

## **Student Politics in India: Issues and Challenges**

### *A CSDS-KAS Dialogue with Student Leaders*

#### **A brief report**

A Dialogue on *Student Politics in India: Issues and Challenges* was jointly organized by Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) with student leaders from some of the most prominent Universities in India on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2017 held at the CSDS Seminar Hall, Delhi.

It was a rare occasion to have had all newly elected Student leaders from some of the most prominent Universities of India belonging to different student party lines and ideologies at the same platform to discuss and deliberate on issues of concern that matters most to student politics today in Indian Universities.

Amongst those present were the **General Secretary** of Delhi University Student Union, Mahamedha Nagar from **ABVP**, **Member** of Rajasthan University **NSUI** Bhanupriya Singh, the **President** of the Hyderabad Central University Student Union Sreerag Parayil from **Alliance for Social Justice**, the **Vice President** of Rajasthan University Student Union Mahima Choudhary from **NSUI**, the **President** of Aligarh Muslim University Student Union, Faizul Hasan, the **President** of Gauhati University Student Union Manash Pratim Duarah from **AASU**, the **President** of Delhi University Student Union Rocky Tuseed from **NSUI**, the **President** of, Allahabad University Student Union, Awanish Kumar Yadav from **Samajwadi Chhatra Sabha**, **Presidential contestant** for the Panjab University Student Union, Avinash Pandey from **ABVP**, the **General Secretary**, Hyderabad Central University Student Union Arif Ahammed from **SFI**, the **Joint Secretary** of Jawaharlal Nehru University Student Union Shubhanshu Singh from **DSF**, a **Senate member** from Kerala University student Union Anvarsha A. from **AISF**, Rangnath Ravi from Jamia Milia University from **ABVP**, an **independent student leader** from Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology, Hisar Adarsh Shukla and **State President** of **INSO** Haryana, Pradeep Deswal.



It was a day long deliberation between the student leaders and the faculty and researchers from CSDS as well as other students and audience present for the dialogue.

The programme begun with an introduction of the Dialogue by **Prof. Sanjay Kumar, Director of CSDS** and an opening remark by **Mr. Peter Rimmele, Resident Representative to KAS Office India.**

**The broader objectives of the dialogue were:**

1. To observe the impact of national or state politics on the student union elections.
2. To identify the issues raised during the election campaign by the student parties
3. To understand the role of gender in student politics
4. To examine the role of caste in student union elections
5. To discuss the challenges faced by elected student bodies while running the union
6. To overview the recommendation laid by Lyngdoh committee

The dialogue was conducted under **five panels** chaired by Prof. Aditya Nigam, Dr. Hilal Ahmed, Prof. Abhay Kumar Dubey, Dr. Awadhendra Sharan and Dr. Prathama Banerjee

- a. Student Politics and Imagination of Politics in Contemporary India
- b. Student as a category: Do party, candidate, caste, religion and gender matter in university elections?
- c. Political Parties and Student Politics: Ideologies, Practicalities and Leadership
- d. Lyngdoh Committee Report: Effectiveness in Student Union Elections
- e. Students' Fight for Democracy: Curbs on Student Activism in Universities



**Important points that emerged from the dialogue can be very briefly marked as follows:**

- Issues of concern raised among the student leaders included the prevalence of discrimination in the University space in general towards students belonging to certain less privileged background in the line of caste or backward tribe. The same discrimination is also seen with regard to access to the Student Union body. If there is '*Jatibad*' in societies, the same is seen in the University as well. The challenge is how to make the Universities more inclusive.
- Women student leaders have also pointed out the huge difference between boys and girls in terms of accessibility to opportunities. To them the University space has not been able to break the prevalent unequal position of women in society, rather the dominant cultural conditioning of women continues even in the University. But the young women student leaders have shown a very positive determination to take the challenge.
- The student leaders also felt the need for intervention of all stakeholders towards some curb in the rapid privatization of education as privatization kills the very spirit of activism in the University thus leaving the students with no power to have any say in matters of their welfare.
- Student parties which are linked to a parent political party are very much influenced by the ideology of the parent party. Some of the leaders also admitted to the fact that student politics is actually dominated by the broad politics of the region and the psychic of the common masses. At times there could be also pressure from the top on Union leaders.
- Student Union in many ways is a platform for the young leaders for future political leadership or a preparing ground for future parliamentarians. There was a total consensus on the importance of Student Union in Universities and the need to conduct elections to elect student bodies as a must.

- The Lyngdoh Committee Report was widely debated by the student leaders. While not discarding it totally, few recommendation for the betterment of the clauses in the report came up including the need to revise it periodically, a need for clearer understanding of the clauses in the University departments, change in the provision where student leaders can contest more than once, Campaign time should not be the same for all the Universities, rather it should be decided in accordance with the size of the University.
- The dialogue ended with proposals from few that Student leaders from across parties and region should unite to fight for Student Rights.