voices rising these are few names which are transforming the political scenario from 'Princelings to Thuglings', crosscutting religious sentiments and prejudices on the way. They are driven by the axiom of "Maximum Happiness to the Maximum of people"<sup>7</sup> and innovative ideas that bridge the gap between orthodox governance models and delivery mechanisms, thus ensuring efficiency and effectiveness. They leave their high paying jobs, shuttle between the two, or at times put one on an auto pilot mode only to advance the interests of the voiceless.

Furthermore, most MPs and MLAs specifically recruit interns in their office within the age group of 18-25 years who can prepare policy briefs, help in raising starred and non-starred questions in the Parliament, and simultaneously analyse the political processes in the country. So, within the barter system of knowledge, these lawmakers prepare their subordinates for future leadership positions in the country. Such an initiative can only work from the standpoint of a politician when he /she is willing to let go the predominant methods of recruitment. To ease the tedious process of appointments in such a structure, there are organizations such as 'GrassRoute, My Parliament, Youth Parliament, and PRS Legislative Research'<sup>8</sup> which bring the MP or MLAs at par with the young and vibrant candidates. This can be considered as a high level of political socialization that happens at a superstructure level.

An example at the substructure level can be viewed in a new political party such as Aam Admi Party<sup>9</sup> (AAP), which organized the Mohallah Sabahs to engage the youth in a dialogue process relating to priority matters of the community development. Such are successful examples of Deliberative Democracy and grapevine communication between patron and his clients. This also becomes a nodal point for a political party to induct rhetorical speakers in their student and parent organizations. They are indoctrinated, trained for all necessary requirements, and fielded in as spokespersons when the party sails

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<sup>7</sup> Mill, J., *Utilitarianism*, BN Publishing, London, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> These are frontier organizations that recruit young people as fellows for a period of 2 years to work along side with Indian lawmakers.

<sup>9</sup> Kurup, P., *Arvind Kejriwal and the Aam Admi Party-An Inside Look*, Bloomsbury Publications, India, 2016.

through troubled waters. For reference, in the recent Delhi Elections (2015) the AAP specifically recruited various youths to promote their manifesto through the Dance of Democracy (5saal Kejriwal songs), satire street plays and participation in Raahigiri events such as “Reclaiming the Urban Space”.

Furthermore, Politics is best described as who gets what when and how, so college-level politics becomes a launch pad for the Gen- X to emerge as future leaders of the country. They enjoy the support of their own leaders who participate in door-to-door campaigning and put up billboards with their pictures side by side the party high command. The recently concluded Delhi University Student Union (DUSU) election of 2015 exemplifies the above case. It was a successful debut for previous DUSU office holders such as Nupur Sharma, Ragini Nayak and Alka Lamba to become prominent foot soldiers (spokespersons) of the BJP, Congress and the AAP respectively.

Youth as a heterogeneous category can become a third democratic upsurge in both state and national-level elections as the number of first-time voters continues to magnify since the 2009 Lok Sabha elections. Many media houses along with Corporates ran a ‘Jaagte Raho’ campaigns to entice the youth to step out of their 9-5 jobs and cast their vote (not vote your caste). India tops the list of the largest youth population in the world, way ahead of its other contemporaries China and USA. The median age of an Indian youth is 25 years, a fact which alone makes this category ambitious, volatile and enthusiastic about India’s dealings with the Silicon Giants and other countries.

What is more concerning here is that this ambitious youth continues to change its stance with respect to preferences of political parties and leaders. An exceptional percentage of youth were swayed by the “young” Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s (as proclaimed by Media) agenda over the reluctant Prince (Rahul Gandhi) promises. Yet by the time November 2015 descended, it was this same youth which rejected Modi’s vows on development and preferred a new party like the AAP or the Grand Alliance on the pretext of freebies in Delhi and Bihar state elections, thus now back again to voting for saffron politics. Therefore one needs to analyse the question: how come in no more than one year the ‘Chai pe Charcha’<sup>10</sup> (Modi’s tagline) made way for the ‘Har Ghar Dastak’<sup>11</sup> (Nitish Kumar<sup>12</sup> tagline) campaigns?

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<sup>10</sup> Translation- Discussions over Tea.

<sup>11</sup> Translation- Knock every door.

<sup>12</sup> The current Chief Minister of Bihar from 2015-2020. The Hon’ble Minister separated from the Grand Alliance as his co-partners in government were accused of corruption and fraud charges (the Lalu Prasad Yadav family members). And within no time he joined hands with Bhartiya Janta Party.

*Times of India*, 27 July 2017, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/nitish-kumar-ditches-grand-alliance-joins-hands-with-bjp-a-tale-of-twists-and-turns/articleshow/59785717.cms>

(accessed 4 October 2017).

This fragmented unity and fluctuating biases has been a major force for creating an anti-party stand at state levels. Furthermore, with elections pending in many states in 2016, vote bank politics will finally shift from the issue of edible items to that of religion and finally to what the youth needs and aspires to be.

I will conclude by saying that youth activism in politics is selective mainly because our educational curriculum becomes redundant when it historicizes India's walk to Freedom and other relevant movements/struggles. The NCERT books and college curriculum mainly harp upon the success of India's struggle to Independence, highlighting past International events. If the country genuinely believes in expanding the youth's role in politics, then academic curriculum must be in sync with current political advancements. We need to deconstruct the prevalent idea that politics is not a hand(s) on investment or a royal rendezvous but rather a service for the well-being of society. The more politically aware the youth is, the more it can contribute to the nation building process. This country would do much better if educational institutions offered courses on public policy and public administration, for today only a handful of them do so. The nation should believe in equality of opportunities: the government can at least contribute in capping the fee structure. This ideological apparatus can overturn India's future for good, better and best.

Finally, the leading newspapers and journals of the country must provide adequate space for the youth to voice out their opinions on the current political developments rather than leasing that space to self-proclaimed best-selling authors. Their insights can be extremely useful for formulating policies in specific areas and reinvigorate the bureaucracy at large.

Therefore, if the youth conscientiously believes in establishing a foothold in Indian politics rather than idolizing radical leaders, they must start from where many leaders have dropped their half-baked thoughts: for example, the right to recall a free media that is accountable to the people. These are small stones that can create long-standing ripples in the political biosphere rather than leading the actors in cause to be labelled as traitors or anarchists, or being slapped with seditions charges. I would only rest my case that the onus is left on the young generation to decide whether they comply with vote bank politics or will instead use politics as a yardstick to make a difference in the lives of many.

To end with a famous quote: "The secret message being communicated to most young people in our country today by the society around them is that they are not needed, that the society will run itself quite nicely until they – at some distant point in the future – will take over the reigns. Yet the fact is that the society is not running itself nicely... because the rest of us need all the energy, brains, imagina-

tion and talent that young people can bring to bear on how to successfully navigate our difficulties. For society to attempt to solve its desperate problems without the full participation of even very young people is imbecile” – Alvin Toffler<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Kimanuka, O., ‘Talent nurturing is vital for our young generation’, New Times, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2015, <http://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/187523/> (accessed 4<sup>th</sup> October 2017).