

Institutionalized Student Violence In Himachal Pradesh University (Shimla): A Form Of Communal Conflict

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History of Himachal Pradesh University since its foundation in 1971 in Shimla has a blood-ridden history in which student activists like *Nasir Khan* of NSUI, *Bharat Bhushan*, *Naresh Sood*, *Vikram Dhatwalia* of ABVP lost their lives in these violent skirmishes. Countless student activists have sustained serious injuries and faced many legal cases for indulging in violence. Government property has been damaged many a times in such violent clashes. These clashes create an atmosphere of terror and fear amidst the academic atmosphere of the university. Violence is the example of failure of any society or institution to resolve its disputes and contentions in a (harmonious) democratic way. Democratic way is the way which is based on dialogue in which all the affected parties have right to express their opinions and the parties have a faith that this process of dialogue will lead to some improvement. The central value of this process is the autonomy of politics, and it therefore requires the participants to put whatever moral codes, principles, interests, private ideas, visions and conceptions of the good they may bring into the process as individuals or groups to the test of politics itself. These ideas and terms are mere rudimentary symbols for the competing ideas and perspective. It is through participatory deliberations and ongoing public talk that democracy contrives to define and redefine the crucial terms that we use in turn to define and redefine our common lives. The language of politics is thus necessarily compound, protean and controversial. There are and there will be different perceptions about what should be the meaning of the terms like freedom, equity and justice, this is what politics deals with.

In Himachal Pradesh University campus the student organizations are working in separation from each other. This separatist political socialization leads to the creation of closely-knit political groups with a culture of loyalty based following. Their political socialization is one sided in nature and this leads to the black and white depiction of the events. After such socialization if there is any conflict with other organization it naturally leads to a feeling of visceral-hatred and intolerance towards the opposition. This combines any organization as a band of legion against the hostile others.

Because of the regularity of clashes there also emerges a possibility of personal rivalry among different activists. Therefore the politics in the campus is mostly defined in terms of friends and foes- in which foes are objects to be hated and friends are always right therefore to be blindly followed. This kind of understanding by youths becomes a power cage which can any time burst open into a violent clashes. Right now most of students are influenced by the doing favors like filling forms for admission, provision of temporary staying before the allocation of hostels and giving them pre-coaching classes for entrance. There is nothing wrong per se in all these activities rather it is the right of any organizations to help and influence students. But one problem which emerges from this is that because of these favors if any student joins an organization then his/her attachment to organization is based on the favors done to them and their participation in one-sided rally rather than on an ideological background and voluntary commitment towards a vision. It's an emotional political socialization not one based on ideological-rational basis. All this is further increased as there is a lack of any dialogue and debates with other organizations. The feeling of commitment toward one's organization is good but it should not culminate into blind following and it is essential that students should have regular debates with students belonging to other organizations and non-committed students. This can help in putting forward different perspectives on a single issue which helps in reducing rigidity of the activists. Democracy is about empowering people by giving them different perspectives and ultimately giving them freedom to choose from these different ideas. We cannot reduce democracy to mere elections and soul of democracy lies in clash of ideas and generation of consensus among the conflicts.

Besides this students are introduced to politics in a non-dialogue oriented methods like by organizing functions, tours, picnics, one-sided rallies – but no dialogue and debate on a combined platform. All these activities are very exclusivists in nature because only students belonging to one organization or at best common students participate in these while rival organization completely boycott such kind of events. All these activities become a source of one sided political education or

socialization. This leads to parochial identity formation without understanding the complex nature of things. It also increase the gap between the respective student organizations and their sympathizers' vis-à-vis other organizations. This gap between students ultimately exacerbate the nature of conflict or clash. Tactics of threatening and staring at each other's activists also (increase the level of) increase the intensity of hatred between different organizations. This type of political education which is based on one sided propaganda is very dangerous, this method was used by Hitler's fascist regime and Stalin's communist totalitarian regime on a much larger scale and intensity. They simply bombarded people with one sided propaganda in which there was no space for dissent, dialogue and debate.

Democracy lives and thrives in dialogue and communicative debate-oriented environment. The basic necessity of a dialogue is presence of different conflicting ideological point of views in a debate. If we want to save our university from being ruined then there is a need to create an environment in which different conflicting and converging thoughts are provided a platform to express themselves and try to present justification for their claims. But in Himachal Pradesh University there no such platform were a dialogue can be organized. Because of the lack of such a platform the entire nature of politics is full of violent propensities. Which can burst open in any second. Therefore even a small scuffle or small dispute can culminate into a "communal riot". The term 'communal riot' is appropriate because other person or group of person is not heated or beaten simply for his personal mistake rather main reason is his identification with other political community. From a shallow perspective we can say the leadership and mobilization by the student organizations and their fanaticized cadres seems to be the main culprit but it is far from the truth. Youths can be forgiven for their mistakes because they are young and inexperienced at times. But professors, non-teaching staff and research scholars cannot be absolved from the blame for this frequent burst of violence in which many a lives, carriers of bright students were lost forever. More importantly our young generation being socialize into a negative perception about politics, there is a danger that large section of our youth may decide to become apolitical as they start to hate politics.

Therefore it is essential that a regular platform of debates and discussion should be organized in auditorium so that energy of youth is channelize into more creative and progressive direction. Student organizations should also be invited to these regular debates concerning our university or other national issues which our university administration should organize and popularize. This culture of debate and 'communicative dialogue' has to be institutionalize into the working of our university. There is need to make it mandatory that at least one debate in university auditorium be organized in a month on various concerning our university and other important issues. This effort will show its results in terms of the creation of a more democratically sound environment and activist with better communication skill will take the center stage in the political activities.

"Politics is a never ending activity of an institutions which a mix combination of conflict and cooperation. Even if elections are formally banned politics will go on because it

cannot be banned it is part of our existence.' The point is to transform the nature of political activity from its current confrontationist tactics to one based on dialogue and debates. For that to happen it will require creation of a common impartial platform. If student organizations are not willing then even university professor, research scholars and even young students can be motivated to express their views on different topics. But point is that there must be adoption of a new approach to the conduction of political activity, there is a need to make such an approach it dialogue oriented.

The banality of evil lies in the culture of acceptance of this violence in our university community (administration, professors, non-teaching and apathetic students). Who take it as given that young students will fight because they are intolerant, impatient and not matured like them. They relate the quality of communicative dialogue with older age which is incorrect because this is a way of human interaction which can be mastered by anyone what is needed is an environment. Perhaps one relevant question arises, do different teachers give space to their students for rationally disagreeing with them in their classes or they crush any sign of disagreement from student's part? Do research guides give space to their students to express their opinions and to stick to it? If answer is in not then this is tantamount to passive acceptance of the culture of student violence. This makes them lose their conscience, their capability of searching for new solutions and they simply accept it as a reality. It is a matter of shame that our enlightened Professors, non-teaching staff and research scholars who earn their wages, scholarships from this university, which sustains us intellectually also by providing us knowledge is suffering from this curse of student violence and we are not able to come up with solutions. The passive acceptance of violence and bloodshed is the most demeaning thing for our university. Over the years University Authority and University Teaching Staff, Research Scholars, Non-teaching Staff, Students Central Authority, Student organizations, failed in this task of transforming our political culture from a confrontationist to dialogue- debate oriented democratic culture. Therefore we are doomed for witnessing a never ending bloodshed and destruction of carrier of many a bright students.

There is a need for construction of a common impartial platform where at regular intervals different issues are discussed concerning our university and national/international importance. Failure of the present stakeholders will directly impact the fate our young generation which will come after us in this university. We never lose in a challenge simply because we have less strength rather we fail to come up with a new alternative vision. Stone Age did not come to an end because there was a dearth of stones rather there was the better substitute of copper. "Philosophers have interpreted the world, the point is to change it", Karl Marx. There is no point in taking fake degrees of education if our knowledge cannot contribute for change.

I have written this small analytical research paper in a form of plea to all the stakeholders of this university to come forward for the creation of a common platform where a dialogue or oriented politics should be started and university should be saved form this never ending barrage of violent clashes. Soul of the democracy lies in dialogue and debates

which enlightens the participants. University is a place for the creation of new ideas which transform the course of history, it should not be limited to the hatred and rivalries among the students of same campus. We know that we don't have number in our side but history is never made by numbers, it is ideas which change the course of history. Even if we fail in exhorting others to join this cause still in the end we have satisfaction that history will do justice to our effort.

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