



Globalisation and Youth Unrest

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation and youth unrest are two social phenomenons that are very different from each other in many ways. Yet they are related to each other. In this study we are going to trace that link of similarity between the two phenomenons. We will get to know how globalisation as a broader process has influenced and impacted the dynamics of student movements or youth unrest. We will also venture through the different phases of globalisation along with the youth activism in those phases.

Keywords: globalisation; student activism; youth unrest; phenomenon; frustration

1. INTRODUCTION

The youth are considered as the most active members of any society and one of the most powerful assets that any nation-state could have. They are the future representatives of their society. Generally, the term “youth” is used to refer to the students who are either acquiring higher education or/and have reached a certain age from which they are granted basic rights as part of becoming an adult member of the society. One of the most important such rights includes the universal adult franchise, which gives them the authority to be a part of the democratic process of their state. With the acquisition of such rights and responsibilities, they also start to become more aware of the socio-economic, political and cultural scenarios within their societies. This encourages them to be a more active part of the larger social by influencing decision making and raising demands for various causes. When they observe loopholes and cleavages in the social, economic and political systems, they become enraged and frustrated with the larger social. Thus, “youth unrest” refers to the manifestation of the collective frustration of the youth. Although youth unrest has existed as a phenomenon for long, its significance within the world has increased to a greater extent since the 20th century due to the increased establishment of democratic principles and norms all over the world. In fact, democracy has fueled and empowered the youth to express their unrest more. It has existed as a worldwide phenomenon.

Observing the changing nature of youth unrest in the 20th century, Gareth Stedman Jones quoted: “From Berlin to Peking, from Tokyo to New York, in Paris and in Prague, the rise of these movements has altered the nature of politics. Students have erupted in the world of politics with a suddenness no one could have foretold”.

2. IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION ON YOUTH UNREST

“Globalisation” is the process of increasing interconnectedness and/or interdependence of various societies, economies and nation-states through various means (such as with the developing forms of communication, transportation and technology). Globalisation has been going on since ancient times and has developed as a process for thousands of years. But contemporary social and economic theorists consistently argue that during the 20th century, particularly more so from the late 1980s, this process has accelerated and expanded to become a more global phenomenon. While this process has a much longer history and distinctive nature than youth unrest, both the phenomenons are interestingly connected with each other. The scope of student movements or student activism has only widened through globalisation. The 20th century was also the period when almost all the countries under imperial rule of colonial states like Britain, France, Soviet Union, Portugal, etc attained independence. Until their independence, the youth of these nations mostly had a sole cause for all their movements: freedom.

After achieving independence from colonial domination, most of these nations began to aspire for an improved state of affairs. Apart from the other economic provisions and advantages, there was an increased consensus among the newly formed democracies to provide education. Now education was meant to be provided not just to the upper sections of the society, but to secure education for the youth on an unequal basis. For instance, around two decades after attaining independence, the south Asian countries (India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, etc.) a big majority of their populations were less than 30 years of age. Additional attempts to meet the expectations and demands of this young section of people were initiated which included tackling unemployment among the educated youth. A general dissatisfaction accompanied by a growing awareness not only of the irrelevance of the educational curriculum, but also of the inequities of the existing social order are apparent in the spurt of unrest in colleges and universities and among the youth in general, during the 1970s. They have reacted not only to university problems but also against the persisting social imbalances rife in their societies.

Taking different cases from different continents, there are multiple factors and causes of the youth unrest. From Cuba in 1958 to Czechoslovakia and France in 1968, the youth have played huge role in criticising, influencing and sometimes even bringing down the governments. In England, the London School of Economics was the scene of confrontation between radicals and the authorities. Student strikes accompanied by an ‘anti-university’ stance marked the happenings at various cities of Italy. In America, the anti-Vietnam and civil rights issues brought about the confrontation between the authorities and the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society). In Bangladesh, the students played a key role in its liberation movement joining hands with Mukti Bahini.

A key feature of the youth unrest which has remained common in most countries that their movements were well-organized in how the student unions and associations carried them. Also, in countries with diverse populations, India being one of the finest examples, equal access and secular provisions to education have aided in the formation and consolidation of these movements. Such provisions have led to heterogeneity among the student masses which has also contributed to the growing unrest among the youth.

While youth unrest in any country has a positive charge, for it indicates an active young population organising movements for their causes, the nature of youth unrest has a negative side to it as well. The very social, economic and/or political factors that push them to organise their protest in a legitimate or lawful manner can also lead them to seek unlawful solutions, which creates further problems in the society. As globalisation vanishes the different borders and barricades of movement of goods, services and humans of different parts of the world, it unintentionally grants power to the movement of unscrupulous elements as well. For instance, two thirds of young people say they want to leave the region, and a growing number do migrate, mostly to Russia or Kazakhstan. Illegal migrants are easy targets for human trafficking, forced drug-smuggling and prostitution, deadly work accidents, racist harassment, extortion and kidnapping.

The wave of globalisation after 1989 (fall of the Berlin Wall) has generated more inequalities and increased the gap between the rich and the poor. One of the less highlighted problems to the developing economies was the fall of many essential small-scale industries in these nations due to intense competition from outside, such as those in India. This increased unemployment and eventually dissatisfaction and frustration in the youth who got unemployed from these industries. The intense competition that globalisation created for the small-scale industries left them with only two choices: either adapt to these changes rapidly or to shut down. This new wave of globalisation has only pushed the populations of educated and unemployed youth more into the cities to find answers to poverty and unemployment. Thus, it boosted the process of urbanisation with more people migrating to cities in search of jobs.

While this certainly boosted the growth of many cities, especially metropolises, it created further problems for the youth. This rural urban migration increased the competition in the job market at the same time. Basic educational qualifications and job requirements increased. Higher education started becoming a mandatory requirement in the job market. But the problem was that the maximum limit of the students in higher educational institutes couldn't be increased in proportion with increasing number of applicants. In fact, the difference between these two variables substantially increased to the worse for the students. In addition to all of that, the issue of reservation of seats of educational institutes and government jobs further worsened the situation. The politicisation of youth issues aggravates their frustration rather than providing solutions. It is quite noteworthy that as societies pass through different phases of globalisation, the politicisation of youth unrest increases in a dynamic manner. For instance, as we move into the politics of India in 21st century, the concept of vote bank politics is inculcated into the youth unrest. Students with different interests and socio-economic backgrounds, that were earlier organising movements together, begin to get fragmented in their approaches as political factions sponsor these movements according to the vested interests of their respective political party.

The advent of the Internet Revolution and the technology boom has boosted the globalisation process but has also brought dynamic changes in youth activism and youth unrest. The Internet has provided a liberal platform for people to connect with each other anytime anywhere by removing the barrier of a common geographical location. This has enhanced and speeded the process of communication among the students. Now they can organise their movements even in the comfort of their homes and raise their issues on a public platform. It has become easier for students to initiate their movements. Moreover, with the development of social media platforms, the students can extend the outreach of their movement to a global level. Some of the student movements which achieved success with the use of the Internet and social media platforms include feminist movements, LGBTQ+ rights movement, Black Lives Matter movement, campaigns against climate change (environmental movements), etc. But due to the existence of regulatory bodies and state control of the social media platforms and the Internet has limited the scope of this success for some obvious and necessary reasons.

3. CONCLUSION

In this article, we were able to trace how globalisation impacted youth unrest. We closely observed the developments of youth unrest in the 20th century, and within various countries, and how with the development of globalisation as a process, the nature of these movements changed. We also observed the different causes of these movements and how globalisation as a variable influenced these movements. Not only the underdeveloped economies but the developed economies such as France, US and Britain have also witnessed student movements challenging the governments and their policies for the country. The Internet Revolution has outrightly expanded the scope of these movements but with its own limitations. The youth unrest of the 21st century has suffered due to politicisation of these issues especially in developing nations.

4. REFERENCES

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