



It's Time for Student Power in Campuses!

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I received my first lessons in democracy while in school, and these are the ones I'd always remember. My school, Sardar Patel Vidyalaya has always maintained a strong tradition of student democracy. We could elect our class representatives through an election process and in class 11th and 12th we had a chance to be part of the student council, where we could become elected "executives" and help in the student and learn valuable lessons in team work and operations management. Each one of us voted for our class representatives, who in turn decided on the "executives" and the "General Secretary", a parallel of our parliamentary form of government. This system ensured that students voted or stood for elections, and in the entire process learnt to take responsibility irrespective of the role they chose. Elected representatives had to undergo a "leadership training camp", where they were helped by the teachers to be prepared for their role ahead.

When I grew up all of this changed for me. I realized that youth around me thought poorly about the politician clique and political participation was synonymous with murky nexus and politics in general was thought to be disrespectful. If you thought of being politically inclined you have to come from a "political background".

Here's my take: With 70% of India's population being under the age of 40 & young people being present in all spheres of life, there is a need to capitalize on the youthful energy. There is a dire need for youth to get involved in the governance of their nation, city, community, even their campuses! Campus environs provide the right training ground for youth to spend their energy and time productively. Youth must be interested in polity, society and economy of these social units.

Sadly, today, India has an ageing parliament, and the reason is the enormous entry barrier that the young face, mainly because of the mindset of "playing it safe". It shouldn't be so. We need representation, which octogenarian parliamentarians cannot

fulfill. Youth politicians are more connected with the ideologies of the young and have more at stake to improve the prevailing situation than their older counterparts. The young bring about freshness in public policy making since they are abreast of the issues concerning contemporary era. They welcome change. They are independent-minded, powerful and a resource for our country's continued renewal. Their participation is desperately needed to preserve and re-energize our democratic institutions. If youth power is to be defined, it is imperative that young politicians come into mainstream politics to show its true connotation. In history too, the clout of students need not be undermined, in Burkina Faso high-school students helped overthrow a dictatorship and in South Africa, the youth united against apartheid.

There has been another notable trend when we speak of politics and youth: the “political hotbeds” of JNU and DU are dominated by major national parties who often relegate real student issues to bring forth ideological razzmatazz. The average Joe or Jane in universities are more concerned about access to infrastructure, academics, facilities and admission issues, not power play or caste based university politics.

With this thought I have been closely involved in setup and functioning of Liberal Youth Forum or LYF. We at LYF, realized that it all starts with the campus; or rather it should. As young people, we should be the present of this nation, and not just the future.

To be adept at handling national or more complex issues, students must first be active at campus level and improve governance there. This has been the crux of our Campus Pulse Program, which we launched in 2009. With the long term aim of liberal members of Parliament, LYF has made a start in 8 campuses. Our Campus Pulse Project will continue to identify, train and support liberal¹ candidates affiliated

¹ By being liberal we imply that we are committed to the creation of a society based on principles of freedom and tolerance, where all citizens are equal before the law and have the opportunity to pursue their own happiness, where gender, caste, creed, race or region is no barrier to the brotherhood of mankind and the accident of birth is not a barrier to social or economic progress, where nations live in peace and borders do not matter and competition is the fountainhead of choice.

within our network to contest for campus elections in the coming years. This project not only aims to reclaim the political space within campuses for governance but also to spread liberal principles and policies at the campus level. We are actively supported by We are supported by the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit² (FNF) and Atlas Economic Research Foundation³. We closely work with other liberal organizations across India.

So think about it, shouldn't you be part of the process of running your campus? Yes, you may be part of certain committees, but wouldn't it be more effective to get your powers together and have a forum where your grievances and suggestions could reach the management of your college and university? Campus politics is about student power and it is best used when this power is used to work together and for benefit of all stakeholders.

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To know more about Liberal Youth Forum, visit them at www.lyfindia.org

² FNF is a non-profit organisation that promotes liberal democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law and economic freedom. More information can be found at <http://www.fnfasia.org/>

³ US based Atlas Economic Research Foundation supports and works actively with approximately 200 market-oriented think tanks. More information can be found at <http://atlasnetwork.org>