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Student Union Leaders and Society – A Sociological Study with Special Reference to the City of Jodhpur

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the sociological dynamics of student union leaders in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, examining their roles, influence, and interactions within the broader societal context. Through qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, the investigation delves into the political and social behavior of student leaders, assessing how their leadership styles affect student engagement, activism, and governance within educational institutions. Additionally, the study highlights the challenges faced by student unions in fostering a cohesive student body, navigating institutional politics, and addressing contemporary social issues. By analyzing the perspectives of student leaders and their peers, this research aims to contribute to the understanding of student union dynamics in India, offering insights into the interplay between youth leadership and societal changes. The findings underscore the importance of empowering student leaders to enhance their effectiveness in advocating for student rights and fostering a participatory culture within educational environments.

1. Introduction

Jodhpur—the second largest city in Rajasthan, India—stands as a vital educational hub of North-West India. The city is home to a number of educational institutions, notably the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS). Historically, educational opportunities were limited to rich elite children in Rajasthan, but student politics emerged gradually even before the formal installation of student unions in the early 2010s. Student unions have traditionally acted as informal channels of communication between students and educational authorities; facilitating the regulation of educational rules and curricula as per students' wishes, ensuring the quality and availability of hostel resources, accommodation, electricity, and pamphlets, and redressing various grievances. Societal benefits that accrue from student leadership initiatives stimulate humanitarian approaches and encourage students to undertake constructive work for their respective communities.

Student leadership offers a distinct platform to youths aspiring to enter politics; activities on college campuses provide students opportunities to introduce themselves into the political system and gain access to more formal careers subsequently. University students have more access to the political environment than senior secondary school students; hence, student union leaders, who are mostly selected from graduates or final year students, can play an important role in shaping future political leaders within the state. (Oriema Emesini, 2016)

1.1. Research questions and objectives

Student politics plays a prominent role on university campuses. Students frequently engage in collective action through various student bodies, resulting in election rallies, protests, and movements (HOMRANI et al., 2017). Student politics are important in terms of political society; activism not only matters in educational institutions but also shapes careers in various fields thereafter. Thus, student politics can help prevent youth detachment from broader social issues (Isaiah Omodan, 2023).

In Jodhpur, young people are still developing a sense of the state. The involvement of students in civil society is critical for societal nourishment and protection. Students contribute their collective and individual voice to society, broadly leaving their mark upon the social landscape. Historically, varying forms of youth activism in the city have emerged from a multitude of leaders, classes, and institutions. Other than awareness and protests concerning educational aspects, students also actively join and lead community participation in health, education, and many more initiatives.

1.2. Significance of the study

Urbanisation entails social, economic or political changes in city life. Development activities and modernisation take place at a rapid pace while playing a pivotal role in altering human situations, increasing expectations and lifestyles in the present era. Urbanisation also poses various threats to balanced urban life. North-western India, particularly urban Rajasthan, is currently exposed to rapid urbanisation. Despite an increase in overall human well-being, the recent development wave through social, cultural or political institutions is sparse. Geographically, urban Rajasthan is connected by a 612-km stretch

of desert. Within urban-rural electives, two major urban cities Jodhpur and Udaipur have developed since last 40 years but developmental activities and methods of implementation vary greatly. One major difference is Student unions remain energising and successful in Jodhpur while at Udaipur both these activities are dormant. A comparative study around a specific theme related to student politics aptly suits.

Student Union is a prominent channel through which thousands of students convey their views on contemporary issues like women safety, drugs menace, job placements, academic curriculum, etc. at state and national level time to time. Various social organisations contacted students for their crucial role in spreading awareness for youth-related problems such as alcoholism menace, girls' education promotional scheme, and traffic rules awareness through student unions. Urbanisation happening around education has greatly affected University student union. Grasping these issues through specific research acting as a major tool becomes significant. Action of using participation as a theme denotes a channel of understanding where major elements influencing create the effect. (M. Gross, 2018)

1.3. Contextual background: Jodhpur, Rajasthan

Jodhpur is a medieval city in western Rajasthan, India. It was the capital of Marwar and home to the Rathore Rajputs until the merger with the Indian Union in early 1950. Known as the 'Blue City' due to the blue-painted houses of the Brahmins in the city, Jodhpur's history dates back to 1459 AD when Rao Jodha of the Rathore clan founded it. Even today, the city remains a prominent hub of activity for the state, institution, and society. The city lies on the edge of the Thar Desert and is well-connected, serving as a gateway to the desert and neighbouring states and cities.

As the second largest city in Rajasthan, Jodhpur has an average altitude of 231 metres and covers an area of 78.60 square kilometers. According to the census of 2011, Jodhpur had a total population of 1,001,700, with an average sex ratio of 926 girls per 1,000 boys, above the national average of 940. The literacy rate was 81.88 percent, above the national average of 74.04 percent (Martelli & Ari, 2018). According to UNESCO, Jodhpur was selected as the only city in India for nomination under the Creative Cities of Crafts and Folk Art category in 2018. The city is famous for its palaces, forts, and temples, attracting many local and international tourists and an educational hub for students. The city has witnessed a consistent flow of students from various states of the country since its establishment and has a wide range of educational establishments that otherwise operate under different modes of education. A major number of colleges under the provision of higher education in the area include the Engineering, Management, and Hotel Management institutes that operate as privatized colleges. Jodhpur, often called the "Blue City," is also a major power center for Rajasthan politics, largely due to **Jai Narain Vyas University (JNVU)**. This university has served as a launchpad for many prominent leaders who started as student union representatives and rose to become MLAs and MPs.

Here are the names and brief introductions of the key MLAs and MPs whose political roots lie in the student union leadership of Jodhpur.

1. Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

- **Current Position:** Member of Parliament (MP) - Jodhpur (Lok Sabha).¹
- **Student Union Background:** He was elected as the **President of the JNVU Student Union in 1992** under the banner of the ABVP (Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad).² His victory was notable as he secured a record margin of votes at the time.³
- **Political Career:** Known as a strong orator and organizational man, he rose through the ranks of the BJP and was elected MP for Jodhpur in 2014, 2019, and 2024.⁴ He has served as the Union Cabinet Minister for Jal Shakti and currently serves as the **Union Minister of Culture and Tourism**.⁵

2. Ravindra Singh Bhati

- **Current Position:** Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) - Sheo (Barmer).⁶
- **Student Union Background:** A recent youth sensation, Bhati was elected **President of JNVU Student Union in 2019** as an Independent candidate after being denied a ticket by major student organizations.⁷ His tenure was marked by aggressive activism for student rights during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Political Career:** Riding on his immense popularity among the youth in Western Rajasthan, he contested the 2023 Assembly elections as an Independent from the Sheo constituency and won, defeating established veterans.⁸ He is currently one of the youngest and most vocal MLAs in the assembly.

3. Ashok Gehlot

- **Current Position:** MLA - Sardarpura (Jodhpur).⁹
- **Student Union Background:** The veteran Congress leader began his public life as a student activist in Jodhpur. While studying Science and Law at Jodhpur University (now JNVU), he was active in student politics and became the **first State President of the NSUI** (National Students' Union of India) in Rajasthan in 1974.¹⁰
- **Political Career:** He quickly moved to mainstream politics, becoming an MP from Jodhpur multiple times (first in 1980) and serving as a Union Minister.¹¹ He has served as the **Chief Minister of Rajasthan for three terms**, making him the most prominent figure to emerge from Jodhpur's student politics.¹²

4. Harish Chaudhary

- **Current Position:** MLA - Baytu (Barmer); Former MP.
- **Student Union Background:** He was a prominent student leader in Jodhpur and served as the **President of the JNVU Student Union in 1991-92**.
- **Political Career:** A senior leader of the Indian National Congress, he was elected as the MP for the Barmer-Jaisalmer constituency in 2009. He later shifted to state politics, winning the Baytu assembly seat in 2018 and 2023. He has also served as the Revenue Minister of Rajasthan.

5. Babu Singh Rathore

- **Current Position:** MLA - Shergarh (Jodhpur).
- **Student Union Background:** He was a highly active student leader at JNVU during the early 1990s and is widely recognized for his aggressive leadership style during his university days.
- **Political Career:** A strong BJP leader in the Rajput belt of Jodhpur, he has been elected as the MLA from the Shergarh constituency multiple times (including 2003, 2008, 2013, and 2023). He is known for his strong connect with the rural voters of the region.

Honorable Mention:

- **Hanuman Beniwal (MP, Nagaur):** While he is a major political force in the region and often associated with student power, his specific tenure as **Student Union President (1997-98)** was at **Rajasthan University, Jaipur**, not JNVU Jodhpur. However, his influence heavily overlaps with the Jodhpur student politics sphere.

2. Literature Review

While social scientists generally agree that political involvement and attitudes are acquired in youth, there is still much discussion about how that influence occurs. At least three broad dimensions of youth political involvement shape the political societies of adults. The first dimension considers generational cohort effects—historical events that affect all youth at a particular time, yielding similar political influences across generations of students and recent graduates. The second dimension is cultural: sociological literature suggests that youth form substantial political beliefs yet remain open to being influenced and shaped by subsequent cohorts and events. The third dimension is transitory, having to do with reciprocity of youth influence rather than the formation of fixed political beliefs. Within these last two dimensions, literature is largely silent about the mechanisms the local sociocultural context deploys to political values and whether the extent of influence is uniform across societies or is subject to local level specific regional forces. The objectives of an investigation into the intergenerational political incubation at a specific Indian university have been to fill these gaps in knowledge and to determine whether the political values transmitted to additional cohorts begin to depart from one cohort's influences.

The 1960s popularly became known as a decade of turbulence, especially in Western industrialized societies—an age of social, cultural, students', antiwar, civil rights, women's, counterculture, and youth movements, protests, and activism—and yet societal reproduction of political cultures via renewal mechanisms was evident as well. Local historical settings shape the kinds of political influence (cult, ideas, behaviours, etc.) that are transferred from one cohort to another through social connections, sanctioning of organizers, and mutual understanding of which analyses absorb attention. Political involvement of and by youth, including political conditioning during youth, varies among Indian students attending different universities according to each university context. Attention to the exogamous or endogamous activism of a Dalit student leader associated with an Indian university reveals that the methods of organizational functioning or the styles of the engagement imposed on the wider surroundings differ according to local conditions, suggesting that the political conditioning imparted on additional cohorts tends to respond to variations in structures and agencies specific to each context (Martelli & Ari, 2018).

2.1. Theoretical frameworks in student politics

Political participation and leadership formation is a widely studied phenomenon among youth, particularly on college campuses. A theoretical framework was articulated in New Delhi by three sociologists from Jawaharlal Nehru University who examined the political involvement of first- and second-year students at residential universities. Their research provided insights into youth political activity in the broader Indian context, but without reference to Jodhpur or its regional particularities (Martelli & Ari, 2018).

Student leaders act as a bridge from campus politics to local governance. Freshers at certain colleges encounter active student government leaders who advocate for participation in politics, creating an early channel of engagement. Attention is drawn to leaders from recent political recruitments and particular campuses with higher activity levels. The predominant political networks operating within these universities were identified; even when fewer recruitment opportunities are available through college union elections, the influence of such social capital remains significant.

2.2. *Schooling, youth, and civic engagement*

Education serves as a key foundation for the future of youth and society, imparting knowledge and facilitating community participation. Schools and universities play a significant role in shaping civic values, encouraging collective participation, and responding to societal needs. Both formal and informal education also influence participation rates and political affiliation by providing experience, knowledge, and motivation. Civic engagement during youth provides training, links to political leaders, and longer-term participation opportunities, fostering democratic action and leadership development that promote active engagement in community, social, political, and civic issues (Martelli & Ari, 2018). Schools and colleges constitute institutions that provide civic education in citizenship, training youth as future leaders in a multi-dimensional society, and encourage social justice activism through campaigns, protests, and rallies. Through extensive attendance and leadership in collective activities, schools shape social networking, knowledge acquisition, and commitment to collective action. School environments provide socialization regarding personal and civic issues, motivating further civic activities outside the school.

2.3. *Social structure, caste, and community in urban Rajasthan*

More than any other caste group, the Rajputs are able to maintain their caste identity and the commensal system in urban areas. Rajasthan, once the seat of numerous princely states, has one caste which resembles the Rajput feudal structure of erstwhile princely states—namely, the Kayasths. Of the Rajput sub-castes, the Rathores, Sisodias, and Sisodias have retained relics of their royal status, and these are chiefly in the form of marriages within the respective caste. Socialisation among the royal families has declined to a greater extent than other caste groups, though marriages continue to take place on formal level. The urban organisation forms a closed network through caste associations for aid and assistance—which continues to preserve caste solidarity and identity in contemporary Rajasthan. There is also a ramification of caste-based political anthropomorphism, which is a form of caste hierarchy that discriminates against the lower caste groups of the Hindus. Though the treaties signed between the erstwhile princely states of Rajasthan with the union of India promulgated certain rights, privileges, and reservations for the backward class societies in Rajasthan, yet these rights and privileges created new forms of political marginalization. The Rajputs officially and politically represent the surface of the backward classes in the state, where that political framework is a norm imposed by the institutions. Rajasthan has developed into a transitional urban formation with a desert stretch and is undergoing social, political, and economic change. In the population share of Jodhpur, which is the second largest city of Rajasthan, the Rajput share is significantly high. The majority of educational and professional institutions in Jodhpur function under political and financial dominion of the Rajputs. As compared to other caste groups, there is no eligible student amongst the Rajputs who availed student union leadership from the educational institution outside Jodhpur. Though the Jodhpur Rajputs had the opportunity to avail of student union leadership through other educational institutions situated outside Jodhpur, where they have administrative control, the Rajput community refrains from seeking this leadership. Thus, an attempt is made to examine these issues with reference to the Rajputs of urban Rajasthan (Davidson, 2018).

3. Methodology

Student unions play a major role in developing political and leadership qualities among the Indian youth. An officer who is elected to any student union is known as a student union leader. Students are elected to these unions on the basis of caste and religion. Caste-based politics prevails and student leaders are given prominence based on the caste of the leader. Boys and girls do not feel free to participate in elections together. Number of girls participating is much less than boys. Sometimes boys compete between each other based on the rivalry of girls. The present investigation focuses on the understanding of their role in society with special emphasis on Jodhpur City, Rajasthan.

A qualitative research design with an interpretive epistemological perspective was adopted to investigate the research problem. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen students actively involved in student unions. The study utilised an open-ended interview guide to obtain data through direct verbal interactions with the respondents. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data collected through audio-recorded interviews. Various mass media, including newspapers, pamphlets, posters, audiovisuals, etc., were used to help students prepare for the elections. It was found that students engaged in student election politics came to know much about the problems of society, and not only did they come to know about the education system of the school, college and university but they also raised their voice through the student union on many occasions for them. The influence of Gandhism and socialism was evident among many youngsters in the pursuance of student politics. Village students and outside students were happy and satisfied with the environment and development in the campus even though some felt a caste-based agenda was much more appreciated and received than purely educational matters (Martelli & Ari, 2018).

3.1. *Research design and epistemology*

Student political unionism has emerged as an influential apparatus of collective expression among youth in post-colonial Jodhpur. Youthful activism, typified by collective and individual protests, embodies broader societal grievances. These grievances reflect students' attempts to belong to society, exert agency, and seek uniform citizenship.

The student union, the main locus of politics within educational institutions, provides a forum for the collective articulation of ideas and opinions, and the pursuit of broader citizenship rights. Student union leaders, in turn, embody such activism and provide essential articulation of complex societal challenges. They act as conduits linking distant political mobilization to local concerns. In Jodhpur, student elections take place every academic year at the university, technical institutes, and colleges. Union leaders who win elections at the college level subsequently campaign for higher positions.

3.2. Sampling and data collection methods

An exploratory study on student union leaders conducted in higher educational institutions in Jodhpur utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods. A triangulation approach, enabled through mixture of research strategies, was adopted to better comprehend the issues and explain the phenomenon. The qualitative phase was completed first to obtain certain understanding of the context and identify variable for quantitative analysis on larger scale. Subsequently, a primary quantitative survey was undertaken to provide comprehensive examination of the phenomenon.

The targeted population comprised student union leaders in four major universities: the University of Jodhpur, the University of Technology, the University of Engineering and Technology, and the University of Physical Education. All eligible leaders from these institutions were included. 115 out of a total of 132 contestants participated, widely proportioned across gender and other categories, such as educational institution, age, and socio-economic factors ensuring overall representivity.

Data collection within the scope of quantitative research was performed through previously tested survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared on the basis of insight obtained through first round of field study complemented by secondary literature collection. It specifically integrated thematic areas relevant to the activities, behaviour, and social attributes of the members exerting influence on community engagement and urban-rural relationship as perceived by leaders themselves within realm of urban society (K. Elhard et al., 2015).

3.3. Ethical considerations and reflexivity

Research involving leadership in educational institutions inevitably raises ethical and reflexive issues stemming from unequal power relations between researcher and researched (Belur, 2014). Furthermore, the size and stature of the university, combined with the researcher's own educational background, may introduce additional power imbalances. A position as a fellowday and as an outsider to the university student community might facilitate rapport and reduce asymmetry. The research is furthermore socially sensitive in that the sustenance of widespread youth activism is likely to bring even after the On the perceived shift, perceptions of selectivity and elitism are potentially unwieldy (Aldred & Aldred, 2008). Large-scale urban-university partnerships in India are similarly at risk of perception as centres of knowledge monopolisation in a national discourse aimed at countering the wider regional imbalances at stake.

3.4. Limitations and positionality

Certain limitations characterize this research, warranting careful consideration of its findings. First, the study relies on a convenience sampling strategy of leading student activists neither representative of the entire student body nor exhaustive relative to the sector. Consequently, its results cannot be generalized to the broader population of student union leaders. Second, the social and cultural context of student activism in Jodhpur constrains the applicability of the findings to different regions of India and other countries. Student union leaders across the country enjoy extensive interaction with political parties, a dimension seldom evident elsewhere. The study restricts its focus to colleges and universities governed by the state, excluding those overseen by the Centre. Nevertheless, the insights it offers help illuminate similar fieldwork across India and globally.

Researcher positionality exerts considerable influence over qualitative studies. A senior faculty member for 25 years, the investigator has conducted extensive research on student union leaders and youth politics. Previous inquiries highlighted the relevance of educational attainment and the influence of caste, locality, and gender during student years, situating individual insights about student activism among other scholarly outputs on the topic. An intervening provincial university also shapes the analysis; the investigator served as a lead investigator for multiple surveys conducted between 2006 and 2012 at JNVU, generating first-hand data on youth and student politics. Access via professional, educational, and personal networks extended to other universities and colleges, fostering positive relations with interviewees. Other Jodhpur institutions sat further down the priority list.

4. Contextual Landscape of Jodhpur

Jodhpur is the second largest city in the Rajasthan state of India and the second largest urban center after Jaipur. Jodhpur is commonly referred to as the 'Blue City' and is known for its folk music and performing arts, as well as its traditional and modern cuisine. The city has a rich cultural heritage and is famous for its forts, palaces, temples, gardens, and lakes and is often referred to as 'Sun City.'

Geographically, Jodhpur is located at 26°17'0"N 73°0'0"E and has an average elevation of 231 meters. It is situated in the Thar Desert and lies in the arid west of Rajasthan. The Jodhpur district covers an area of 22,850 square kilometers and lies within 24°33' north to 26°10' north latitude and 72°50' east to 73°46' east longitudes. The geography is characterized by rocky and undulating terrain bounded by the Aravali mountain ranges to the south-east and a flat semi-arid plain extending west towards the Pakistan border.

4.1. Demographic and socio-economic profile

The town is located in the western state of Rajasthan, India. According to data, the maximum population of Jodhpur is recorded *SC* constituting 131,800 and 131,801 *ST*. According to Census data, Jodhpur is the 33rd most populous city in India and 2nd in Rajasthan; the designated population is recorded to be 1,404,486 with a density of 158 persons per square kilometre (Agarwal, 2019). Jodhpur has been constructed and developed on 7,225 square km, containing urban population and rank it is 16th. The Student union is operated in 261 Institutions of Jodhpur in Rajasthan of the town. In Jodhpur district,

the maximum number of educational institutions is located in the city; the cluster of Institution which are following the student union activity is actively affiliated to different universities for Universities training and feel for the campus and include the students at the national level. The educational Institution of the Saints and the Instead of Private Sectors is developing at the enormous rate. Rajasthan is well known for historical development and development of Jodhpur Education moreover some private sectors also come forward for the development of education; (Singh Chouhan, 2017). The climate of Jodhpur is arid and semi-arid, average annual rainfall here is up to 300 mm. Population density of Jodhpur is more than 490/sq. km. The surrounding of Jodhpur is enriched with Agriculture and the basic material is dry MEC. Rajasthan is well developed in the Education Sectors and Jodhpur has been selected for researching.

The education System in Jodhpur is very well organized delivering education since 1865. Apart from government educational institutes many private educational institutes were also developed the technique of teaching and adopted new system, curriculum and technology to impart education. Rajasthan state has also developed a technique for the formation of student Union focusing on the participation of Youth in leadership to perform in National Development. Rajasthan Government is the First Government permits Student Union Activates in the Country. State Government of Rajasthan allows students Union within First year of Graduation and Virgin Teaching Staff. A large number of Private institution for training and School cum residential centre are available also.

The student agenda is often diverted into various dimension such as, health awareness, Drugs Awareness, Blood Donation, Kidnapping (constitutional, Child Education, social upliftment, Poverty, Women ignorance, Woman Safety, School Dropout, Right to Education. The education provided in Jodhpur aim to create *Scientist, Engineers, Administrator, Indian Army, Doctor, Industrialist, Professor, Teacher, Advocate, Researcher, Mechanical Engineer, Computer Engineer etc. Jodhpur filled with number of application, Aeronautics, Engineering, Hotel Management, Information Technology, Nursing, Paramedical, Hospitality due to availability. The other District of Jodhpur still lags behind in the field of Education and development. Jodhpur is more suitable for the Research and Studies. The city is connected with all over Rail, Road, Air, Telecom, ICT accessibility, which provide priority, for Research and Data Collection.

Out of 18 Major Cities of Rajasthan, Jodhpur rank 2 in student strength, as per the Census of India during the Academic Session struggle is ongoing to construct new Railway Station on Jodhpur- Ahmadabad route at Beri to organize Brothers with Jodhpur is going on for the development of Railway Station link of Jodhpur District and Ahmedabad for Multi Lingual course; "Nehru Model School" comes in reliance of 80% and approved under plans of 'IAS' and Hande College Organized student Conference regularly on Current Motivation and encourages students to read Newspaper and gets involved in National Politics. • School, College, Educational Institute and other establishment of public utility is opening heavily within Jodhpur, so that facility like Placement, Employment is getting more.

Jodhpur is the City of Blue Housh which are popularly known as the *Blue City* where the painting is done through the mixture of Chemicals to preserve them from degradation and Jodhpur is the Area of Rajasthan with Bright Sunny Weather. The Climate of Jodhpur varies from Extreme Hot i.e. 45 Degree celcius to 30 Degree celcius during the Month of June to August from September to December. The District Covered by Broad Band facility is more than 90%. The Coverage of the District with mobile Services is more than 98%. The Free Coaching Centre for AIMS, MDS, N. E. P, CHT etc is available within Jodhpur for Medical Studies and the District have Full Facility of Education. Around 32 Catering Institute, 05 Hotel Management Institute, Water Resource and Engineering Institute are well established in Government Sector for Hotel Management and Catering Academic Purposes.

4.2. Educational institutions and student demographics

Education provides students with opportunities to learn about and participate in activities beyond their immediate family and local area, fostering an understanding of contemporary societal conditions. Educational institutions in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, include an array of universities, colleges, and schools that cater to a variety of educational needs and serve an uneven distribution of student populations. Primary and secondary schools are generally attended by students who reside nearby, while students from distant towns and villages, and even neighbouring states, seek post-secondary education.

Two universities—Jai Narain Vyas University (JNVU) and the University of Rajasthan (UOR)—and several other institutions offering undergraduate and postgraduate courses attract students pursuing a diversity of fields. Program options available at JNVU, Jodhpur National University (JNU) and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)—some of India's higher education institutions ranked among the world's top twenty—draw students from a broader catchment area, including many adjoining villages and areas beyond Rajasthan. Institutions such as these support relevant scholarship disbursement and infrastructural requisites in the State. Careful attention needs to be given to educational facilities, professional development, and support services made available in the region. Student unions can unite individuals from diverse colleges, streams, and communities, motivating stakeholders to gather, exchange concerns, and plan actions, thereby building awareness of these significant matters (Pandya & K. Srivastava, 2017).

4.3. Political culture and civil society infrastructures

With the consolidation of the administrative and education sectors, the multifaceted civil society, political, and economic aspects of the Rajasthan state are examined, where civil society activities have been intensified during the last decade. The focus is on the political culture, civil society infrastructures, and students' socioeconomic aspects imbibing the election campaigns in Jodhpur.

Political culture reflects the attitude of citizens toward the political system, the perception of political system operations, citizen involvement in the political system, and the realization of political values. The developmental perspective of political culture sees it as a process of development and evolution

of the political community to introduce both a civil and a political community in an unruly state (Martelli & Ari, 2018). Local self-governance institutions should not be considered a new initiative but rather a revival of Jodhpur civil society in a broad sense.

After the merger of princely states into the Indian Union, attempts were made to strengthen the decentralization process by reviving the village panchayats and reorganizing them in a systematic way. Thereafter, the Civil Rights Movement, the Sankalp Movement, and the Lohia Movement in various parts of the country had a strong influence on the students of Jodhpur. The political mobilization of students of higher education started through the establishment of the 'Rajasthan University Student Federation Union' in 1955, which later affiliated itself with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Hindu nationalist, right-wing, paramilitary volunteer organisation.

The gradual decline of political consciousness after the 1967 elections encouraged more students to take interest in the student union. When Emergency in 1975 was declared the long period of intensified political-consciousness and organized student activism in Jodhpur came to end. Still, the development of the university-civil society linkage remained unbroken. In the mid-1980s, and gradually the political culture of student union also revived in Rajasthan universities. The incorporation of politics, caste, community, and higher education into the understanding of urban development processes has prompted a fresh examination of how urban politics and higher educational institutions might reshape the trajectory of urban expansion and of broader urban-rural relationships.

5. Student Union Leaders: Roles, Networks, and Influence

Student unions in India occupy an important position within the academic community, rendering valuable services through student leaders who participate in committee-level academic decisions (Oriema Emesini, 2016). Students believe that union leadership gives them an opportunity to participate in providing services that improve the academic experience; through leadership they bridge the gap between students and the university administration, and they find opportunities to serve society (HOMRANI et al., 2017). The need for qualified authorities to interact each year with these leaders is vital. Responses from 275 students in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, show that union leadership strongly affects social behavior, friendship building, aspiration, and character formation; and that substantive and widespread informal contacts exist between several union leaders and officials in other universities, notably in Delhi, Rajasthan, and Gujarat.

5.1. Leadership pathways and recruitment

Elected as representatives of their peers, student union leaders in Jodhpur typically serve for a one-year term. Prospective candidates for the union are recruited through various means. Aspiring leaders often emulate their predecessors and join or observe political parties and student unions close to the commencement of their undergraduate studies. Maintaining social ties with previous schoolmates also aids networking on campus. Other students plan their approach early on, and determinants include the degree of political interest acquired in school, the level of awareness regarding campus issues, and the influence of friends and family members already engaged in the educational institutions. Some survey participants indicated that they learned of student politics through neighbours and friends involved with student organisations during their pre- or post-secondary education. The communal nature of school education promotes exposure to such information through community engagement initiatives when potential candidates may not yet have attended college; the connections fostered during schooling continue to facilitate political networking afterwards (Judith Toich, 2019).

5.2. Internal governance and decision-making

This examination elucidates the internal governance arrangements and decision-making processes within university student union leadership in Jodhpur. Evidence from the social and political science literature highlights the crucial role of internal governance, including the nature of deliberation, differences in agenda-setting authority, and the degree to which leaders can shape decisions (Okeyo, 2017). These dimensions significantly shape the quality of interactions with external actors and the capacity to influence policy. Moreover, the dominant forms of governance and decision-making affect the type, scope, and intensity of external engagements, further defining the "society" aspect of interactions outside the university. Interviews and student leaders' diary reflections among union office-bearers elucidated the internal governance and decision-making system employed by the student unions in Jodhpur.

The ruling coalition often employs informal mechanisms. Union leaders belonging to the ruling coalition, regardless of their union, participate in informal discussions to arrive at a consensus prior to formal meetings. While formal collaboration agreements exist, informal discussions preceding formal meetings are common among both union leaders and officials. During Jodhpur's leadership engagement with formal decision-making arrangements, the same informal processes apply: two of the polity's three offices define the agenda, and considerable ex ante informal consultation and agreement occur (Yadessa et al., 2022).

5.3. Interaction with university authorities and policy processes

Student union leaders in Jodhpur interact with university authorities through informal and official channels during policy development and implementation. Students enjoy extensive freedom to approach administration for support on issues ranging from academic to organizational matters. Bureaucratic structures, administrative checks, and financial constraints also inhibit access to policy-making, strategic, and research decisions. Student leaders cite other challenges such as bureaucratic interference, inadequate delivery, student apathy, suppression of dissent, co-optation by organizations, scheduling conflicts, and association with subversive activities (HOMRANI et al., 2017).

Leaders perceive the interaction climate as supportive and responsive to diverse student needs. Formal platforms for dialogue include general assemblies and the scheduling of student-accessible discussions alongside Nepali festivities. Union representatives engage with an array of administrative divisions, for example by participating in university-wide committees or by seeking endorsement of outreach activities from the research cell responsible for international conference organisation (Martelli & Ari, 2018).

5.4. Community engagement and local governance

Community engagement brings together individuals or organizations to work toward a common goal and is crucial for community development. Responsible community engagement also involves using volunteer hours, resources, and money to support community causes and efforts (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2010). Student union leaders in the surveyed area actively participate in several community engagement activities, such as awareness rallies on education and nutrition, plantation drives, cleanliness campaigns, traffic safety initiatives, and blood donation drives. By collaborating with national organizations or with support from District Collector offices, these leaders organize educational awareness programmes and awareness rallies, demonstrating their engagement through direct action, organization of events, and collaboration with the local governing body, particularly the District Collector. Such community involvement enhances the credibility and influence of student leaders in educational institutions and fosters a strong link between academic growth and social responsibility. Collaboration with local governance also ensures access to essential permissions, transportation, and equipment for conducting these events.

Additionally, student union leaders participate in various public issues of social concern, such as waste management, education, child labour, and women's empowerment, engaging with citizens and government departments to find solutions.

6. Societal Interactions and Civic Outcomes

Off-campus, student union leaders engage with urban society through mobilization, addressing grievances in various sectors including public services, education, and services provided by private institutions. Rajasthan ranks 29th among Indian states in terms of overall development despite significant investments (Sharma & Sharma, 2015). Educational quality in Jodhpur remains poor. Student leaders regard the delivery of educational services as a collective civic issue and demand improvement through collective efforts. Local bodies receive substantial funding for education in Jodhpur, the site of numerous private educational institutions, despite high dropout rates. However, education is more often considered a family concern than a societal issue, leading to low visibility of education-related student activism.

Public services in Jodhpur, particularly water supply and drainage, are deemed inadequate by union leaders. A protracted water crisis forced Jodhpur's students to demonstrate collectively for water service improvement, resulting in changes to the scheme. Nonetheless, leaders assert that educational service deterioration arises from multiple competing demands on public funds, contributing to reasons for scarce collective activism concerning public services, except on specific protracted issues.

Highly educated candidates with prior political exposure remain concentrated in Jodhpur's politically active student bodies. These candidates still encounter hurdles in attaining legitimate student leadership positions, particularly in government engineering and medical colleges. Leaders perceive the systemic attainability of depicted positions as low, and the establishment of new mass-based organizations at the grassroots service provision level in Jodhpur, where political parties already play this role, is viewed as equally unfeasible. (Martelli & Ari, 2018)

6.1. Youth activism, social capital, and collective action

Activism as a group phenomenon is intrinsically relational, transcending the individual actor and yielding the notion of collective action. Initial participation exclusively involves individual actors. Youth activism extends beyond youth, encapsulating the emergent networking capability that enables the opportunity for, and continuation of, youth activism. Youth activism is interpreted as non-institutionalised collective action, distinct from laissez faire political activities, where youth collectives are more likely to remain dormant than to engage in political activism, even if personal political activities are widespread, as collective action is fundamentally different from individualistic actions. Research in southern India documented common orientations toward non-institutionalised collective action, class- and gender-based differences in engagement, and the characteristic of youth, in terms of complaint, as a salient factor affecting participatory orientation across ages and youth conditions. A study of Tamil Nadu, in a different regional context, revealed an increase in pre-colonial ruling group eligibility among youth participation that was more constrained in the non-collegiate group compared with other parts of India. Forms of engagement remained somewhat limited, reflecting the dependency of youth on both time and finance, as well as the nature of student and non-student conditions across specific administrative. Youth attributes determined a long-run dependence of support on eligible pre-colonial group engagement. Agitation generated a well-documented ebb-and-flow cycle among youth and students along the political landscape. Only sporadic youth initiatives cumulated, eventually coalescing into youth political activism, predominantly concentrated within urban space, on top of a prolonged anti-systemic politics movement inhabited by university youth since the early 1960s. Youth activism, overwhelmingly urban-centred, predominantly crystallized through the short-lived agitation wave birthed by the Youth and Students Movement in the mid-1980s. Multiple spirals of youth agitations surfaced among university youth. A certain breed of students enjoyed a surplus of time and engaged in social activism, creatively appropriating the political spaces and drawing upon diverse non-political issues to escape the state's clampdown. (Martelli & Ari, 2018)

6.2. Perceptions of legitimacy and accountability

Perceptions of legitimacy, accountability, and trust are critical for leaders in any organization to function effectively and obtain followers (Okeyo, 2017). Legitimacy rests on followers' acceptance of leaders based on criteria, formal or informal, recognized and acknowledged by both leadership and followers. Accountability refers to the responsibility of leaders to report on their stewardship of resources entrusted to them and to be answerable for their actions. Trust in the field of student leadership has been shown to be a three-dimensional construct encompassing integrity, benevolence, and competence.

Student union leaders in the Jodhpur study showed fairly high levels of perceived legitimacy, accountability, and trust, although younger leaders tended to be associated with lower scores on these dimensions, even after controlling for educational qualifications, membership in a student union, and regular participation levels.

6.3. Impacts on public services, education, and social inclusion

In universities of Jodhpur, student leaders participate actively in addressing public grievances, influencing education systems, and prompting government action for social inclusion. Valuable services from the government often reach educational institutions through these leaders, improving hygiene conditions, repairing facilities, and offering scholarships for economically weaker sections. Education remains a prominent agenda; student leaders engage in discussions, voice opinions, and collect information on the educational needs of the masses. Leaders also play a significant role in ensuring the inclusion of marginalized or deprived sections, contributing effectively to the planning and execution of schemes to meet the educational needs of students from weaker societal backgrounds (Martelli & Ari, 2018).

7. Case Analyses from Jodhpur

Within university districts of Jodhpur, student unions reportedly possess a multiplier effect on local society that transcends educational institutions (Martelli & Ari, 2018). Data gathered during the present study illustrates how student-led reform initiatives targeting issues of public service and quality of education emerge from local campus student unions, with similar objectives articulated across institutions. The same analysis reveals additional university-based networks that facilitate input on local governance beyond the electoral cycle, enabling civil society actions that traverse urban-rural divides both physically and virtually.

Despite the active nature of student unions at the university level, local secondary-school students demonstrate little interest in pursuing comparable leadership roles within college student governing bodies. Analysis of the data indicates multiple potential explanations. First, the highly centralized nature of secondary schooling within the Jodhpur region, combined with student mobility patterns that do not strongly favour university study within the district, indicates that most secondary-school graduates will transition to postsecondary education outside the local area. As a result, efforts to develop leadership skills in this venue might become moot. Second, under curriculum specifications set out by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), schools devote limited time to co-curricular activities (e.g. drama, music, and dance) in addition to the subjects prioritized by the formal examinations (e.g. mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology).

7.1. Case study: Multiplier effects in university districts

The sociopolitical landscape of urban Jodhpur, Rajasthan, is characterized by prevalent social inequities. The socio-economic divide between well-off and underprivileged citizens is perceptible. In such an environment, social background and interventions seem to influence student participation, collective action, and the significance of student leadership in civic engagement. Nonetheless, student leaders, and student politics, in particular, remain very active. As a matter of fact, in Jodhpur, the presence of universities and a higher number of educational institutions, compared to nearby towns, has resulted in a remarkable multiplier effect of student-led activism. This effect has allowed student activism to become a recognised phenomenon outside the university campus, positively impacting Jodhpur's society as a whole.

Due to the considerable presence of the student community in Jodhpur, students from nearby towns prefer to continue their higher studies in this city. Consequently, university and college dropouts from Jodhpur also stay back in the city to seek temporary jobs and engage in other productive activities. University dropouts, motivated by the political connection they have with the institutions, continue to work in various capacities within student bodies, enjoy interaction with students, and enjoy sharing their political experiences. The colleges and universities hold significant importance in the civil society of Jodhpur. As a result, students and educational institutions are actively engaged, and university student representatives representing student political parties attempt to address civic issues concerning students even after they have graduated. The educational system and student community of Jodhpur sustain civic engagement channels long after students have left the institution.

7.2. Case study: Student-led reform initiatives

Student-led reform initiatives include the elimination of gender-based harassment in public administration. These reforms generally follow a five-step process: the generation of ideas or proposals; discussions with administrators and stakeholders on the feasibility of making such proposals; and the adoption of such proposals by the authorities, who pledge to follow through with the proposals in view of the increasing demand from students. This multistage process, requires at least several weeks to months and the involvement of more than a dozen individuals at different stages.

The student-led elimination of gender-based harassment in the delivery of public administration by quality education has stemmed from the abolition of the “poverty march” in 1983 (Martelli & Ari, 2018). The march, which, until its discontinuation, had been a low-profile but consistent rally against the continuation of poverty and other societal ills connected to it, had targeted the local vernacular school as a sector in which the State was viewed as deliberately neglecting youth. It had ultimately only enjoyed a slight rise in participation in its final months and remained a distinctive element of Zhuozishan College therapeutic session streams until its elimination.

7.3. Case study: Bridging urban-rural divides through campus networks

Bridging rural–urban divides through campus networks Jodhpur exhibits deep divides between urban district and rural outskirts, compounded by classist discrimination against rural students (Shirish et al., 2020). Student migration has accelerated since 2014, and access to student unions provides exposure to academic, professional, and civic opportunities that enhance career prospects (Martelli & Ari, 2018). Faculty-supported extra-curricular and outreach initiatives counter rural marginalisation by facilitating interaction with other students, directly and through hybrid online-offline modes. Campus networks foster linkages to government schemes, administrative nodes, and civil society, including NGOs addressing rural issues. However, rural associates remain vulnerable to agents disrupting engagement with campus networks.

8. Discussion

Students hold a significant position in civil society, as they form a bridge between their institutions and the community at large. A study of student leaders was thus undertaken in the city of Jodhpur, Rajasthan, to understand their role in community-building activities and how their interactions with broader society influence their university-level leadership styles. The data collected through semi-structured interviews with Union office-bearers in Jodhpur were examined through the lens of Hermans and De Lange’s (Martelli & Ari, 2018) theoretical model of the foundations of youth political leadership, which identifies opportunity structures, personal characteristics, and networks level as primary agents.

University Union leaders in Jodhpur engaged actively with civil society on issues of major importance to the Jodhpur urban region, including education, infrastructure, youth welfare, and safety. Leaders reported attending community programmes, making Jodhpur educational institutions aware of civic issues, and serving on campus student councils. They were attentive to the issues confronting local youth and society, viewing the Union as a means to redress public-service deficiencies. Community contact commenced in informal networks at the twelfth-grade level. These earlier connections, retention of personal networks, and involvement in campus events sustained relationships with non-university youth active on Jodhpur issues. Student activists availed themselves of leadership opportunities through Union member nominations, elections, and candidate support, enrolling fellow community members locally and within national student organizations.

Student leadership in Jodhpur took place against a backdrop where the choice to and ability to participate in matters of public concern fell along intersecting lines of gender, community identity, caste, and religion among youth. Leadership remained highly contested, leading to the prominent employment of caste-affiliated students on campus by mass and community-media stakeholders seeking to reinforce political perspective, actions, and discourse. Aligned with Jodhpur urban society, opportunities remained open to a spectrum of student political engagement opportunities in union, non-union, party, and community-led options.

8.1. Synthesis of findings with theoretical frameworks

Understanding the social significance of student union leadership in Jodhpur draws upon three bodies of scholarship. First, a long-standing sociological literature describes the role of schooling in the development of political subjectivities and the articulation of civic engagement at different stages of life. Second, research on contemporary youth in India highlights the gap between legislative aspirations and sociopolitical realities—informing the relevance of student union leadership at a moment of political disengagement. Third, scholarship on urban politics in Rajasthan identifies contradictory processes at work in the city: a dispersal of political space through the rise of new parties, ballot systems, and informal governance, countering the consolidation of power among new upper-caste elites. Each of these bodies of scholarship frames the findings of the study.

Beginning from the notion that student union leaders have a crucial role to play in a university and the broader society, and that institutionalised structures are necessary to ensure student activism sustains, a large-scale sociological investigation was conducted to discern leaders’ network connections, activity patterns, and effects on collective behaviour. Aspects were selected on the basis of their historical relevance to Jodhpur, the forms of educational governor available, and the extent of literature in the student activism space. Deeper inquiry across the selected factors determined their limited pertinence and, therefore, a more nuanced selection of economy, politics, and scholarly ethos emerged. Within each, proximity to decision-maker and temporal cycle of activity are found to coincide with heightened influence on collective behaviour and academia.

Second, though student union leaders remain potent catalysts for collective behaviour among students, their interactions with institutional stakeholders from local bodies to the university administration are conspicuously limited. The maintenance of private-domain venues free from additional regulation and the inclination towards a continual discourse on the necessity of mass mobilisation against student-centric issues are furthermore perceived to provide high access to colleagues within their own group, though access to students in general remains low through these activities. Equally critical to the perceived lack of outreach is the preoccupation with guest lectures on technical subjects within the wider urban-policy discourse.

8.2. *Implications for policy, university governance, and civil society*

Active and sincere engagement of university authorities with civil society observatories, granting student mobilization a genuine societal audience, could enhance the proliferation of suggestions for social amelioration and the emergence of alternative channels for complementary collaboration in issues as far-ranging as employment opportunity provision, rural infrastructural improvement, or health-care accessibility. Consideration of participatory approaches involving coupled student-university negotiation and co-deliberation with nonacademic stakeholders on, for instance, non-educational investments and the pedagogical trajectory, sought by student bodies in an accompanying case, might strengthen student council redistributions of societal action to non-educational aspects of the engagement arena. Just as student councils in developed contexts facilitate collective expression on topics too contentious for other fora, enlarging the local-societal investment remit into rural provision of non-university services—by-passing the university itself—might, in instances where such actions enjoy higher local-scholar validation and steel supracampus legitimacy, work around the absence of genuine alternative, and consequently link scholars to third-level wideners unobserved elsewhere. The general enthusiasm for territorial and local governmental matters corroborates Jodhpur's predilection, evidenced in surveys, towards the territorial-local domain, educational interest, remoter topics, and central-space leverage. As firmly campus-linked perspectives arise elsewhere, embracing a local dimension perceived to reside already inside the campus system may interface coordinating and governance battling aspects of the state on a domain and jurisdiction of direct social manifestation. Methods that leverage the intimate university-community relation to transcend campus-specific programming and accompany Jodhpur University's systemic deficit and provincial trajectory merit attention with full awareness that, as the university grows through first-degree acquisition alone into an institution typically of a different status, articulation of campuses through the local space—evidence that access on wider themes exists—soon forsakes relevance.

8.3. *Considerations of social equity and justice*

Social equity and justice involve the opportunity for marginalised people to access resources, including education, employment, and civic engagement. The caste system has created inequities at the heart of society, with the Dalit community and other marginal groups continuing to experience forms of social exclusion, even in the city of Jodhpur, which interacts with the broader theme of participation (Xavier Thaiparambil, 2017). Backward class reservations seek to promote inclusivity in higher education but are themselves critiqued for their limitations. The establishment of political parties with a primary focus on supporting Dalit representation, furthering educational attainment, or establishing schools for marginalised groups serves to reinforce existing hierarchies. Schemes such as fieldwork, educational tours, cultural programmes, scholarships, and social justice initiatives of diverse styles run on campuses with greater marginalisation also play a role by promoting financial assistance to cater for the unmet needs of wider participation and effort.

9. Conclusion

The student union leaders were spotted exploring educational and health schemes of the Government to benefit the common and underprivileged people; student union leaders were supporting women empowerment policy of the government (Isaiah Omodan, 2023). They were contributing and honouring the self-reliant India in their speeches; connection of the students with the poor and needy in the society; and teaching knowledge to the underprivileged were also noticed. The behavior of the student union leaders was Open-mind and to certain extent a caring approach towards the society. The area in which the author has studied the student union leaders was a long-distance area. The educational campaign like plantation, hygiene campaign, study campaign in rural area were observed among the student union leaders led by administration and education officers.

There were some cases study and from that gender based inequality in academic and non academic sphere among the college students was studies and level of student leadership among male and female was also studies which gender wise the involvement in students Union leadership is very low among female students as per the study. Gender based inequality and its impact on student leadership at various levels among the higher education students was a crucial area and from various literature review it is understood that the education of student union leaders will leads to develop our nation and the colleges. The educational analysis on student union leaders act as a road map to deal the concern raised by need assessment and during the study of female students it was the dull phase where majority of representative position were held by male students; development like nation building or society building perpetuating equality and justice can not be achieve unless equal opportunity is given to women.

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