ISAS Working Paper

Youth and Politics in India-II

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to uncover the features that make India's youth politics so distinct from other forms of politics within the country, the kinds of politics young people participate in, and the kinds of young people who participate in it. First, there is a detailed discussion of the various identities that political parties have used for mobilising youth, as well as those that the youth themselves have used as a basis of political mobilisation on their own terms and in their own ways.

This report also deals with the dynamics of youth politics to make the argument that it is far more behavioural than ideological. The practice of youth politics, which often operates outside the sphere of formal politics, is not only highly informed by the distinctly youthful traits of restlessness, spontaneity and insecurity, but is also more about participating for the sake of participation itself. Rather than an ideological, policy-focused type of "participation for the fulfilment of a certain goal",[2] participation in youth politics is driven by the desire to experience a sense of action, identity and masculinity, given that India's youth politics is portrayed in the literature as a male-dominated domain. However, there is evidence that this is beginning to change, as the number of protesters in the weeks following the rape of a 23-year-old medical student in South Delhi on 16 December 2011 had "been roughly half women and half men".[3]

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[2] Sika, N. 2012. Youth Political Engagement in Egypt: From Abstention to Uprising. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. **39** (2), 182.
[3] Upton, J. 2012. Why Mostly Men at the Indian Anti-Rape Protests? *Slate* [online]. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2012/12/india_s_anti_rape_protests_are_women_getting_groped.html>.

For developing this argument regarding the character of youth politics, an attempt has been made to explore the practices of friendship and fun that are part and parcel of the political activities of youth, the highly masculine orientation of young men's political behaviour, and the ways in which they both view and practice politics as a form of public performance.

Investigated, in the process, are the implications that youth politics carries for the personal lives of those who engage in it, as well as its consequences for wider society and for the overall politics of the state. This section of the paper covers the argument that youth politics not only carries implications of violence such as armed conflict and riots, but it is also becoming increasingly powerful in creating policy changes as young middle class youths have begun to politically express themselves, in recent years, in reaction to the unravelling social situation and the actions of the state.

2. Identity in Youth Politics

Much of the literature reveals patterns of young people being drawn into politics on the basis of identity – mobilising on caste, ethnic and/or religious lines. Caste, ethnicity and religion have not only increased in importance as markers of identity among youth as result of politics, but have also been reconstructed. During the process of political mobilisation, young people negotiate and reconsider the meanings of their caste, religious and ethnic identities.

I. Caste Identity

Michelutti's (2004) study of Yadav men in Uttar Pradesh, which is particularly relevant to youth politics considering that "most Yadav males begin their political careers or interest in politics at a very young age",[4] conveys how political responses are not only encouraged by, but also based upon, caste stereotypes.

The disposition of Yadav men towards politics is strongly influenced by the stereotype of Yadavs as "a caste of politicians",[5] which in turn affirms their caste identity. Michelutti describes how "ordinary Yadavs constantly trace their 'caste' predispositions and skills",[6] such as "the skill of 'doing politics'",[7] to their caste "descent".[8] Similarly, while their political rhetoric is intrinsically tied to notions of caste, depicting democracy as a "primordial phenomenon inherited by contemporary Yadavs from the ancestor-king-god Krishna",[9] their political behaviour in action is also influenced by their sense of masculinity and the idea of Yadavs "as thugs who base their strength on muscle power."[10]

Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery (2005) reveal the positive impact of caste politics on young people as it provides opportunities for empowerment and social mobility by removing caste prejudices. Low-caste political activity has helped mobilise Dalits by "providing a powerful

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[4]   Michelutti, L. 2004. 'We (Yadavs) are a Caste of Politicians': Caste and Modern Politics in a North Indian Town. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. **38** (43), 69.
[5]   Ibid.
[6]   Ibid, 48.
[7]   Ibid, 47.
[8]   Ibid, 48.
[9]   Ibid, 47.
[10] Ibid, 53.

model of Dalit masculinity based on education and white-collar employment".[11] However, in contrast to much of the literature, Jeffrey and Young (2012) observe how young men in Meerut College in Uttar Pradesh have "mobilized politically across class, caste and religious lines".[12]

II. Regional and Class Identity

Unlike the findings of Jeffrey and Young, many of the other studies on youth politics have found different political movements that cater to young people to be highly exclusive in terms of identity. These include Hansen's (1996, 2001) studies of young men in Maharashtra who were mobilised on the basis of their religious identity as Hindus and also Sirnate's (2009) study of youth in Meghalaya who were mobilised on the basis of their ethnic identity as Khasis.

Whether it is a difference in opinion or theory among the authors discussed above, on whether youth politics erases or reinforces identity, what has more likely contributed to the difference in findings is the fact that these studies took place in highly different regional contexts. Geographical differences are especially important in the case of India, considering its vast geography and different regional cultures, which will inevitably influence politics to differ greatly from region to region.

The issue of class also explains why youth politics has spread in different directions. Class differences account for different types of political behaviour among young men, for example, "an upper middle class style of being masculine may be strikingly different from a working class style of masculinity".[13] These multiple class dimensions of masculinity help to provide an understanding of why it manifests itself in wildly different forms of political behaviour.

The differences in masculinity across class are evident from how young men from different class backgrounds conceive of masculinity in different ways. They identify different values and activities as markers of their class and gender identity. According to Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery, "educated young Chamar men emphasised schooling as a source of individual dignity and masculine prowess" contrasting themselves with uneducated Chamar men who, according to them, exhibited a highly different form of masculinity by watching "violent, crude and badly acted dramas starring 'wild man' actors".[14]

However, the extent to which these different types of masculinities, varying according to class, have fed into the politics of these respective class groups, is unclear from the literature. Nevertheless, the potential of class to impact on caste within youth politics can be discerned from how "most middle-class students are from the politically dominant intermediate castes" while "working-class students are mainly Scheduled Caste".[15]

[11] Jeffrey, C., Jeffery, P. and Jeffery, R. 2005. When Schooling Fails: Young Men, Education and Low-caste Politics in Rural North India. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. **39** (1), 32.

[12] Jeffrey, C. and Young, S. 2012. Waiting for Change: Youth, Caste and Politics in India. *Economy and Society*. **41** (4), 653.

[13] Ferguson, J. 1999. *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life in the Zambian Copperbelt*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 95.

[14] Jeffrey, C., Jeffery, P. and Jeffery, R. 2005. Dalit Young Men and Formal Education. In: Chopra, R. and Jeffery, P. (eds.) *Educational Regimes in Contemporary India*. New Delhi: Sage, 265.

[15] Rogers, M. 2008. Modernity, 'Authenticity', and Ambivalence: Subaltern Masculinities on a South Indian College Campus. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. **14** (1), 80.

III. Ethnic Identity

Perhaps what is most interesting and most different about members of Meghalaya's Khasi Students Union (KSU), in relation to other political youth groups in India, are their objectives which underlie all the activities they participate in. The operation of the KSU involves "taking over the contentious and electorally unrewarding positions national parties may shy away from – against institutionally correcting the influx of "outsiders", anti-mining and power projects and re-instituting the "inner line permit" regime in Meghalaya".[16]

The literature claims that the KSU represents a rejection of political ideology. However, a highly anti-establishment, anti-development, pro-tradition ideology that is very much in line with the group's mission to preserve Khasi culture can be extrapolated from the various positions the group has taken on issues such as mining and migration.

In spite of an implicit ideology, what nevertheless makes the KSU so typical of many other political student groups is its concern with identity and challenging the state system. Whilst many young men in India enter politics for the purpose of establishing an identity, the KSU aims to protect the Khasi identity, evident in its opposition to activities and populations such as mining and foreigners, respectively, that threaten to modernise and re-organise the culture of the state. Similar to the politics of youth in other parts of India, KSU members engage in identity politics. In response to the state's handling of development of the Northeast and its marginalisation of the region's inhabitants, the politics of youth in Meghalaya represents mobilisation against the state and against the idea of being 'Indian'.

Like the men featured in Gooptu's (2007) study of jute workers in Kolkata "who try to steer clear of democratic party politics",[17] the "KSU's antagonistic career against seemingly unrepresentative state power in Meghalaya"[18] represents a challenge to the political system of the state and a rejection of the dominant political ideology. Moreover, the fact that the KSU takes electorally unrewarding positions on contentious issues may reveal that its politics is not necessarily about finding a place within the party system, but rather, is about finding an outlet for expression and voicing concern.

IV. The Role of Party Politics in the Construction of Identity

Much of the literature portrays youth politics as operating outside the confines of party and electoral politics, as it is "oriented towards, and fashioned through, the informal political spheres"[19] in which youth operate. However, in many cases, political parties play an important role in mobilising young people. Even as "political parties are using these students' unions only as their 'vote banks' and for political support",[20] in the process they often end up shaping the political identity, if not ideology, of youth.

[16] Sirnate, V. 2009. Students versus the State: The Politics of Uranium Mining in Meghalaya. *Economic and Political Weekly*. **44** (47), 19.

[17] Gooptu, N. 2007. Economic Liberalisation, Work and Democracy: Industrial Decline and Urban Politics in Kolkata. *Economic and Political Weekly*. **42** (21), 1927.

[18] Sirnate, V., above n 16: 19.

[19] Jeffrey, C. 2010. *Timepass: Youth, Class and the Politics of Waiting in India*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 181.

[20] Prasad, C. 2007. Students' Movements in Arunachal Pradesh and the Chakma-Hajong Refugee Problem. *Economic and Political Weekly*. **42** (15), 1378.

An example of party politics reinforcing and reinventing religious identity is how the availability of young, unemployed, mainly other backward class (OBC), middle-class Hindu men in Maharashtra "provided the conditions for the success of the Shiv Sena and the BJP"[21] in the 1990s. In addition to reinforcing the 'Hindu-ness' of the young men, the *Shiv Sena* mobilised them on the basis of altering the meaning of the Hindu identity in a way that spoke directly to the youths and their desires – the party's "brash, self-confident, 'street smart' style represented to many young men in villages and towns the essence of what Bombay's tantalising modernity was imagined to be".[22]

The construction of a multi-faceted identity through which the *Shiv Sena* was able to attract unemployed young men not only explains the youthful appeal of the party but also the contradictory and complex nature of youth politics. According to Hansen, to be a *Shiv Sainik* is "to be respectable, to indulge in the enjoyment (*maza*) of one's newfound status, to play by the rules; the other is to remain angry, to display courage (*sahas*) and manliness, to be the opposition".[23]

The juxtaposition of these two ideas is particularly appealing to unemployed young men. The gaining of respect overcomes the shame they often feel as a result of their unemployed status. The ability to project anger, on the other hand, allows them to express their masculinity as well as vent their frustration at the socio-economic situation in which they have floundered. Whilst these contradictory ideas of commanding respect and expressing anger are reconciled within the *Shiv Sainik* identity, they emerge as differences in the identities of working class men in Kolkata who, according to Gooptu, either go down the path of social service or crime when engaging in politics, but rarely both.

In the same vein as the *Shiv Sena*, the literature on Dravidian politics reveals a tendency by parties to emphasise ethnic identity in the quest for mass mobilisation. Much like how the *Shiv Sena* mobilised young men around the creation of a distinctly Maharashtrian identity and past, the "DMK deployed Tamilness as a category of analysis and expression, thus constructing an imagined community which took pride in its past and longed to translate that past to the present".[24] These similarities between Maharashtrian and Dravidian politics convey how parties across India resort to tactics of glorifying ethnicity. Political parties therefore play a critical role in politicising the identities of young men; whether it is the 'Hindu warrior' of the *Shiv Sena* or the 'Goonda' of the Samajwadi party, the use of symbols, images and even the reimagining of history by parties are powerful in their ability to influence the political engagement of young people.

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[21] Hansen, T.B. 1996. The Vernacularisation of Hindutva: The BJP and Shiv Sena in Rural Maharashtra. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. **30** (2), 178.

[22] Ibid, 184.

[23] Hansen, T.B. 2001. *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 198.

[24] Rajadurai, S.V. and Geetha, V. 2002. A Response to John Harriss. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*. **40** (3), 121.

3. The Nature of Youth Politics

I. Youth Politics as a Form of Behaviour

The apparent nature of youth politics, rather than the actual type of politics and political ideas youth engage in, is the subject of much focus in the literature. This is likely because of the fact that, according to the literature, politics is less of an outlet for political expression of ideas than it is an opportunity to overcome the "feeling of limbo"[25] experienced by many young people both during schooling and afterwards when the problem of unemployment is a common occurrence.

As a result, it is the character of politics, more than anything else, that is actively informed and shaped by young people. Their own insecurities and personal aspirations are often the factors that drive them towards politics, consequently determining the manner in which they express themselves politically, more so than the issues they choose to debate. Presenting a certain type of behaviour and identity through engaging in politics, rather than pushing for a certain policy, provides a quicker and more direct solution to the problems of boredom, restlessness, shame, alienation, social immobility and unemployment.

II. The Behaviour of Youth Gangs

The literature on youth gangs is useful in providing a possible explanation as to why youth behaviour overpowers political objectives as a driving force behind youth politics. One similarity between youth politics and gangs that conveys this particular dynamic is the indifference youth have towards the activities that define the organisations they join. As is evident from Pitts' (2008) study of youth gangs in East London, the prospect of "criminal involvement"[26] or being a gangster is seen to have little weight in the decision to join a gang in contrast to the possibility of social integration and interaction. In the case of politics, it is unlikely that many of the young men involved have serious thoughts about becoming a politician or even have a genuine interest in political thought. Participating in youth groups, not because of what the group means or stands for in terms of its objective, but for the opportunity to have fun, is a common incentive that links young men involved in gangs and political groups together.

The similarities in the composition and organisation of youth gangs across the world and youth politics in India point to the distinctiveness of youth groups that operate in public spaces as 'visible' and, to a certain extent, 'controlling' entities. Like most gangs around the world which mainly consist of groups of boys, young college-going men in Kerala, according to Osella and Osella (2000), are often "segregated from girls and socialising in all-male gangs".[27]

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[25] Jeffrey, C. and Young, S., above n 12: 658.

[26] Pitts, J. 2008. Describing and Defining Youth Gangs. *Community Safety Journal*. **7** (1), 30.

[27] Osella, F. and Osella C. 2000. *Social Mobility in Kerala: Modernity and Identity in Conflict*. London: Pluto Press, 228.

III. The Gang Phenomenon in India

The link between youth gangs and politics becomes further magnified when considering the phenomenon of youth gangs in India, as the country has had a "long history of groups that could be considered youth gangs".[28] Much like India's youth politics, Varanasi's street gangs, according to Singh (1969), "were mostly comprised of adolescent males".[29] In addition to the similar profiles of participants in youth gangs and in politics are their similar experiences of unemployment. Grennan's et al.'s (2000) description of gangs noted that "Indian youth who joined gangs between 16 and 18 years of age were unemployed and had prior criminal involvement".[30]

The tendency of youth to politically mobilise along caste lines can be compared with Srivastava's study of Bombay gangs (1955) which concluded that "gang participation and membership was based on caste, with members only joining within their caste".[31] The similar choices youth make and the factors they consider when joining gangs or politics indicates their desire for a space in which they can both display their identity and organise themselves socially outside the realm of the family and college/workplace. Participation as a way of replacing inaccessible and unsatisfying institutions is another common feature across youth gangs and politics. Just as "street gangs in Bombay were viewed as substitutes for other social organisations, such as school and family, which failed to meet the needs of youth",[32] many young men in India have turned to politics in the face of exclusion from employment and entertainment.

The activities of gangs and politics that sometimes overlap suggest, to a certain degree, that youth gangs and politics are not always easily distinguishable. The similarities between the driving forces behind both activities can be viewed as causing gang and political activity to merge into one. For example, according to Sidhva (1997), the street gangs in Bombay "had political support from high places and ties to the police".[33] Furthermore, references to groups of the Congress Party's youth wing "as gangs" that are "involved in street crimes" but "are most likely not true street gangs"[34] convey the grey area that lies between the participation of youth in gangs and politics. This would suggest that young men are able to fluidly transition from politics to gangs, as seen in the example above demonstrating how youth politics can descend into violence and crime, and vice versa, as evident from the example of some young men in Kolkata who resort to extortion "to break into the exclusive, though corrupt, world of privilege and power".[35]

The similarities of composition, alienation, unemployment, friendship and the need for fun between youth gangs and youth politics, reveal a set of patterns that identify youth as a separate social category containing its own set of distinct features. Not only are the youth unique in their behaviour - they are also powerful. Rather than consisting of people who do nothing more than participate as mere actors, the literature conveys that the youth in fact are

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[28] Franzese, R.J., Covey, H.C. and Menard, S. 2006. *Youth Gangs*. 3rd Edition. Springfield, IL: Charles C Publisher, 143.
[29] Covey, H.C. 2010. *Street Gangs Throughout The World*. 2nd Edition. Springfield, IL: Charles C Publisher, 188.
[30] Franzese, R.J., Covey, H.C. and Menard, S., above n 28: 143.
[31] Covey H.C., above n 29: 187.
[32] Ibid, 187.
[33] Ibid, 189.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Gooptu, N., above n 17: 1929.

made up of highly complex characters who display the ability to shape and transform whichever activity they involve themselves in, be it within the space of politics or gangs.

IV. The Behaviour of Young Men in the Arab Spring

The distinctiveness of youth and its impact on politics becomes further evident when comparing and contrasting the literature in question to that on the Arab Spring. Much like the young men in India who participate in politics, "the street revolutions that overthrew the presidents of Egypt and Tunisia" comprised mainly of "alienated street youth"[36] (the word 'street' indicating the space in which they practise their politics, much like India's youth, rather than destitution).

Upon reviewing the literature, both examples of political activity can be said to represent a manifestation of youthful behaviour. Whilst youth politics in India is informed by the practices of friendship, improvisation and masculinity by young men, those in the Arab Spring "bring youth's character to their fight for change".[37] In reference to the Arab Spring, Pollock (2011) states that "youthful protests can feel messy and chaotic. They are sometimes fun. They are often innovative. Organising or attending protests gets fitted between flirting, studying, and holding down a job".[38]

However, the marked differences in objective and operation between the politics of young people in India and those in Egypt and Tunisia highlight the features that make India's youth politics unique and specific to its cultural context. Firstly, whilst protests and riots in the region of Gafsa in Tunisia "have traditionally focused on issues such as unemployment", much like in India, the Tunisian rebellion in February 2011 was directed "toward a particular end: removing Ben Ali".[39]

The rebellion not only tackled a completely different issue from unemployment, but was also highly specific in its aim, thereby differentiating it from the far-less objective-focused protests of young men in India. Secondly, the use of online tactics, such as those "that had become popular in Egypt: uploads on YouTube and Facebook",[40] have yet to play a large role in connecting alienated and politically-minded young men in India together in the same way that it did in Egypt during the rebellion. This is because in India, "the key provider of oxygen to protest is the television".[41] In contrast, the "weak force" of social media in India was most clearly displayed in June 2012 when a group of internet activists, who called for a nation-

[36] Pollock, J. 2011. Streetbook: How Egyptian and Tunisian Youth Hacked the Arab Spring. *MIT Technology Review* [online]. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/425137/streetbook/?p1=Mag_story1>.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Joshi, M. 2012. 2012 Year of the Fighter: Never Before has India Seen a Previously Apolitical Class Take to the Streets with Such Alacrity to Change the System. *India Today* [online]. Available from World Wide Web: <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/year-of-the-fighter-2012-protests-across-india-anna-hazare-arvind-kejriwal/1/240096.html>.

wide protest against internet censorship, were not even able to "attract more than 300 people in the five big metros of India".[42]

Exploring the literature on the behaviour of Egyptian and Tunisian youth prior to the uprising, however reveals the politics of Arab and Indian youth to be far more similar than would seem at first glance. Rather than indicating a heightened sense of politicisation that sets Arab youth apart from their Indian counterparts, the literature suggests that the Arab Spring was in fact a manifestation of several different factors that were specific to the space and time in which it occurred.

Shahine (2011) describes the Arab Spring as indicative of "the political awakening and activism of this new generation of secular Egyptians".[43] Sika (2012) comes to a similar conclusion, stating that "youths were civically and politically disengaged prior to the uprising".[44] This was according to a 2008 study conducted on the social and economic returns on education in Egypt which found that "the large majority of youth (98.8 per cent) are not members of civil society organisations, which is generally indicative of low political and civic engagement levels".[45]

The Arab Spring was a significant conjuncture and a matter of opportunity, as Sika states that "when the political opportunity was available for young people to participate and change the political game, they did so, contributing forcefully to the ousting of a long-time authoritarian leader".[46] Therefore, it cannot be deduced that Arab youth are innately more political than Indians. It is possible that young Indians are equally capable of demonstrating such political will, provided the conditions are such that change is seen by them as necessary. In fact, indications of such politicisation are beginning to be seen in India today as middle class youth are, unlike ever before, protesting for change, whether it is regarding corruption within the government or society's treatment of women.

V. The Importance of Masculinity in Politics

What seems to be unanimous in the literature is that the politics of young people in India reflects male youth behaviour – it is active, spontaneous and even aggressive. Jeffrey and Young argue that "local forms of student leadership also reflected masculinised cultures of youth politicking".[47] This idea that youth politics represents a space for the expression and projection of masculinity, however, begs the question of why masculinity is so important for young men in the context of unemployment.

This question is crucial in understanding the attraction that politics has for young men, because it helps to provide a fuller picture of youth politics and its complexities. Masculinity not only explains the connection between the effects of unemployment (such as alienation) and the appeal of youth politics, but also manifests itself within the practice of youth politics. According to Rogers (2008), masculinity, for young men, provides a way of assuming "authority over the disruptive and negative forces in the world around them, particularly

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Shahine, S.H. 2011. Youth and the Revolution in Egypt. *Anthropology Today*. **27** (2), 2.
[44] Sika, N., above n 2: 198.
[45] Ibid, 193.
[46] Ibid, 199.
[47] Jeffrey, C. and Young, S., above n 12: 649.

locally high levels of graduate unemployment and economic insecurity resulting from rapid economic change and India's integration into the global market".[48]

The reasons why expressions of masculinity are seen by young men as forces for confronting unemployment lie in the fact that masculinity acts as a coping-mechanism. Specifically, masculinity provides a mask with which men can "recover a loss of self-esteem, while conversely concealing weakness and social dependency".[49] Through projecting, and in turn, feeling a sense of strength and confidence, the insecurities regarding unemployment essentially become hidden, though not necessarily erased. As a result, young men in response to unemployment turn towards political performance as it provides a space for the expression of identity, particularly one that is masculine.

If it can be argued that dealing with insecurity through the display of masculinity allows men to conceal their fears without directly confronting or reflecting on them, then it can be suggested that projecting masculine identity does not really deal with insecurity at all, at least in a substantive sense. Whilst no such argument seems to appear in the literature, this leads to the possibility that the politics of young men, at least in its initial stages, operates at a superficial level in terms of its ability to solve insecurity. It works only to distract men from their problems rather than overcome them. Nevertheless, politics remains fundamental to the societal fabric of youth groups in India. What is evident is the power with which politics is able to transform and redefine other aspects of young men's lives such as their behaviour, activities, social groups and identity.

VI. Youth Politics as a Form of Performance

Representations of youth politics as performance in the literature are especially helpful in several ways. In addition to uncovering the highly active and emotive nature of youth politics, they help to illustrate both why young people turn to politics in search of identity and how these identities are played out.

For the *Shiv Sena*, which "attempted to remain rooted in political society as a site for permanent protest",[50] its presentation of politics as a form of performance was especially successful in increasing the accessibility of politics to young people. The performance-based nature of *Shiv Sena* politics allowed young men to act out their idealised gender roles publicly. It therefore becomes evident how the *Shiv Sena*'s focus on political identity through performance, which touched on many of the insecurities that young men in the region faced such as emasculation and powerlessness, was able to empower, and in the process, politicise youth.

Lukose's (2005) fieldwork among college students in Kerala traces the way in which the college environment has provided space for young men to organise demonstrations and protests. More specifically, she identifies a link between the nature of politics in the state and the age and gender identities of the actors who engage in it within the space of the college. In

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[48] Rogers, M., above n 15: 80.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Hansen, T.B., above n 23: 231.

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highlighting the importance of this linkage, she states that "youth as a space of masculine political agency has been key to the articulation of public politics in Kerala".[51]

Her research conveys the contemporary relevance of youth, stating how Kerala's politics is "driven by the political agency of revolutionary or revolutionizing young men".[52] It also probes further into the educational institution as a specific space in which a highly youthful and gendered type of political performance is practised. This is evident from how "colleges as spaces of civic virtue" are "incarcerated by politics" by being subject to strikes, "fasts and demonstrations".[53]

These types of performances offer a glimpse into the impact of "masculine sociality that is reckless and restless"[54] on youth politics, as well as the extent to which youth politics is, as a result, highly active and impulsive in nature. However, the questions of political ideology and the relationship between specific youth activities and politics are left unanswered. The literature prompts several questions. The first is on the patterns of political attitudes among youth, and the second is whether their experiences of "fun, friendship, and romance in public"[55] determine in any way the type of politics they engage in.

VII. The Lack of Political Ideology

The young 'community-leading' men that feature in Gooptu's study on declining jute industrial areas in Kolkata saw themselves as "non-political, staying clear of power plays, patronage nexus and factional rivalries".[56] However, their political aspiration cannot be denied. They claimed to be interested in the community at large, in direct contrast to the politicians whom they viewed as self-seeking. This reveals their perception of the idea of politics to be both negative and intrinsically tied to formal and party politics. In attempting to distance themselves from the actors and institutions that have come to define what they know as 'politics', it becomes clear that their own form of politics is less institutional and ideological than formal politics. Rather, their politics is much more individualistic and expressive of their aspirations.

Similar to the young men in Kolkata, the youths of Meghalaya who are members of the Khasi Students Union distanced themselves from the political system and ideologies of the state. This is evident from how "the KSU today remains a non-ideological organisation sporadically engaging in activism and functioning as a springboard for politically ambitious young men".[57]

In the case of Egypt's youth, whose political behaviour resembles that of India's, ideology takes a backseat to the importance of protest and performance. This is evident in the new youth movements that have "taken shape outside the mainstream political parties"[58] such as the Youth for Change movement and the Sixth of April movement. Sika describes these movements as having "no single or unified political agenda", instead representing "a broad

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[51] Lukose, R. 2005. Empty Citizenship: Protesting Politics in the Era of Globalization. *Cultural Anthropology*. **20** (4), 512.
[52] Ibid, 506.
[53] Ibid, 515.
[54] Ibid, 516.
[55] Ibid, 514.
[56] Gooptu, N., above n 17: 1930.
[57] Sirnate, V., above n 16: 22.
[58] Sika, N., above n 2: 188.

spectrum of dissent".[59] She goes on to argue that "they have been involved mainly in expressing their discontent with public policies, on the streets or on social networking sites, without presenting any distinct form of political platform".[60]

Such expressions of discontent can be observed too, amongst middle class Jat men in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh. According to Jeffrey, they have been protesting "around issues of corruption, students' progression through academic institutions, educational mismanagement and government officials' harassment of students".[61] This reveals a pattern of politics that, despite being issue-orientated, has little coherence ideologically. Many of the issues that form the subject of such protests also suggest youth politics to be both highly critical without providing policies or proposals, as well as being driven by the desire to advance individual well-being rather than deal with wider issues of concern to the state.

An indifference to ideology was also displayed by the young Maharashtrian men who joined the *Shiv Sena* in the 1990s. The extent to which the *Shiv Sena* pursued an identity-based strategy of mobilisation, instead of a politically ideological one, is evident from how the party "never published elaborate manifestos or programs, and even its election proposals have generally been brief".[62] This ambivalence towards specific policies in their electoral campaign may have been strategic given that it connects closely with the way in which youth often disregard policy matters when participating in politics.

By delimiting the focus on policy objectives and proposals, the *Shiv Sena* was therefore able to gain the interest of young men through symbols, speeches and activities such as protests. All of these were particularly powerful modes of mobilisation as they offered "young, powerless, insecure men the opportunity to view themselves as strong, enterprising men, accepting of their male desires, able to control women and to command respect simply by their association with *Shiv Sena*".[63]

In the case of speeches, the party's founder, Bal Thackeray, relied heavily on "mythical parables and metaphors" evoking ideas of "violence, bravery and manliness".[64] This reveals a highly powerful and evocative style of language, full of imagery that readily appealed to the young man's desire to redefine his own identity. Moreover, the *Shiv Sena* managed to appeal to young men and their desires to prove their masculinity as it offered "masculinity through violence – for example, through annihilation and humiliation of the Muslim "other," who has long deprived Hindus of their masculinity".[65]

Katzenstein's study (1977) on the mobilisation of youth by the *Shiv Sena*, during the 1960s and 1970s, explicitly highlights the distinctiveness of youth in terms of political behaviour, stating that "ideology or material incentives, central to most organisations, count less for youth".[66] Her argument that emotions such as "the exhilaration of being involved" provided

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[59] Ibid, 189.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Jeffrey, C. 2011. On His Book Timepass: Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India. *Rorotoko* [online]. Available from World Wide Web: <http://rorotoko.com/interview/20110323_jeffrey _craig_on_timepass_youth_class_politics_waiting_india/?page=4>.
[62] Hansen, T.B., above n 23: 200.
[63] Ibid, 93.
[64] Ibid, 85.
[65] Ibid, 93.
[66] Katzenstein, M.F. 1977. Mobilization of Indian Youth in the Shiv Sena. *Pacific Affairs*. **50** (2), 231.

the "central impetus for mobilizing young party activists"[67] substantiates this literature review's findings regarding the centrality of collective identity, overcoming isolation and avoiding alienation in youth politics.

4. The Implications of Youth Politics

I. The Political Violence of Educated Unemployed Youth

There is a theme in the literature on educated unemployed youth (McNally, Unni, and Cassen 2004 p. 162) regarding the causality between unemployment and political participation. Many scholars have cited how educated unemployed young men around the world have reacted to economic uncertainty by "entering youth or student politics"[68] (Altbach, 1984; Nasr 1992; Humayun & Khalid, 1996; Sykes, 1999; Obeng, 2000; Matin-Asgari, 2001; Rhoads, 2001).

The literature reveals the politics of educated unemployed youths in India to be, more often than not, a threat to the physical safety of religious/caste groups as well as to the project of abolishing caste identity. Chowdhry's (2009) study of unemployed Jat men in Haryana portrays their political engagement, through the channel of the caste *panchayat*, to be violent in nature and deeply informed by strict notions of social separation on the basis of caste. Rogers argues that "educated unemployed Dalits on a south Indian campus tend to retreat into caste-specific, violent action in the face of joblessness".[69]

Regarding the nature and character of youth politics, much of the literature which focuses on the connection between youth bulges and politics concludes that problems of unemployment, limited employment opportunities and urban crowding may steer large youth populations to engage in politics of a violent nature (Moller, 1968; Choucri, 1974; Braungart, 1984; Huntington, 1996; Goldstone, 1991, 2001; Cincotta, Engelman & Anastasion, 2003).

II. Types of Political Violence

In India specifically, Urdal (2008) argues that youth bulges not only increase the risk of low-intensity political violence, such as strikes and riots, but also "increase the risk of more organised forms of political violence like internal armed conflict".[70] Along with the studies on college students in Kerala, students in Meghalaya, working-class men in Kolkata, and *Naxalite* parties in Jharkhand and Bihar, these findings from Urdal's study of political violence in 27 Indian states from 1956 to 2002 reveal an undercurrent of violence that lurks within the political activities young people participate in.

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Jeffrey, C., Jeffery, P. and Jeffery, R. 2004. "A Useless Thing!" or "Nectar of the Gods?" The Cultural Production of Education and Young Men's Struggles for Respect in Liberalizing North India. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. **94** (4), 962.

[69] Jeffrey, C. and Young, S., above n 12: 642.

[70] Urdal, H. 2008. Population, Resources and Political Violence: A Subnational Study of India, 1956-2002. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. **52** (4), 595.

Urdal's argument that "youth bulges increase the risk of armed conflict, particularly in states with large male compared to female populations",[71] can be said to be compatible with Chitralekha's (2010) research on the states of Bihar and Jharkhand - both of which have highly male-dominated populations, with 916 and 947 women per 1000 men, respectively (Census, 2011). Chitralekha argues that the possibilities of "holding a gun"[72] and engaging in violence have, among other factors, drawn young people in both states to join *Naxalite* parties in increasing numbers, thereby increasing the likelihood of armed conflict.

Urdal's other argument is that "youth bulges are associated with higher levels of rioting".[73] This seems to confirm Lukose's (2005) research which suggests that the "restless, aimless movement"[74] and energy of young men in Kerala has contributed to the riots, strikes and demonstrations that take place at their college campuses. Urdal's findings support those of Lukose to the extent that they both suggest a connection between youth bulges and riots. However, they differ on the importance of whether the youth bulge associated with riots is male-dominated.

Urdal's argument claims that male-dominated youth bulges are associated with armed conflict while youth bulges in places marked by high levels of urban inequality are associated with less intense forms of political violence such as riots. He mentions that "states with a large excess male population unexpectedly have fewer riots"[75] because the "relationship between youth bulges and riots is not conditioned on the gender balance",[76] but instead, is dependent upon high levels of urban inequality.

These findings suggest an idea different from that in Lukose's study which points towards the influence of typically young male patterns of behaviour (such as restlessness and spontaneity) on the riots, strikes and demonstrations that have characterised the student politics of Kerala. However, the fact that Urdal's study is India-wide and therefore more general in its overall argument whereas Lukose's is state-specific may account for the difference in findings between the two studies.

III. Crime and Politics

Some young men, excluded from employment, move towards dangerous and criminal forms of behaviour. Parallels can be drawn between the conditions that provide for this inclination towards crime and the politics of unemployed youth which sometimes takes a violent and aggressive turn. For example, the dissatisfaction felt by young Chamar men in Uttar Pradesh, in relation to their "experience of competing for secure white-collar employment", was identified by Chamar parents "as an important factor in the perceived rise in alcoholism, suicide and criminal activity in the local area, including murder, assault, sexual harassment, rape, bullying and vandalism".[77]

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[71] Ibid, 601.
[72] Chitralekha. 2010. 'Committed, Opportunists and Drifters': Revisiting the Naxalite Narrative in Jharkhand and Bihar. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. **44** (3), 321.
[73] Urdal, H., above n 70: 605.
[74] Lukose, R., above n 51: 514.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Jeffrey, C., Jeffery, P. and Jeffery, R., above n 11: 20.

The underlying forces behind this wide array of criminal activity do not seem dissimilar to those in Kolkata which drive some young men into criminal politics. The casualisation of the labour market has led a small section of young men to commit "certain specific types of crime like petty extortion and intimidation".[78] These types of crime are innately political in that they are highly public performances intended to be seen and experienced (unlike other types of crimes such as murder and theft which are usually private and committed for the end goal rather than the experience of the process) and enable men "to define a new persona as the powerful, rather than as a common criminal".[79]

Whilst the literature explores the criminality of youth politics, there is little discussion of the parallels between the politics and crimes of youth as separate categories of behaviour. This is a highly interesting comparison that could be not only potentially useful for understanding youth politics but also further explored.

5. The Politics of Middle Class Youth

I. The Politics of Youth from Elite Sections of the Middle Class

Whilst much of the literature on youth politics in India focuses on young men from the lower middle classes, the working classes and those who are unemployed, little attention is paid to those who come from the upper middle or upper classes. The section of the middle class that comes into focus most clearly in the literature is what Jeffrey refers to as "the "real middle class" of people in provincial India who are not poor but who are also excluded from many of the benefits of metropolitan modernity".[80] Specifically, most of these middle class men featured in the literature are identified as unemployed. What the literature seems to suggest is that their status as 'unemployed', rather than as 'middle class', is key in determining their political engagement, as "unemployment is often a setting for reactionary political assertion".[81]

This is evident in how reservations have provided space for the political assertion of unemployed, upper middle class men as "educated unemployed young men from urban middle-class elites have been key players in protests against positive discrimination for lower castes."[82] In response to government policies introducing reservations for OBCs (Other Backward Castes) in higher education, unemployed "young men from prosperous backgrounds" have "articulated their goals in the language of the upper classes in urban India (English)", circulating "political messages on internet blogs".[83] There has even been "involvement of richer sections of the educated unemployed" in party politics, as is evident "in studies of Hindu right-wing political parties in India".[84]

There is clearly a gap in the literature regarding the politics of rich and employed sections of the middle class which may be due to the fact that they "seem to have little faith in

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[78] Gooptu, N., above n 17: 1929.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Jeffrey, C., above n 61.
[81] Jeffrey, C. 2008. 'Generation Nowhere': Rethinking Youth Through the Lens of Unemployed Young Men. *Progress in Human Geography*. **32** (6), 747.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid, 748.
[84] Ibid.

government institutions and the political class".[85] However, to completely rule out this fraction of the middle class as a significant force in politics and therefore view middle class youth as apolitical, would be incorrect. According to Donner, "the view that the middle class is disengaging from politics only holds if politics are narrowly defined as party and electoral politics".[86]

II. The Recent Protests over Rape and Corruption

What must be understood about upper middle class youth is that their political behaviour is typical of modern middle class politics – it falls under the remit of 'civil society', which is "the arena for middle-class activism and assertion".[87] Their activism is evident in the recent protests against corruption in 2011 and against the Delhi gang rape in 2012. The fact that "there were no political parties orchestrating the demonstrations"[88] conveys the nature of middle class youth politics in that it operates outside the space of party politics, which "generally, is oriented toward the denizens of political society".

The protests over the rape were "mostly urban and upper middle class",[89] comprising of "women and men — many of them college students".[90] This reveals the political agency of upper middle class youth. However, the fact that there has been "greater participation in protests by the middle class" only "over the past year and half"[91] may explain the lack of literature on this particular demographic - the public political expression of the upper middle class youth has only just begun.

III. The Politics of Middle Class Youth in Chennai

A part of the literature that hints at the political agency of well-employed, socially mobile middle class youth is Fuller and Narasimhan's (2007) study of Chennai. It "looks at one of the most high-profile sections of the new-rich middle class in urban India: the professional staff in the new information technology (IT) companies".[92] Most of the informants in the study do not indicate any sign of political interest or participation, though as to why, it is unclear. From interpreting the wider literature, their (presumed) political apathy may result from the view that they might hold of politics as the concern of the working class. It could also be because they do not share any of the feelings of alienation that drive unemployed and underemployed men to enter politics. This is because their jobs in the IT sector provide them

[85] Sen, R. 2013. *The Delhi Rape Protests: Observations on Middle Class Activism in India*. Singapore: Institute of South Asian Studies, 3.

[86] Donner, H. 2012. Marriage in Modern India: "The Middle-class Ideal of an Indian Marriage has not Changed". *India at LSE* [online]. Available from World Wide Web: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/indiaatlse/2012/10/01/marriage-in-modern-india-the-middle-class-ideal-of-an-indian-marriage-has-not-changed-henrike-donner/>.

[87] Harriss, J. 2006. Middle-class Activism and the Politics of the Informal Working Class. *Critical Asian Studies*. **38** (4), 461.

[88] Sen, R., above n 85: 1.

[89] Bhattacharya, D. 2013. Two Cheers for the Anti-rape Movement. *IBN Live* [online]. Available from World Wide Web: <http://m.ibnlive.com/blogs/debrajbhattacharya/3422/64190/two-cheers-for-the-antirape-movement.html>.

[90] Sen, R., above n 85: 1.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Fuller, C.J. and Narasimhan, H. 2007. Information Technology Professionals and the New-Rich Middle Class in Chennai (Madras). *Modern Asian Studies*. **41** (1), 122.

financial stability and prestige. Or simply, it may be that they do not have the time nor the energy to participate in politics due to the long working hours associated with the IT sector. This is especially so in the case of call centres, which, in addition to their "long working hours", are distinctive in terms of their "late or nightshift working and long travelling times"[93] that make it difficult for workers to invest time in outside activities, let alone political engagement.

What is particularly interesting is that the youngest informant among the group of IT professionals in the study, "Raghu, an unmarried 22-year-old software engineer",[94] admitted to behaviour of a political nature. However, this behaviour was said to be displayed in the realm of activism rather than politics. Two ideas regarding middle class politics could possibly be extrapolated from the fact that he "does voluntary work for a well-known charity in Chennai that provides counselling for the depressed and suicidal" and that "he strongly disputed the perception that IT professionals are selfish materialists".[95]

The first is that his volunteering conveys that not all of the middle class are politically apathetic. Despite not engaging in explicitly political activity, his choice of being an activist can be considered a form of political behaviour, since the upper middle class, through activism, "specializes in the production of ideologies and articulates the ruling bloc with the rest of society".[96] The second is that there may be different levels of interest in political engagement between generations of the middle class, as Raghu, the youngest informant among those surveyed, displayed a political orientation. If the informants are in any way representative or indicative of middle class behaviour and if we consider the profiles of those who protested against corruption and the rape case, it may then be possible to view the youth of the middle class as distinct from the rest of the middle classes, in that they show a greater tendency to question and engage with the state.

6. Conclusion

In the last two years, India has witnessed what has been described as the 'political awakening' of its youth. The increasing concern over national issues among youth has translated powerfully into political action as thousands of young people had taken to the streets in 2011 to protest against corruption and in 2012 to protest against rape. Despite the encouraging signs of female participation and demand for policy change in both these movements, youth politics in India remains dominated, for the most part, by men and by questions of identity.

With young men gravitating towards politics by appeals to identity instead of policy, behaviour becomes salient within, and highly indicative of, youth politics. The behaviour of youth men, characterised by "mischief, irreverence, a certain emphasis on manliness" and "bravado",[97] not only infuses into their politics, but also determines it. As a result, the display of masculinity, the resort to protests and other forms of assertion such as intimidation and extortion, and a shift in focus away from any ideology that would detract from the activity

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[93] Taylor, P., D'Cruz, P., Noronha, E. and Scholarios, D. The Experience of Work in India's Domestic Call Centre Industry. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*. **24** (2), 441.
[94] Fuller, C.J. and Narasimhan, H., above n 92: 132.
[95] Ibid, 133.
[96] Harriss, J., above n 87: 461.
[97] Ruud, A.E. 2012. *Timepass* and Politics. *Dialogues in Human Geography*. **2** (1), 98.

and informality of youth politics, are its defining characteristics. The implications of this "protest lifestyle"[98] include the tendency for political performance to drift into violence. The fact that unemployed young men in particular often gravitate towards violent politics, such as riots, intimidation or even armed conflict, is not a mere coincidence - violence in India, outside the realm of politics, is resorted to by gangs of unemployed and disenchanted or disgruntled young men.

The middle classes of India that have been the subject of much optimism and excitement among those seeking to target this rapidly expanding and therefore increasingly important consumer market, rarely feature in the literature on youth politics. It is the poorer sections of the middle class that instead, appear to be at the forefront. However, both a peek into the IT sector and an examination of India's recent developments regarding public engagement, over issues such as rape and corruption, will reveal that middle class youth who do not experience unemployment, alienation and a loss of male superiority (as young women are now involved too) are, in fact, starting to establish political presence in ways that are, interestingly, quite similar to most other political youth in India who face these problems. As rapid social and economic changes affect what it means to be young in India, the politics of youth will not only claim greater attention in their everyday lives, but will begin to leave its own distinctive mark on the political culture of the state.

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[98]   Rogers, S. 2012. Timepass: Youth, Class and the Politics of Waiting in India. *Journal of Occupational Science*. **19** (4), 376.

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