

STUDENT UNIONS: CORNERSTONE OF SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Outline:-

1) Introduction

Thesis statement: Student Unions are not just a representative body of students rather they are evidences of alive nations. Student body can advocate for change in a socio-political stumble for fostering progressive policies.

2) Background of Student Unions endeavours.

3) How Student Unions cornerstones of change?

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4) Student body raising voices across the world against barbarianism.

i) Example of Pro-Palestine Protest in different parts of the world.

5) Advocate for social change

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ii) Advocating for Justice. The example of infamous and alleged Punjab college Rape case

iii) Protest in India carried out by medical students in "Kolkata Rape case"

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J.W. Aldrich famously said by Barak Obama,

Obama, '66 A change is brought about because ordinary people do extraordinary things? Sometimes, it is more word play, sometimes extra ordinary people that can do miraculous things are under the garb of ordinary people just like students. A nation's intelligent acumen can be measured through the student's activism and how well read they are in social and political matters. In any nation, students or youth are harbinger of hope for the future and they can lead a party for better tomorrow in socio-political upheaval. Student unions are not just a representative body of students rather they are evidences of an alive nation. Student body can advocate for change in a socio-political stumble for fostering progressive policies. However, sometimes flag bearers of better future face adverse retaliation from people in power and that can damage the fabric of the society.

Student union is not a new concept in a nation or a country. Youth and students have been participating in political atmosphere since quite a long time. Erstwhile, student body was mostly on campuses but now with digital age, they have gained momentum on social media and internet. In Pakistan, the history of student union

is short lived but effective. Since the inception of Pakistan, this country has faced severe challenges and one of the major challenges was student activism on the government's policies. Initially, it was seen in 1950's "Language Movement" lead by student protesters of Bangladesh. Their demands were for making Bangla an official language for that is lingua franca along side Urdu in Pakistan. It was their demand so that they could use Bangla officially in government papers. Ergo, they recorded their protest and eventually got succeeded. However, sometimes these young students can also be mobilise by hate mongers of the country on basis of misinformation. Similarly, it happened in 1971, when East Pakistan separated from West Pakistan because of students who initiated protests in Dhaka. But as in mere example of change, it can be taken in Pakistan, a major event of change that altered the history of the power.

Since the inception of altercation of history between East and West Pakistan, now known as Bangladesh and Pakistan, respectively, it is evident that student unions are cornerstones of change. However, historians can deem these changes good or bad but whatever one says, a change is a change. Recent incident in Pakistan's long lost brother, Bangladesh

Supports the phrase of cornerstone of change. In July, 2024, student unions protested against the unfair policy of the government on quota system. Government reinstated a 30% quota for descendants of Freedom Fighters, reversing the government decision in 2018 in Bangladesh quota reform movement. Students felt this decision to be discriminatory, leaving them with less opportunities on merit. So because of this thought, students carried out protests university by university. Furthermore, the government acted out undemocratically, turning peaceful student protest into full blown violence for many days. But the protest still came out as cornerstone of change when brave students remained steadfast on their decision to amend the new reform. Hence, due to immense pressure and violence, the longtime ruler of Sheikh Hasina was overthrown by students. Through this event, the world got to know the immense power of young students who are fully aware of their rights and power to change decision. This is why they are called cornerstone of change. Similarly, just like Bangladesh protests led by students, young students in different parts of the world are carrying out protests

against Israel's human rights violation in Palestine. Not only they are demanding for ceasefire but they are also questioning ~~the~~ their leaders. Protests have been seen in America carried out by young students. They are not just protesting against Israel or their own government, they are protesting against their own university to fulfill ~~the~~ their demands. Protestors have protested on the campus to build pressure on university to cut ties any link with Israel. They also demanded for divestment if they have done. Eventually, universities were not giving into these demands but as the pressure built up, they agreed to their demands. Examples are: Brown University, Northwestern University and Evergreen State College etc have agreed on a part as told by Al-Jazeera. In this demonstration, students stood against a cause of genocide and they succeeded in making an awareness for war crimes.

Through the awareness of about war crimes carried out by Israel, student union advocated for social change where society has become so insensitive that they cannot relate to the plight of Palestinians. Similarly student union is a key for social change ~~and~~ and other evils encapsulating the society. ~~A~~ A great power show of youth was ~~the~~ experienced in 2022 in Pakistan after the ouster of

Prime Minister Imran Khan, however, that protest changed into violence against state that needs to work for functioning state machinery. As said before, good or bad, that would be decided by experts, but this can't be over ruled that Pakistan has seen huge number of turn out in support of their populist leader.

Recent example from students' protests against alleged rape case in Punjab College, shows that students can come together in demanding justice and probing the case. As stated by social media platforms, an alleged rape case occurred in PGC Lahore and soon after surfacing of this news, the whole social media plunged into covering this news with no authentication. The next day, a large amount of student body protested against their colleague and demanded effective probe into the case. It created a law and order situation in the city that was dispersed through violence by law enforcement agencies. Nevertheless, the protest extended its branches in various cities of Punjab. However, after much hue and cry, the rape case was declared a mere misinformation on social media or a result of chingche whisper. The point to ponder is that in country like Pakistan where student unions are banned

since Zia's era, a huge amount of student body mobilised and demanded justice. Albeit, the protest and their demands resulted nowhere but it showed the potential and awareness of young students about their rights.

This was not the only example of students who demanded justice by carrying out protest. Same thing happened in India in Kolkata Rape case where a female doctor got brutally gang rape inside her hospital, on duty. After surfacing of this news, the students of that college and trainee doctors gathered together to protest against the authorities to provide safe space for working women. Formally, this case was going to be dismissed by authorities but with power show by students, this case got highlighted in local and international media. This indicates that change starts from fresh minds who hope for a better world and safe space.

Students not only protest for justice in the society or political turmoil, they also raise voice against the policies of their institutes towards them. In Rawalpindi Medical College, students started a campaign on social media against the policy of 90% attendance and deduction of marks on basis of attendance. Students protested for this unjust and inhumane policy of

University because their future dependent on the ~~no~~ grades they would get. Therefore, their protests against injustice can also be categorise as freedom of speech.

In Pakistan, student unions face harsh limitations and challenges that can hinder freedom of expression and thought. Since, student activism is ban since 1980s, political parties deem it blessing in disguise that a large body who could challenge their power is now in shackles for many decades and no revival is seen in the near future with increasing impositions on social media and other platforms.

There is a lot of political pressure on student union formation but along that there is financial constraint as well, with this burgeoning economy, it is hard to bear expenses of a student union. However, if all these hurdles are met, there will ~~be~~ always remain a issue of internal conflicts between students because Pakistan has diverse ethnicity with their own own ideologies. So, besides fighting external turmoils, this kind of weak student union will would give upto internal demons.

However, there should be progressive way forward in strengthening student unions in Pakistan. Authorities can allow universities to revive student unions

on campus which make awareness about evils of society and political atmosphere where they can be peaceful in their demands by ~~not~~ avoiding anarchy. Having said that, it is also the responsibility of government that nourish tomorrow generation and allow them free space to address their issues. In this way, the chasm between government and student body can be bridged. It is necessary for Pakistan to make room for upcoming generations.

In conclusion, it is evident from the examples that student union is a cornerstone for change, be it social or institutional. What is more important in frustrated student body is to educate them because education is key building blocks of society that make a society peaceful in many ways.