

# Analyzing the role of women and current situation of Student Politics in the city of Kolkata

Brishti Sen Banerjee

*Brishti Sen Banerjee, University of Delhi*

brishti.sbanerjee@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This paper would look at the role of women in the context of student politics in the city of Kolkata. It is a qualitative exploratory research extensively based on primary field work and have been conducted among the students belonging to different institutions located in the city of Kolkata. It would try to explore the the active role of women in terms of representation, participation, engaging in programs, instances of sexual abuse and decision making power among the women in the organizations. This paper would also attempt to provide a comparative analysis among different organizations in respect of the issue of women and would be providing an idea about the current situation of student politics in the city of Kolkata. Also it aimed at understanding if any inconsistencies are present between what the organizations claim to do and what they actually practice on the grass root level.

**Keywords:** Student Politics, Gender, Women, Organizations, Kolkata

## I. INTRODUCTION

Left-inclined politics in Bengal firmly made its presence felt right from 1967, the time of Naxalite awakening, revolutionizing the formation of political ideologies among the youth. Shaping the political consciousness of thousands, the Naxalite movement had long-lasting repercussions on the practise of politics in campuses and later left rule in general. With a history of 34 years of the left regime, politics in Bengal has been heavily influenced by the dominant Marxist ideology and its multiple interpretations in the ideological sphere. As the leftist politics at large are vehemently vocal about the notions of equality and equal rights for all (irrespective of caste, class, gender, religion, ethnicity), one can assume that women would enjoy the same privileges and rights as their male counterparts in a leftist political sphere. Reviewing the available literature, it came to my notice that women remained a persecuted lot even among the most liberal of

<http://doi-ds.org/doi/10.2021-75174667/IJMRE>

political organizations that speak for equality. The matter of skewed gender representation in leftist politics along with recent cases of survivors reporting the longstanding practise of sexual exploitation, harassment and gas lighting inside political organizations have encouraged me to probe into the matter further. Through this study I aim to look into the inconsistencies present, in terms of gender issues, if any, between leftist liberal theories and the practise of leftist politics at the grassroots level.

## II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION:

My work will specifically focus on the left-leaning student political organizations as my aim is to grasp the idea of the current scenario. A Shodhganga article traces the root of the student's movement in the state of Bengal. The article states that the movements begun within the imperialistic education system introduced by British Raj. The surrounding atmosphere also helped the movements to grow further. It is of importance to note that from the beginning of the twentieth century and before the starting of organized student movement, the students were working in an unorganized way by writing against the irregularities and the conservative attitude of British ruling. With due time the movements started being influenced by political issues, and later by Marxist ideologies. As a result of that, the students' organizations became scattered into different wings, which in the long run, disrupted the unity of the same.

The issue of student politics has been a field of interest for many scholars all over the world. Trying to put a deeper meaning into the concept of student politics, Philip G. Altbach

states in his work that student political activism, being a highly complex, multifaceted phenomenon, is quite difficult to explain. He further explains that the configurations of student politics must be understood at a deeper level because their dynamics, historically have threatened and even toppled political structures in the past. According to him a firm knowledge of history, politics and potential of student activism is the key factor when it comes to understanding student politics and movement in a comprehensive manner. Drawing influences from Altbach's works on student political activism, Dr.T L Mamashela states that student activism is inherent in the nature of the academic community and will continue to be a powerful force both on campus and in society. The term 'student politics' is used as an umbrella concept to refer to all kinds of political activities of the students whether formal or informal, ordinary or extraordinary, or oriented towards society or academia. In Mamashela's terms, student activism is about expression of new ideas, by the public about shaping public debate on a topic and is therefore done through publications, public speaking, campaigning, use of mass media, and finally through demonstrations and other forms of agitations. Student organizations and movements are generally the platform from which student politics is organized, which can be national, international, inter-institutional or institutional in nature. In Mamashela's views, a student movement is defined as "an association of students inspired by aims set forth in a specific ideological doctrine, usually, although not exclusively political in nature."

Scholarly articles like Student Politics And National Politics In India portray how one leads to the other. In India, student politics tend to congruence with national politics across multiple planes. The short lifespan of student generation deprives them of the stability and continuity that other political classes enjoy, and their social and economic dependence compromises their political independence and limits their access to political resources. Student unions on occasions become a leading sector in the political system of the campus, expressing in an organized

and militant form, dissatisfactions. Most political activities that take place in the educational institutions are interest-oriented, largely because of the poor infrastructural conditions of the institutions. Most of their activism is directed to providing satisfactory solutions to the college grievances. Student politics is one of the key developments that have affected the relationship between the educational and political systems in recent years. It has, characteristically, engaged public authorities, and encouraged the penetration of the 'political' into the educational system.

Closer home, many a scholar have put forward their ideas about the nature of politics in the education institutions of the country today, notably as Piyush Kumar Shah mentions in this work that instead of having cordial environment of dialectical debate, discussion, dialogue and dissent, nowadays only a politics of disruption is practiced both in the national parliament and in college campuses which adversely affects the legislative process and academic respectively which make him believe that to bring about a holistic change in the nature of politics in the institutions, the most important thing is to guarantee the complete autonomy of these institutions.

Valay Singh states in his article that the recent incidents such as HokKolorob in West Bengal, Justice for Rohith in Hyderabad and Stand with JNU in Delhi show how students are rising as an irrepressible force in defense of not just their rights but of everybody who is critical of the majoritarian politics. Student politics in India has a luminescent history. The ongoing campaigns are adorned with the same altruistic and fearless banners that their predecessors carried. The issue of discrimination in higher education is a pan-Indian issue that has mobilized students of all the campuses despite student unions being banned in majority of the colleges. From being "category students", a derogatory reference to them belonging to castes which are in the reserved category, to non-cooperation, humiliation and lack of support, the life of a Dalit student is often reduced to her or his caste identity in campuses across the country. Dalit students claim that most of the organizations ignore their issues. Today, Rohith Vemula's death has become pivotal for both Dalit students and other student unions to consolidate the larger student movement. On

the other hand, the HokKolorob movement of 2014 in Jadavpur University, Kolkata, was one of the first student's movements in India to harness the power of social media and internet activism for coordination and dissemination. Most universities in India prohibit student elections, despite that students across India, are organizing themselves or are actively contributing to internet activism and student solidarity is no long limited to a few universities.

### III. METHODOLOGY:

My study will be based on the present left leaning student organizations in the city of Kolkata. The organizations that I have taken into account are SFI, AISA, USDF, PDSF and others. The organizations taken into consideration either believe in parliamentary form of left politics or in alternative form of left politics.

The study will be an in-depth qualitative research which will be exploratory and descriptive in nature. This study will be situated in Kolkata, across multiple student organizations practising leftist or alternative leftist politics. The sampling technique used in this research work would be snowball sampling. The research methods through which the study will be carried on are primarily semi-structured interviews containing mostly of open-ended questions using the interview schedule as the research tool. The study will be conducted on the individuals within the age group of 19-29. The target population of the study has been divided into three sections:--

- i) Individuals currently affiliated to leftist student political organizations.
- ii) Individuals who were affiliated before but has left due to some reason.
- iii) Individuals who are non- participants.

Incorporating all these narratives is essential for making the research inclusive and unbiased in nature.

### IV. DATA ANALYSIS:

On going through the available literature it came to notice that leftist ideologies speak of equality across all spheres with its roots deep within the concepts of class struggle. Drawing inspiration from the construction of political consciousness regarding class struggle the matters of oppression on parameters other than class (such as gender, religion etc) also come to light in leftist ideology where we find mentions of socialist versions of 'feminism'. However, the theoretical sphere of leftist politics are selectively vocal when it comes to issues on gender equality as they place class struggle at a higher plane in hierarchy than any other forms of oppression. An article named "Left and Feminism" states that in case of Bengal, the CPIM doesn't even recognize concepts such as 'feminism' and 'patriarchy' in the ideological sphere. They go as far as defining feminist as 'urban middle class women' with the desire to create a divide. Nivedita Menon in her book 'Gender and Politics in India' further elucidates on this matter highlighting how feminist have been consistently labeled as 'bourgeoisie' by the leftist organizations for speaking up against atrocities pertaining to matters other than class. Leftist organizations slam feminists, accusing them of not being empathetic enough towards Trade Unions or other organizations actively aiming to abolish the class systems. Leftists activists have been known to shy away from or being hostile towards articulating women's issues. Further more women has always been assigned peripheral roles even within the leftist political organizations in India.

Hence we can observe a sharp contrast between leftist theoretical claims of being vocal for any form of equality across all social and economic markers and the prevalent practise of leftist political organizations in India. Probing deep into the matter of the condition of women within leftist political organizations is thus the need of the hour.

Corroborating to these perspectives regarding the role of gender sensitivity in the leftist organizations, I would try to observe among the active members of the same about the representation and participation of the oppressed gender in the organization, how they handle issues related to gender, the importance given to these issues, and how they aim to resolve these issues and create a more gender sensitized space.

The presence of discrepancies between theory and practise based on gendered issues has been there in the field of the literature. During the Naxalite movement, which was portrayed to be an extremely progressive and people oriented movement, there were subsequent cases of violence against the women by their own comrades. Srila Roy in her book, 'Remembering Revolution' has narrated the experiences of the women involved in the movement, and how they have been subject to domestic abuse, sexual violence and harassment by their own comrades. This work efficiently unmask and debunks the projected version of the movement and probes deeper into it. Going through the available works in this field, the antagonistic relation between the leftist and the feminist activists could be observed clearly. The feminists accused the leftist for not incorporating the women question and also claimed the leftist women organizations don't have any autonomy and were ultimately ruled by the dominant masculine leaders of the mother party. In spite of these uneasy relationship between the two, there has been strands of feminism like Marxist feminists who have efficiently incorporated both the class and the gender struggles and gave them due importance in the course without prioritizing either.

Also, akin to the me too movement worldwide, in India also survivors began to come out with their own narratives. Many of the women have criticized the left platforms as Savarna masculinist sphere and through social media posts have voiced their protest against rampant casual sexism and even cases of sexual harassment within those spheres. In this context, the case of Sushil Mandi, a student of Jadavpur University could be an example. A Times Of India report states Sushil Mandi who was actively affiliated to a left organization named Radical was accused of sexually harassing a girl during a protest on campus. Ironically enough the protest during which this allegations were charged against him was a protest based on gender sensitization and issues related to the women's toilets. Sushil Mandi later disappeared and came back after a few days. The case became standstill as the parents of the accused also pressed charges against the victim in question

for mental harassment. No proper investigation was undertaken and the case didn't get resolved. Hence, all these information from newspaper reports influenced me to take up this issue as my matter of study. Going by these literature and reports, my research would try to look at how the organizations deal with such accusations, whether there exists a committee which aims at resolving issues pertaining to sexual harassment or not and what measures they take to go about the investigation. The perspectives of the mass in general would also be taken into account. Their perceptions would shed light on the popular opinion on the working of left political organizations, and whether they deviate from what the members of the organization portrays or not. Both the participant's and non-participant's views should be taken into account to develop an unbiased research product. My research would try to pose questions such as to what extent these inconsistencies exist in the empirical field and how 'safe' are the leftist political spaces which claim to be all-inclusive in nature.

#### *A. Nature of practising left politics and the issue of representation.*

The term 'left' can have multiple interpretations among different individuals. According to the dictionary of Cambridge, left wing means 'supporting the political left; relating to the belief that wealth and power should be shared between all parts of the society.' The left term arose before the dawn of the French Revolution. It is stated that at that period, the individuals who used to sit in the left side of the parliament, who were the voices critiquing the government in power were labeled to be the 'left'. Hence all the parties who were against the government in power were thought to be leftist in nature. Other interpretations of the term has been those based on the Marxist or Leninist ideology. In the present scenario, most of the organizations who label them as 'leftist' claim to have strong belief in the Marxist ideologies. To delve deeper into the perceptions of individuals regarding the left politics, I have interviewed individuals who are active participants in politics and are affiliated to a particular left leaning political organization. The views that have come to surface regarding the nature of left politics has been more or

less uniform across organizations. Left politics at large meant for the interviewees a socialistic view of the society which can be radical or achieved through constitutional measures. Left politics provide a scientific path towards achieving a more evolved and equal society and in the process challenges the prevailing dominant power structure. A Student Federation Of India Activist stated 'I don't believe in the extremist left because I think they take impulsive decisions which cannot yield any fruitful result in the long run. They practise a form of reactionary politics which I don't believe. My idea of left politics is more of central left which my organization follows. I believe in the idea of communism which Marx preached.' All of the interviewees agreed that left politics preach equity, it is the only way the dominant structure can be challenged. They agreed that left politics, specifically Marxism preaches changing the system from its root which is essential in order to bring any productive change in the society. The interviewees at large said that they would try to convince others to practise politics based on leftist ideology as they think that is the only way out in the present circumstances. One of the interviewees stated that keeping the current economic order in the mind, she thinks socialism is the only way where we can reach a society which is balanced both economically and socially. Another AISA activist stated that only left politics engages in checking one's privilege and undoing it in the process, hence it is important to practise left politics. However when the interviewees were enquired about which factors played the role of inspirations in their lives for joining left politics, a wide variety of responses came into light. Few believed the institution they are currently studying in played an important role in the process. The problems occurring in the campus triggered them to think about the roots of the problem and hence with time they grew interest in the same. One of the interviewee stated that for him, situation played an important factor. The interviewee in question came from the suburbs of Kolkata where he experienced the politics practiced by Congress and Trinamul Congress, which according to him was extremely violent in nature. The only parties challenging these practices were the left

parties, who were vocally opposing the Congress and fighting for just rights. Hence, that inspired the individual to practise this form of politics. The others stated reasons such as family background or in depth studying of leftist literature helped them to conceptualize the leftist practise better in general. To delve more into the aspect of efficiency of leftist politics, the interviewees were asked whether the solutions indicated in the theories can be implemented in practise or not, to which all of them agreed that it's not possible to exactly replicate the solutions proposed in the theories in praxis. All of them were of the view certain modifications and alterations are definitely required with the change of time. One of them stated that what Marx has said 100 years ago cannot be exactly replicated in the present situation. Also, as Marx talked only about the western countries, it is difficult to implement the same in the context of India because of the diversified nature of the country. Hence, the crux of the argument should be adopted and the rest of the theory should be modified keeping the context of the present socio-economic-political scenario in mind. So, it can be inferred from the responses that the theories give the structure, but certain modifications are required with the change in time which would allow intersections among different forms of stratification to occur.

Coming to the structure of an organization, it is extremely important to perceive the dynamics of participation and representation within the organization. Women constitute over 50% of the entire population of the world, yet they remain the most oppressed and marginalized section of the society, economically, politically as well as socially. Lack of education has curbed the opportunities of women and have in order led to sidelining of women to the peripheries of 'cheer leading' denying them access to political power and leadership. Researches have shown that a democratic system also doesn't necessarily empower women or give them equal space and rights in the political sphere. Extensive researches on this matter proves democracy doesn't depict equal or even increased participation of women rather statistics prove autocratic regimes show more women participation than democracy at large. An article by Pamela Paxton elucidates the matter of women's low rate of participation in the sphere

of politics which continues to be an enduring problem in gender stratification. Several researches on this topic have suggested three factors to be the cause of this skewed representation of women- social structures, politics and ideology. The structural and political explanations state that often certain professional spheres are given more priority in terms of selecting potential members of an organization and hence, if women don't have the privilege and access to these institutions, their chances of participation decreases. Hence, if women get exposure to higher levels of education, the probability of participation increases manifold. The author also believes that ideological beliefs play a crucial role in determining women's participation in the political sphere. Conceptions about women's position and role in the society can influence their decision in the long run. As the women being a part of the patriarchal society internalizes certain roles and ideas ascribed for them, these pre conceived notions can both enhance or constraint women's ability to seek political power. Hence, cultural norms and values can restrict a woman's decision making power.

Under representation of gender have been a concern in case of India, or the world at large. Even in the parliamentary positions, the numbers occupied by women politicians is inevitably much less than that of male politicians. Students' Federation Of India ( SFI ) one of the biggest left student organization has it's hold even in universities like Presidency and Jadavpur. The highest executive body of the parent party of SFI , Communist Party Of India Marxist ( CPIM ) is the politburo and the first woman politician to become a politburo member was Brinda Karat in 2005. Communist Party Of India Marxist Leninist ( CPIML ) , the parent party of All India Student Association ( AISA ) also has only one female member among the 17- member body of politburo. Due to the acute presence of women members in political parties, the need for reservation of seats for the women became indispensable. But later it came to light that the demand for and granting of reservations to women in political offices have proved to be mere tokenism. In spite of this gender

reservation, the representation of women has still not reached at par with the men's. As it is clearly visible the gender representation in the leftist political organizations at a larger scale is extremely skewed, I through my research want to test whether the case remains the same in terms of leftist student organizations or not. I would also look into the matter whether alternative leftist platforms have greater balance in terms of gender representation than platforms practising mainstream left politics or not.

To get a more in-depth picture of the scenario , the interviewees were asked about the state of representation and participation within their organizations and how gender neutral it were. An AISA activist believed that in their organization the ratio is 50-50, with an equal distribution in the participation between male and female members. Also, he opined that in his organization, the representation of women in committees were also quite impressive, keeping the current patriarchal society in mind. Another individual belonging to a platform practising alternative left politics stated that gender participation was equally divided among the sexes in the organization and also stated that the committees present were headed by women mostly and even comprised of 90% of women member. Surprisingly, another respondent, who is a girl belonging to the same platform was of the belief that the gender ratio was still unequal with a visible dominance of the men in the organization. An SFI activist stated that it was a male dominated organization, but the ratio is changing. In the recent times, more and more women are willing to join the organization and also in many instances the bodies are being led by women comrades. She gives the example of the SFI Presidency University Unit, which in the previous year was led by a female president, vice-president and convenor. Though stating that the representation was well enough, one of the interviewees stated that the women are somewhere treated as less equal. She stated an example that when the police takes violent measures on the students, the male comrades come to the fore front and guard the women comrades, not letting them take the lead. The respondent believes that by doing this they are reinstating the belief that women are 'weaker' physically than men and hence are

incapable of handling such situations. Though an interesting observation should be noted that none of the organizations mentioned the queer representation in their platforms, which shows the invisibility of the same from the political sphere at large.

Hence, it can be perceived that on one hand, the nature of left politics currently being practised among student organizations at large still is based on the traditional Marxist or Leninist ideologies and traces its root to the well developed leftist literature. On the other hand, the issue regarding representation and participation have undergone a drastic change with increasing number of women joining politics, but has still failed to achieve inclusivity due to the absence of LGBTQIA+ participation within the organizations.

### *B. Role of Student Organizations: A comparative analysis*

This chapter would aim at drawing a comparative analysis among the student organizations of different ideological basis, primarily parliamentary left, alternative left, student wing associated to trinamul chatra parishad and the student wing associated to Bharatiya Janata Party (Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad). By explaining in great detail their ideological stand points and their organizational standpoints regarding gender questions, I would try to locate their sensitization regarding the same. The information put down in this chapter is entirely based on primary findings, the interviews conducted with the respondents and no secondary source has been used.

#### *1. Political belief:*

The political belief of an organization forms the root and base of the entire organizational structure and standings and hence was thought to be an important parameter of comparing the different political forces in order to understand their perspectives regarding politics at large.

The alternative left student political organizations largely were of the opinion that their aim was to uproot the

prevailing social order by creating class consciousness among the individuals. They all believed that it is important for a class to become 'class for itself' from 'class in itself' to bring about any revolutionary change.

Similar to this belief, the parliamentary left organizations were the promoter of the socialist view point where the society should be based on equity and not equality. They believe socialism is the only way where a society can be thought about which is more accepting, understanding.

Contrary to the leftist organizations, the trinamul chatra parishad was of the opinion that their political belief stands on one ideology, "of the people, by the people, for the people." Their aim is to serve the nation, serve the people and respect the diversity of India.

Keeping all these views aside, the members of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad and the Yuva Morcha believed that their aim is to serve the nation and being a part of this organization can fulfill their aim most efficiently. One of them stated that our ideology is "Nation first, party second, self last. We can do anything for our nation." Another Yuva Morcha activists stated "I am proud of my Hindu identity and my organization gathered me the courage to not suppress this identity within myself."

Hence, it can be perceived that whereas the political belief of the parliamentary leftist and alternative left political forces is entirely based on a particular theoretical discourse, i.e., Marxism, the trinamul chatra parishad in this respect doesn't hold a strong theoretical ground but has a generalized aim of working for the people of the nation. The right wing organizations on the other hand believes in a particular form of nationalism and works to implement that on the pan Indian scenario.

#### *2. On Feminism:*

The alternative left organizations were of the opinion that feminism as a movement is definitely far reaching in its potential but they also identified some loopholes of the movement. They are of the belief the movement in its purest

sense should be accessible to women of all class and caste positions, but in reality the case is not the same. In reality, the movement is still at large restricted to the elite classes and haven't moved beyond it until now. They also believe that feminism and Marxism should be preached simultaneously in order to aim for a better society.

On the other hand, the parliamentary leftist organizations said that the level of gender sensitization across India has developed with time as a product of the ongoing movements and protests. A respondent affiliated to AISA stated that feminism has spread hugely across India, but the question still remains which class is controlling the movement and what is the hierarchical structure of the movement?

The individuals affiliated to TMCP believed that they believe in humanism, and doing good for all. They through their work don't want to emphasize on any particular gender, because they believe believing in feminism or preaching feminism will project a biased picture of the entire society and will hinder their ultimate aim. One of the respondent stated we work to unify India, and anything that is creating any divide, like the movement of feminism should be condemned. He believed the feminist movement to be extremist in its view and hence should be opposed vehemently.

The respondent belonging to ABVP didn't exactly gave any opinion regarding the concept of feminism but stated that they respect women and often tend to idolize and worship them as they view woman as the epitome of sacrifice, as the ever sacrificing mother figure. Agreeing to this view, the Yuva Morcha activists also believed that the party treats a woman with utmost respect, as the ideal mother figure and also works for the security of the women at large.

In this case, the parliamentary and alternative left forces pointed out the elitist nature of the entire movement and how the entire movement invisibilized the working class entirely. On the other hand, the trinamul chatra parishad rejects the entire idea of feminism terming it as biased and

extremist in nature. The right wing also avoids commenting on the particular ideology but rather discusses how they perceive women in general. The sharp contrast between the views is explicitly visible in this respect.

### *3. Me too movement:*

Alternative leftist organizations largely criticized the me too movement for being confined to an elitist space, where only the privilege can reach but not the oppressed ones. They also criticized the act of public naming and shaming and regarded it as problematic. In spite of the loopholes of the movement, they still believed the fact that some urban women came up with their stories and shared it should definitely be regarded as a success of the movement.

Akin to these view points, the parliamentary left organizations are of the view this movement is restricted to the social media only, and no pertinent field work is being carried on related to this. One of the respondent stated, "Whether the allegation is true or not should be left for the judiciary and the legal system to decide. Even if it is true, people are discussing about it for some days, and after that everyone is forgetting. So it's of no use." Another respondent stated that though the middle class and the upper classes are aware of the movement, but the working class, the most oppressed of the lot have no awareness regarding it.

Regarding the me-too movement, the respondents affiliated to TMCP believed it to be a remarkable event in the recent past, but they thought it shouldn't be restricted to only the women. They believe that irrespective of gender, individuals face sexual abuse and harassment and everyone should speak about it, not just the movement.

The respondent affiliated to ABVP believed that the movement at large cannot be treated as uniformly productive or fruitful. They believed there were several cases of false accusations against men which forced the men to go into depression or affected their career choices. Hence, they particularly highlighted and specified such cases and thought it is important to keep such cases into consideration while talking about the me too movement.

As the parliamentary and alternative left forces criticized the 'name and shame' policy of the movement, the TMCP expressed dissatisfaction regarding the movement as it has been restricted to the women only and have failed to incorporate the men in the same and the ABVP highlighted the cases of false accusations which problematized the movement further.

#### *4. Skewed Representation:*

Individuals affiliated to alternative leftist organizations regarded illiteracy among women as one of the key factors responsible for their skewed representation in the political organizations. They believe that basic education would be able to empower women and make them aware of their rights which will in course increase their participation in the public sphere.

The parliamentary left organizations stated socialization to be one of the primary reason for this skewed representation of women in politics. A female student affiliated to Students' Federation Of India stated " In my own University spaces I have seen when the police comes, all the women comrades are pushed backwards and the male comrades take the lead. What are you trying to say that I am not strong enough to face the conflict that is happening? If i am in the forefront, i can deal with it".

Similar to the previous ideas, the respondents affiliated to TMCP as well as ABVP, also held the patriarchal society responsible for the current scenario of the women in the political sphere but also had strong belief that with the change in time, the number of women participating in the political sphere is increasing. The Yuva Morcha activist however stated that as villages still form the crux of the Indian society, and most villages still don't encourage their women to study further or don't support gender equality, hence it becomes difficult for the women to take part in the political discourse.

Here, all the political forces agreed on putting the blame on the prevailing patriarchal structure for the present position

of the women in the political sphere, and in general at large.

#### *5. Representation and Participation:*

Though it is well understood that representation cannot alone yield any productive result in terms of gender empowerment but still it is one of the pillars which contribute to the development of women and helps in making a class of individuals visible in front of the public eye.

In case of representation and participation, alternative leftist student organizations informed that participation in their organizations are nearly 50% and most of their bodies are hugely dominated by the women with almost 90% of the post holders being women.

In case of parliamentary leftist organizations, they believe the ratio is changing and more women are willing to get into organizations.

The representation and participation of women in TMCP as per the respondents is nearly 50-40% in comparison to the male members and there is a slow but steady increase in the same.

Similar to the other organizations, the ABVP as well as the Yuva Morcha also believed they had more or less equal participation and representation of male and female members in their organization.

#### *6. Works related to the gender question:*

One of the alternative leftist organization stated that they are working current with the domestic workers, on cases of domestic violence ( where they are helping the victim's family both economically as well as morally), arranging law workshop for women in rural areas to make them aware of their rights, conducting awareness programmes regarding the taboo against menstruation and helping women in the Birbhum district to produce sanitary napkins on their own with the help of vending machines.

The parliamentary left organizations stated that they have organized several awareness programmes, such as gender mela, discussion on the rights of the transgenders, etc.

TMCP in the recent past have arranged awareness programmes by conducting seminars related to the gender question. They also mentioned that every work falls under the spectrum of gender, they ideologically don't emphasize on only one gender, but work for all irrespective of their gender differences. A respondent mentioned the schemes of Kanyashree and Yuvasree as part of work done on the gender question. He also expressed that he hopes that his party will think more about the transgender community also in the near future.

The ABVP also discussed that they have conducted several programmes for the benefit of the women. They cited an example of a recent campaign where they worked to make sanitary napkins tax free and promoted it via several mediums. The Yuva Morcha activist discussed about the works on the durgabahini (which from the initial phases of the childhood help to make a woman independent), mahila morcha and mission shahasi which worked for the security of the women.

*7. Dealing with sexual abuse/ harassment within the organizational sphere:*

All the respondents were enquired whether there is a specific committee present within the organization to deal with matters regarding sexual abuse and were asked to illustrate the process of dealing with these complications.

The alternative leftist organizations informed that such a committee is present to deal with such issues. They also said that if both the parties belong to the organization, the victim will obviously be given the space to speak and the victim's voice will surely be heard and prioritized. They also said that if the alleged abuser is a boy, and if the victim is a girl, the victim's voice will be heard first and her statements will be given priority, but if the opposite occurs, where the alleged abuser is a female, both of their voices will be given equal priority because the prevailing patriarchal societal structure allows the men to dominate and manipulate the women for their own interest, hence being the privileged sex, their voices cannot be prioritized under any circumstances. They further said when such a

case arises within their organization, first they try to solve it by organizing a discussion or meeting where both the alleged perpetrator and the victim will be present. Then the alleged abuser will be kept under observation or suspended for 6 months or more depending on the case concerned. After the stated time period, if the individual is perceived to be a changed person and if the victim is comfortable with his presence, then only he will be allowed to work in the organization.

Among the parliamentary leftist organizations, some said there are no committees and some said the committee is under process. One of the student said, "these issues at first are not dealt organizationally. They are first tried to be kept aside. Firstly it is dealt with from a personal sphere, it is looked after that the news doesn't spread outside of the organization. But I feel it should be taken at the organizational purview at the very first level. Things like this have occurred within our organization also. In case of most of the emotional abuse, a place of coexistence had to be reached but if there is a sexual abuse, investigation will be held, and if it is proven right, the concerned person will be expelled. This has occurred previously and also is occurring recently in a case".

To this question, the respondents affiliated to TMCP stated that no particular committee is present to deal specifically with such issues. One of them stated that when such complications arise, the position holders of the party take necessary steps after listening to both the victim and the alleged abuser, and whatever step is taken by the position holder is agreed and accepted by the entire organization. Building a specific committee for this task alone according to the respondent has not been necessary until now. But if the individual is proven to be guilty, he will either be suspended or expelled from the organization, depending on the magnitude of the crime he committed.

The ABVP responded to this by stating no particular committee is present for dealing with complications regarding the gender question. The respondent stated he has not witnessed any such case where such accusations have come about and so is unaware of how it would be dealt with. He

also added ' Our girls and boys always stay separate unless they have some program. They even walk differently in the rallies. The girls are seen as a mother in your organization."

Whereas both the left inclined organizations assured about a committee present or was under process within the organization to tackle such issues, the TMCP or the ABVP don't feel the need to even build a committee which would specifically cater to complications arising out of the gender question or allegations of sexual/ mental harassment s. But interestingly, the respondents of the parliamentary left forces expressed their views of the necessity of forming a committee but also stated that in many cases, when such accusation arises, it is tried to be dealt personally instead of organizationally, so that the news doesn't spread to other organizations. The complications and hypocrisy present within such organizations hence becomes easy to decipher.

The comparisons portrayed above, when analyzed gives a striking contrast on the ideological belief systems between the left, alternative left and the right wing organizations. In the context of perceiving a woman, where the left organizations perceive the woman as their fellow comrade, the right wing organizations necessarily has imposed upon them the status of a ever sacrificing mother figure, ready to fulfill all the demands of the son, which in this case is the nation. This clearly reinstates how the concepts of motherhood and nation building are intertwined in the discourse of nationalism. Keeping in consideration both theoretical viewpoints as well as practical implementations, the contradiction between the left and right wing forces are quite visible and the ignorance of the right wing organizations regarding certain issues can also be observed. In case of left and alternative left organizations, both organizations stand almost similar on their theoretical grounds but differ in their approach of practising politics in the grassroot level. Interestingly, certain complexities and hypocrisies present within the left inclined organizations have also emerged from the responses which further questions the integrity of such organizations. In the face of these dichotomies, the Trinamul Chattra Parishad, when

compared with the others struck a balance in the responses by neither confining themselves to the left wing or right wing ideology, and developing an ideology of it's own not owing much to theoretical formulations but practical relevance.

#### IV. STUDENT MOVEMENTS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE PRESENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC SCENARIO

India has a rich and diverse history of student politics which has also contributed to the dynamics of national politics in the country. As student politics have always been an integral part of the politics on India, it is important to introspect the nature of student politics in the present situation and how it is affecting the society at large. Student movement all round India has taken a huge shape and is affecting the national politics at large of late. But it is crucial to perceive whether the movements in general are achieving what it aims to achieve? Are the movements becoming successful, and if not then why? This chapter hence tries to answer these questions by both narrative analysis and interviews.

Jadavpur University, Presidency University, Jawaharlal Nehru University- these spaces have always been mentioned as places of dissent and contributed to a great extent to the history of student movements in India. Even now, though these universities experience many protest gatherings and lock downs, still it is important to find out whether their forms of resistance are yielding any fruitful results or not.

Jadavpur University has recently witnessed the Hokkalob movement in 2014. It has been considered one of the greatest movement and one of the most spontaneous one in the recent times. But delving deep into the movement, we would see that the demand with which the movement started was not paid any heed to in the later times. The movement started in protest of a sexual harassment of a female student by a group of male individuals belonging to the hostel. The movement took a huge shape when the students were beaten up by the TMC goons and the police officials and the primary focus and demand hence shifted from justice for the victim to resignation of the vice chancellor. The movement was believed to attain its victory when the vice chancellor

ultimately resigned from his post, but the issue with which the movement started was suppressed within all of this and was never looked after in the near future.

In context to this, it is important to quote an article critiquing the movement on the grounds mentioned above. "The 'Hokkolorob' movement underwent three stages: first, specifically against sexual harassment till 16th September 2014; second, it assumed a radical spontaneity with a large number of students condemning the police atrocity post-16th September; third, formation of General Bodies for decision-making on the future course of struggle and slow de-centering of issues. The development of each stage shows the change in the direction of the movement as a whole. The movement went into a general direction with the primary focus of justice against sexual harassment shifted to other demands like the resignation of the VC, constitution of a committee for investigating the case of sexual harassment, and so on, particularly after the 16th September police brutality. The question of sexual harassment was slowly eclipsed by other larger issues by the second half of the second stage. Slowly the discourse in the third stage remained to criticizing the police brutality and securing university space."

A student from the department of sociology of Jadavpur University when questioned regarding the movements occurring in the recent times stated that mass plays an important role in determining which movement would succeed and which would not. She has drawn a comparison between the movement regarding the change in the entrance examination pattern and the Hok Union movement. In case of the former movement, the number of participants were more and as it concerned educational aspects, more individuals felt for the movement and joined it spontaneously. On the other hand, in case of the Hok Union movement, the level of participation is much less as the mass at large is not bothered whether any union will be present or not. The mass in general believes if an union is present, it will give rise to coloured politics and power politics, and hence is not affected by its absence. The respondent also believed as most of the students belong to

a middle class background, they don't want to risk their career or personal lives by engaging in student politics as it has the potential to get violent in the near future or to get the person in question into trouble with the administrators.

Presidency University, another site of political struggle owes much of its fame to the naxalbari movement, where innumerable students of the university sacrificed their lives for the movement. But it is important to understand in the recent times, how political has this place been?

Presidency experienced many movements in the recent past where only few after a lot of negotiations became successful. The latest movement, the Hindu hostel movement took almost 2 years to get back the hostel. The authority throughout the movement according to their convenience changed the dates of the renovations, and the students in most of the cases had no option other than abiding it. Also, in case of the Hindu hostel movement, it lacked a huge participation of the female students who believed it to be 'just a boy's issue' and didn't want to engage in this. Many female students critiqued the movement for being hetero-normative in nature, and expressed their concerns about the ignorance of the mass in cases of issues concerning the girl's hostel. For example, the distance from the university, availability of buses, curfew time etc.

The respondents to whom I had conversations mostly believed the university space is becoming depoliticized with time. The students are more interested in engaging in fests, hanging out with friends and avoid doing something which required a lot of critical thinking and if had to be done efficiently, may also require a lot of sacrifice, like letting go of one's class privileges as much as possible. One of them stated that movements are failing recently due to several reasons. Firstly, the demand with which the movement initially starts don't remain static. The demand goes on changing through general body discussions, as well as negotiations with the authority which is problematic. After several negotiations, the demand which is considered to be the ultimate usually is a demand which the authority will accept. Hence, the dire need to justify one's victory, jeopardizes the actual demands and motives of the movement. Also, the insecurity that Jadavpur University is

being successful in their movements, but presidency is not being able to, plays a huge role in creating the urge to win a movement at any cost. So, it can be said that more than winning the movement in reality by solving the issues, it becomes important to make people believe that they have won it by celebrating by playing aabir, giving press statements or social media campaigning. Another reason stated for the failure of the students movement is that the individuals are unwilling to take part in movements or politics at large. The politics of 'apolitics' have grasped the minds of the individuals at large where most of the individuals find pride in stating that they are apolitical or ignorant of current social situations.

Another respondent stated that those who engage in serious politics often experience anti-campaigning against them. As they are not treated 'as cool enough' as they don't engage in gossiping or hanging out much, they are often otherized. Individuals who are sincerely engaged in politics often have a lot of serious commitments and hence doesn't have plenty of time to sit and chat with others, which goes against them in the recent scenario. Also the aim of most of the political activists in times of the movement is to attract individuals to their respective organizations, not to politicize them in general, which is hindering the nature and spirit of the movements at large. The mass based politics which is being practised is inherently problematic, as the mass in general is depoliticized and doesn't want to take necessary radical steps at crucial times of the movement, hence the movement doesn't reach its potential.

One of the respondent stated that gender bias is an important factor throughout the history of movements. It has always been present in the case of Presidency University also. Most of the slogans are shouted by the men and majority of the movements are led by the men which undoubtedly creates a negative impression on the female population and decreases the rate of female participation in movements.

The movements at large are being restricted to the four walls of the safe place of the campuses and is not exploring the outside world and the issues concerning the entire population at large. The aim is to be a part of an organization, conduct events and being part of several movements, but not intrinsically developing a person politically or influencing a person to perceive the personal through a political lens. It is not possible to apply political theories in the grassroots level unless you perceive the personal as the political.

On asking whether the recent movements have yielded positive result, an interviewee stated that none of the movement has been successful. For example, Suppose, if the movement started with the demand that there will be no admission fee, after few discussions with the authority it came down to the fees will be reduced from 500 to 400, as the authority offered us the same. Hence the interest of the movements are being compromised in order to portray the victory to the entire student population.

In the pan Indian scenario, one of the most interesting responses for the failure of the student movement was " I think whenever a fascist force emerges, the entire opposition, specifically all the left parties try to unite in order to fight the fascists. But the left parties are divided by their ideologies and hence can never be united in its true sense which creates problems in times of movements at large."

In case of Calcutta University, a student from the mathematics department stated that the recent Roll back CBCS movement was a big failure as it was disorganized in general. In different colleges under Calcutta University, different aspects of the CBCS system were being critiqued, but the movement didn't get unified. As the results came out after the implementation of the CBCS movement, many individuals failed in the examination. A movement spurred up regarding this but it failed because the victims didn't come forward as they were afraid of the entire situation. The respondent also added that the entire student population has not developed a class consciousness and hence prefer to adjust in the prevailing system at any cost which is hampering the spirit and enthusiasm of the student movements at large.

The respondents across campuses further were enquired about the status of student movement in the pan Indian scenario, to which almost everyone agreed that the movements are not taking any concrete shape and are not being unified across cities. The reasons which came up as factors leading to the present disorganized status of the student movements are listed below. Firstly, in most of the cases leadership becomes a problematic space. The movement often don't include those for whom the movement is taking place. In most of the cases the movements are led by men, and are hugely male dominated in nature which discourages the women to take part in such movements. In most of the cases the leadership imposes the decisions on the entire student population without even trying to build a consensus regarding the same.

Secondly, the initiators of a movement don't take into account other's perspectives or don't engage in dialogue with either the individuals they are working for, or the authority they are working against. For example, during a lockdown in JNU, a student stated that by doing this lockdown we are actually saving the authority's money and those who are suffering are the daily contractual workers like the sanitation workers as they are not being able to perform their jobs. To this, the political activists ridiculed the person in question and asked him to provide some alternative and if he doesn't provide one, his suggestion is not even taken in consideration. The respondent also added "He was said not to be a part of the politics he doesn't even understand."

Thirdly, the nature and strategies of protests are becoming very predictable and hence is not creating any impact on the administration to a great extent. By this time, the authority knows how to handle a protest march or hunger strike, hence it is important to come up with new ideas of resistance which would take them by surprise.

In conclusion, it can be inferred that the declining success rate of student politics and movements at large is reflective of the present generation, it reflects the priorities of the current student population and is also creating a negative

impact on the discourse of national politics at large. In times of a fascist regime, when the resistance, the voice of dissent should have increased threefold, the student movements tended to become disorganized and de-unified in the pan Indian scenario. Also, as in the recent times the need to attain victory in overpowering the fulfillment of the real agendas of the movement, it is hindering the spirit and growth of the movement and is leading to fragmentation of movements from within.

#### *Acknowledgment:*

I would like to thank my Supervisor Professor Nabamita Das, Department of Sociology, Presidency University for guiding me throughout this research work.

#### *References:*

- Ahmed, Karuna, Rudolph, I. Lloyd & Rudolph, H. Susanne. "Student politics and national politics in India", *Economic and political weekly*, 6 (30-31-32): 1655-1668.
- Altbach, G. Philip. "Perspectives on student political activism", *Comparative education*, 25 (1): 97-110.
- Dasgupta, Priyanka. "What's ailing campus politics in JU?". *Times Of India*. February 28, 2017. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/whats-ailing-campus-politics-in-ju/articleshow/57398979.cms>.
- Imam, Sharjeel and Saquib Salim. "Left-wing Groups Speak of Women's Empowerment, but Their Politics Are Still Dominated by Men." *Firstpost*. April 14, 2017. Accessed on November 7, 2018. <https://www.firstpost.com/india/left-wing-groups-speak-of-womens-empowerment-but-their-politics-are-still-dominated-by-men-3383722.html>. [Accessed on 5th November, 2018].
- Ivekovic, R, Mostov, J. (2006). "From gender to nation", Available at <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~sj6/ritumenondowomenhavenation.pdf>. [Accessed on 5th November, 2018].
- Jayawardana, K, Kelkar, G. "The Left and Feminism." *Economic and Political Weekly* (1989). <http://www.citationmachine.net/bibliographies/378062016?new=true>. [Accessed on 10th November, 2018].
- Luescher-Mamashela, M. Thierry. "Theorising student activism in and beyond the 20th century: the contribution of Philip. G. Altbach", *Student engagement in Europe: society, higher education and student governance*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing. 33-49.
- Menon, N. *Gender and politics in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Paxton, P, Kunovich, S. "Women's political representation: the importance of ideology." *Research Gate* (2003). [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236695623\\_Women's\\_Political\\_Representation\\_The\\_Importance\\_of\\_Ideology](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236695623_Women's_Political_Representation_The_Importance_of_Ideology). [Accessed on 6th November, 2018].
- Roy, S. *Remembering Revolution*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Sharma, K. Piyush. (2016), Why asking students to stay away from politics is the biggest mistake a nation can make. [online] Available at

<https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2016/02/need-for-student-politics/>.  
[Accessed on 6th November, 2018].

Sherpa, Chepal. "The Hakkolorob Movement and the Shantiniketan Sexual Assault Case: Convergences, Fragmentation and the Aversion to Politics". Sanhati. (2014).

Shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in. (n.d.). Roots of Student Movement in Bengal. [online] Available at: [http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/200712/20/9%20\\_%20chapter%20i.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/200712/20/9%20_%20chapter%20i.pdf). [Accessed 4 Nov. 2018].

Singh, Valay. (2016), How student activism is taking India by storm with issues ranging from caste discrimination to high fees. [online] Available at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/how-student-activism-is-taking-india-by-storm-with-issues-ranging-from-caste-discrimination-to-high-fees/articleshow/51071071.cms>. [Accessed on 6th November, 2018].

Zungura, M, Mutasa, F, Nemba, E. "The relationship between democracy and women participation in politics." Research Gate (2013). [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272662300\\_The\\_relationship\\_between\\_democracy\\_and\\_women\\_participation\\_in\\_politics](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272662300_The_relationship_between_democracy_and_women_participation_in_politics). 2161-7104. 10.5296/jpag.v3i1.3516. [Accessed on 4th November, 2018].