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**”JNU is not Just Where you go, it’s What you Become”
Everyday Political Socialisation and Left Activism at
Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi**

Jean-Thomas Martelli

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HAL Authorization



King's College London

Jean-Thomas Martelli

having completed the approved programme of study and
satisfied the examiners has this day been admitted to
the King's College London degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science and Political Sociology

PHD AWARDED

1 April 2018

Chairman of Council



Principal and President

Research Degrees Examination Decision Form (PhD)



Please complete within three weeks of the oral examination and email to the Examinations Office, together with both preliminary reports and a joint final report.

Name of Candidate: Jean-Thomas Martelli

Names of Examiners: Nicolas Jaoul, Andrew Wyatt

1. The examiners report that they have examined the thesis submitted by the candidate and have conducted an oral examination:

Date of oral examination:

Was the supervisor present: YES NO

2. The examiners further report that they have satisfied themselves that the thesis:
Please tick relevant boxes

a) is genuinely the work of the candidate	X	g) includes discussion of those findings and how they advance the study	X
b) forms a distinct contribution to knowledge of the subject	X	h) demonstrates a deep and synoptic understanding of the field of study, objectivity and the capacity for judgment in complex situations and autonomous work in that field	X
c) affords evidence of originality: 1) by the discovery of new facts <i>and/or</i> 2) by the exercise of independent critical power	X	i) is satisfactory as regards literary presentation	X
d) is an integrated whole and presents a coherent argument	X	j) includes a full bibliography and references	X
e) gives critical assessment of the relevant literature	X	k) demonstrates research skills relevant to the thesis	X
f) describes the method of research and its findings	x	l) is of a standard to merit publication in whole, in part or in a revised form	X

3. Following the oral examination, the examiners have agreed the following result:
Please tick one box only

1)	Pass: The candidate has satisfied the examiners in the examination for the degree of PhD	
2)	Pass, subject to minor amendments: To satisfy the examiners in the examination for the degree of PhD, the candidate is required to make specified minor amendments within three months	X
3)	Pass, subject to major amendments: To satisfy the examiners in the examination for the degree of PhD, the candidate is required to make specified major amendments within six months	
4)	Not a pass, however: The candidate is permitted to re-enter the examination for the PhD degree and to re-present the thesis in a revised form within eighteen months (A further oral examination is at the discretion of the examiners) A further oral examination is <input type="checkbox"/> required <input type="checkbox"/> not required <input type="checkbox"/> not yet decided	
5)	Pass, subject to one month's amendments: Only to be used if the candidate has not satisfied minor or major amendments or after the re-presentation of the thesis	

6)	Not a pass, however: The candidate is permitted to re-enter the oral examination (on the same thesis) no later than (A period not exceeding eighteen months)	
7)	Failed PhD, however: The candidate has satisfied the criteria for the award of a related lower degree (if available)	
8)	Failed PhD, however: The candidate is permitted to enter the examination for a related lower degree and to re-present the thesis in a revised form within eighteen months (if available)	
9)	Fail: The candidate has not satisfied the criteria	

4. Preliminary Reports

4.1 Both examiners should complete the independent preliminary reports template prior to the oral examination

4.2 **Please note:** The candidate **will** be provided with a copy of both the preliminary reports

5. Final Joint Report

5.1 The final joint report should give the grounds on which your decision is based, and should include the candidate's name; thesis title; the names of each of the examiners; and the date.

5.2 **Please note:** The candidate **will** be provided with a copy of this report.

5.3 Please also refer to supplementary Graduate School Prize form.

6. Minor Amendments (within 1 or 3 months) or Major Amendments (within 6 months)

6.1 Minor amendments may be checked by either or both examiners, or the supervisor. Major amendments may be checked by either or both examiners. Please indicate the person(s) responsible for checking the amendments:

The supervisor.

(Please note: if no one is indicated, this will default to the examiners for checking)

6.2 **Please note:** The official start date of the corrections will be once the research degrees team emails them to the candidate following ratification

7 Corrections

7.1 If the candidate is required to make corrections to the thesis, please ensure that the person responsible for checking the corrections confirms the final decision by email/in writing to the Examinations Office. (researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk)

<p>Examiners' Names:</p> <p>Andrew Wyatt Date 13/10/2017</p> <p>Nicolas Jaoul, Date 13/10/2017</p>

Please return this form within three weeks of the oral examination, together with the joint report, preliminary reports, and list of amendments (if applicable) to: researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk

Joint Examiners Report

Candidate Name:	Jean-Thomas Martelli
Thesis title:	“JNU is not Just Where you go, it’s What you Become” Everyday Political Socialisation and Left Activism at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi
1st Examiner Name	Dr Nicolas Jaoul
2nd Examiner Name	Dr Andrew Wyatt
Date:	22/09/2017

Comments:

On the basis of the preliminary reports and close reading of the thesis the candidate was asked the following questions, to which he supplied well informed and often extended answers.

1. What motivated you to carry out this work?
2. What do you consider to be your contribution to the literature?
3. How would you locate the activity on campus in relation to the wider history of the Left in India?
4. Can you say more about the intellectual contribution to Marxist historiography of the history faculty on campus? They are relatively under-discussed.
5. How did you enter the field? How did you conduct your ethnography?
6. How did you collect the pamphlets contained in the database?
7. Can you explain the coding of the searches? Some key words, such as gender and merit, appear to be missing?
8. How would you apply the work of Jacques Rancière, who talks of dis-identification from sociological categories, which he describes as a step towards political subjectivation and emancipation. It might bring new theoretical insights and perspectives on the ethnography of declassing.
9. What precisely do you mean when you refer to the ‘body public’?
10. How, if at all, can you justify the assimilation of regional, caste identities to kinship?
11. What might be revealed from comparing the student activism on the JNU campus with the same on the Delhi University campus?
12. What are the ethical implications of the research? To what extent could the published findings be used in the ongoing campaign to discredit JNU by the present government?
13. What steps have been taken to anonymise the respondents, especially where details of their office holding have been given in the text?
14. Regarding the ABVP on the campus. Were there attempts to assert the Hindu right’s aggressive ideology on the campus? Did political violence occur on campus between the ABVP and the communists?
15. Dalit ideologues usually articulate a severe critique of the left as brahminical, while the left accuse the Dalit movement of being petty bourgeois in its leadership and aspirations. Does JNU represent a space for discussion and negotiations between both?
16. To what extent do the political sympathies of activists survive graduation and do they continue to participate in networks that originate from their student days?

These questions were discussed over the course of a two-hour viva held at King’s College on the afternoon of 22 September 2017.

Having read the thesis and asked the above questions and clarifications we were concluded the candidate had achieved almost all of the criteria for awarding a PhD outlined in the King’s College regulations (section 11). More precisely we judged:

Joint Examiners Report

- a) The candidate gave a clear and authoritative oral account of his own work (both the written work and the data collection)
- (b) the thesis offers a contribution to knowledge in terms of its empirical content and the entry into debate with existing literature on youth and student politics
- (c) the argument was coherent as written with well-defined chapters and summary of the overall argument in the concluding chapter.
- (d) the current literature on youth politics was well summarised and subject to critique, the methods were justified at length (including use of mixed methods), and the candidate showed how the case studied was unusual in preserving a culture of deliberation over time. The examiners' judged that the treatment of a key concept 'declassing' needed a little more work and theorisation. The oral discussion highlighted the complex ethical issues raised by ethnographic work and the candidates' sensitive treatment of confidential information. The scale of the data was impressive for a relatively short immersion in the field.
- (e) The thesis was well written and nearly free of spelling mistakes. It was a pleasure to read. A few tables needed minor adjustments.
- (f) The word limit was observed.
- (g) the bibliography was extensive and most of the referencing was of a very high standard. A few Harvard references needed page numbers to be added.;
- (h) the candidate made very good use of ethnographic methods
- (i) the thesis could generate a number of articles and be converted into a monograph quite easily.
- (j) the ethical issues of anonymity and consent raised by participant observations were clearly understood and had been discussed at length with the advisers.

Both examiners agreed that the written work was generally of a high standard and merited the award of a PhD. There were a few minor amendments required which we judged to be able to be completed with three months in line with regulation 14.3.

The list of corrections is attached, and it has been passed to the candidate also.

Our formal recommendation is for the award of a PhD subject to the completion of minor amendments, to be completed within three months.

Signed: Andrew Wyatt, 7 October 2017

Signed: Nicolas Jaoul, 13 October 2017

List of Corrections

Candidate Name:	Jean-Thomas Martelli
1st Examiner Name:	Andrew Wyatt
2nd Examiner Name:	Nicolas Jaoul
Date:	22 September 2017

Corrections:

The candidate needs to add a more thorough theoretical discussion on the important issue of declassing. This extension to the discussion in chapter four could (if the candidate finds it useful) draw on the work of Jacques Rancière, which is connected to political subjectivation and emancipation, and might bring new theoretical insights and perspectives on the ethnography of declassing.

The arithmetic in Table 5.1 needs correction so that the occupation of former JNUSI office bearers totals 100%.

The phrase kinship needs to be used with more precision. The candidate should re-examine and modify the use of this term throughout the thesis.

The spelling mistakes identified on the hard copy returned by the external examiner should be corrected. These can be found on pages: 29, 36, 42, 67 (x3), 68, 72, 74 (x3), 80, 86, 90, 92, 96, 98, 121, and 173.

There are some references where it would be useful to have the page number(s). These can be found on pages: 33, 34, 40, 42, 63, and 91.

A few errors in the bibliography should be corrected. These were identified on the hard copy returned by the external examiner.

The titles for Tables 4.1 and 4.2 should be re-worded for clarity.

The candidate should edit some of the biographical details of one or two respondents to strengthen their anonymity.

Preliminary Examiners Report

Candidate Name:	Jean Thomas Martelli
Thesis title:	“JNU is not just where you go, it’s what you become”
Examiner Name	Nicolas Jaoul
Date:	15 September 2017

Comments:

The study deals with the reproduction of political culture on a traditionally Marxist campus, JNU, which is the most prestigious university of social sciences in India. It analyses the political life on the campus in order to scrutinize from below “how students transmit, negotiate and actualise the left heritage rooted in JNU” p16. The study provides a much needed contribution to one of India’s democratic strongholds, which is of decisive importance for the intellectual formation and reproduction of the cadre of leftist organizations. The study successfully takes into account both the intellectual debates and the rivalries between different student organizations. The ethnographic description of the cynicism of recruitment techniques of new students by older activists provides a vivid and realistic picture of the pragmatism involved in campus politics, inspite of its highly idealistic outlook. The work also provides a fine description and analysis on the delicate question of Gandhi’s discrete and ambiguous influence on the Indian left, by discussing more specifically the Gandhian pattern of the bodily performances of declassing, which is the main focus of the dissertation and which makes its originality.

Besides offering an extremely well informed and fine synthesis on the history of the campus’ politics and intellectual life, the study provides an ethnographic approach from below. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods makes the dissertation original in its methodological eclectism. It combines a lively ethnographic observation, including well chosen sketches of campus life and revealing situations, with a sociological survey of more than 1200 respondents, and a statistical text analysis of nearly 75 000 pamphlets dating from the period 1973 to 2015. The most interesting outcome of the pamphlets’ study is to highlight the different political cultures, between Marxist organizations of the established communist parties whose vocabulary reveals a “Marxism of reason” (the defense of student interests and of measures of political economy) and the AISA whose emotional vocabulary reveals a “Marxism of the heart” emotionally inclined towards the most underprivileged sections of the Indian people.

Challenging effectively the tendency of the studies of Indian student politics to portray campuses as a mere reflection of Indian social and political life, the author effectively shows the ability of student organizations to part from the conflicting guidelines of their “parent” organizations, and their ability to unite and make alliances in order to preserve the unity of the campus.

Besides documenting two brands of Indian communism (the traditional CPI and CPIM and the formerly underground CPIML), the focus on the more marginal actors of the campus’ political life, like the Dalits’ anticaste movement, the Queer movement, and the Hindu Nationalists, who are in minority on the campus, highlight the different manners of tackling Marxist hegemony and seeking to influence its agenda.

The author convincingly concludes on the need to study more systematically the campuses’ politics in India, which indeed could help reveal many other particularities of the JNU phenomena. In particular the comparison with the Delhi University campus, another prestigious place for humanities, seems quite promising.

Suggestions from the examiner

- 1) The dissertation represents a major contribution to the understanding of the dynamics and diversity of the Indian left. In terms of methodology, it provides a welcome combination of intellectual history,

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with a grounded ethnographic study of an intellectual stronghold of the left. Valorizing this contribution would however require to provide a section on the state of the art of the historiography of the left in India, which is missing at present in the dissertation order to highlight fully its contribution.

- 2) Regarding the intellectual history of the campus, one is struck by the absence of the subaltern studies collective in JNU, and more particularly at the Centre for Historical Studies, described as “avant garde for Marxist historiography” p21. Although the subaltern studies are the most recognized Indian contribution to Marxian historiographical debates worldwide, why are they seemingly absent from JNU?
- 3) One would like to know more regarding this pamphlet collection, which must obviously have represented a huge task. It would be interesting to know more about the process of collection of pamphlets. Was it participatory in nature? Beyond its’ positive outcome in terms of scientific study of political culture, one wonders how this attempt was received by the activists. Was it seen as a positive contribution towards the creation of a campus archive?? Has it led to other academic or political uses and forms of appropriation? Is it still being updated?
- 4) The notion of “declassing” is usually referred to as downward social trajectory in sociology. However, it is used by the author in its indigenous version, as a form of voluntary “disidentification” from one’s middle class background in order to identify with the underprivileged. There needs to be a more thorough theoretical discussion on this important issue. Firstly, the different uses and sociological definitions of declassing need to be more discussed in reference to existing scientific literature, which do not seem to provide a satisfactory framework for the prevalent notion of declassing on the campus. The contribution of Jacques Rancière’s notion of disidentification from sociological categories, which he describes as a step towards political subjectivation and emancipation, might bring new theoretical insights and perspectives on the ethnography of declassing.
- 5) The concept of “body public” (P155 & note 133 p155) is not clear for a reader who is not familiar with this concept.
- 6) Use of kinship for regional or caste affinities, not convincing. Regional and caste identities are broad identifications that do not necessary imply actual kinship.
- 7) The work provides a fine understanding of the evolution from the domination of SFI/AISF towards the rise of the AISA, whose affiliated party is the former Naxalite party, the cpi-ML. However, very little is said on the Delhi Student’s Union (DSU), which supports unofficially the banned maoist party. I would suggest to read the unpublished Sciences Po MPhil dissertation of Naïke Dequesnes, who made a comparative sociological study of both the AISA and DSU and came up with very interesting sociological evidence regarding the more elitist backgrounds of the more radical DSU in comparison with the AISA activists.
- 8) The way political organisations maintain their influence through teacher- activists is a fascinating finding, which contributes to the understanding of the informal networks of campus politics. However, the ethnographic observations regarding preferential treatments of activists by same organisation supervisors could be sensitive if published? This leads to a question on the ethics of the researcher. To what extent could these informations, once made public, become an argument against JNU, which is facing a lot of adversity by the present government?
- 9) The analysis of the ABVP’s presence on the campus is one of the most surprising findings. The author found that the campus’ left culture impacted even these Hindu nationalists, who have even been seen campaigning against Modi in one particular event. However, one would require a bit more explanations on how such a contrast with the main organizational body is possible. In order to

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highlight this contrast, one should also be able to have a bit more ideological contextualization of the ABVP's ideological stands outside JNU. It would be interesting to know more about the history of the implantation of the ABVP on the campus. Were there attempts to assert the Hindu right's aggressive ideology on the campus? Were there any event of political violence on the campus with the communists?

- 10) I also noted a few problematic formulations regarding Dalit politics. At some point in chapter 7, the Dalit movement is equated to "caste empowerment". However, this is only one aspect of the Dalit ideology, which also has a more emancipatory and revolutionary perspective, ie the annihilation of caste. Ambedkar is at some point characterized as a "reformist", which also downplays the revolutionary side of Ambedkar, who rejected the reform of Hinduism as futile and pointless as far as his aim of annihilation of caste is concerned. I also had the impression that the author overstated Dalit sympathies with the left. Dalit ideologues, among whom students tend to be the more radical, actually uphold a severe critique of the left as brahminical, while the left accuse the Dalit movement of being petty bourgeois in its leadership and aspirations. Does JNU represent a space for discussion and negotiations between both, as it is shown for other ideologies? This could be argued more thoroughly, especially by describing the debates generated by the suicide of a Dalit student from Hyderabad, Rohit Verma.
- 11) Another question that comes to mind concerns the broader influence of JNU on former students. How does the fact of having studied there impact the political sensibilities of former students on the longer run? Does it create left sympathies and networks in the civil services that many join? Do former JNUites continue to maintain relations with left organizations, etc ?

Corrections required

Table 5.1: occupation of former JNUSI office bearers. total amounts to 126%.

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Thesis title:	“JNU is not Just Where you go, it’s What you Become” Everyday Political Socialisation and Left Activism at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi
Examiner Name	Andrew Wyatt
Date:	12/11/2017

Comments:

Chapter 1

The chapter opens with a lucid summary of the project and the intellectual objectives of the study. The style of current activism and personal political trajectories is set out clearly. Some interesting issues of dissonance are flagged: the regional clustering of student activists, the hierarchy among students and the often privileged background of the student body. Appropriate methods are explained in detail. The candidate concludes the chapter by introducing the institution and the fieldwork site very thoroughly.

Questions: how do fulltime activists fit in with the student body (p.15)? What epistemic community is the research question to be answered within? (p.18)

Chapter 2

This chapter reviews the existing literature on student activism in India and offers a wide ranging account that pre-dates 1947. The current literature on youth in India is also reviewed. On the basis of this literature and some additional empirical material four approaches to understanding youth politics are profiled: resistance, deviance, inheritance, and the impressionable years. Various omissions in these approaches are detailed and then an alternative approach which sees youth as a shifting cultural category. The candidate offers a threefold categorisation of youth politics: small grouping (can a better term be used?), social youth politics (of mediation) and individual youth politics (fixers). Some upcoming issues are discussed (such as the role of ‘seniors’ and the possibility that the campus might be an autonomous space. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Bourdieu’s work and the suggestion that youth are moving from one habitus to another. Overall this chapter is very good but the quality of the referencing is not as good in chapter 1. A lot of quotations are not linked back to their location in the original text and this is not consistent (so Bourdieu is properly referenced but not other authors).

Questions: to what extent can any campus be an autonomous space? Is the claim to favour interpretive work fulfilled in the search for causal factors determining political socialisation? Is the definition of politics as performative representation of the social world (pp.28-9) sufficient? Is the jump from JNU to the Indian university justifiable? (p.50)

Chapter 3

This chapter gives an account of key phases in the history of student politics. After the foundation of the JNUSU the candidate notes that student politics became institutionalised. The emergency is noted as a key period of internal struggle and decision. The long dominance of the SFI/CPM is discussed and its demise explained. The account of the ABVP is welcome in the light of recent developments and the telling observation is made that even this rightist union was pulled away from its organisational roots in the Sangh Parivar. The conclusion follows up the discussion in chapter 1 on the significance of JNU as a site of political action, an “object of desire” for parties seeking new leaders and influence in Delhi.

Questions: to what extent is student activism influenced by full time workers deputed to JNU by the parent political organisations? Did the students protests the US invasion of Vietnam in 1977 or at an earlier date? What do the negative readings in figure 3.1 mean? Especially for Nandigram between 1994 and 2005? On what basis are the clusters of search terms listed on p.73 generated? Why is merit not mentioned with regard to reservation issues? And patriarchy for gender issues? Why are the 2016 protests mentioned on p. 79?

Chapter 4

The gap between the high status of many JNU activists and the subaltern objects of leftist emancipatory politics are discussed in this chapter. The practice of ‘declassing’ is explored using a full range of ethnographic techniques.

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In spite of such renunciation the candidate argues that economic capital is traded for symbolic capital as activists seek to demonstrate their ideological purity. Figure 4.2 shows activists are more male, Muslim, atheist, from the south and the children of farmers than the non-affiliated students. The sacrifices and ethical tensions involved in declassing are well profiled in the ethnographic data (including the choice of post-student career). Not all activists, especially those from lower status backgrounds find this self-sacrifice, a justifiable activity. In the conclusion to the chapter it is made clear that Gandhi is a model for political asceticism but this is not commonly acknowledged.

Questions: What is the difference between tables 4.1 and 4.2? Why is Chandu relevant to declassing?

Chapter 5

This chapter discusses the relationships between senior students and freshers. Various devices to build relations, including appeals to co-ethnics, are used to do this. An important paragraph on p.116 notes that some students self-select and follow the influence of their home party (e.g. CPM in Kerala) or emulate previous entrants who have already entered JNU. There are a number of points in this chapter where the candidate is making causal claims (pp.122 and p.124). The process of student mediation is described in great detail, some cross-referencing with relevant authors (mentioned earlier in the thesis) could take place here. The chapter demonstrates the nexus between students and faculty (many of whom were once students on campus themselves). The conduits linking party and campus organisation are identified. The conclusion could make slightly stronger references to theoretical insights developed earlier. There are probably interesting complementarities between this chapter and the work of Sneha Krishnan.

Questions: can more be said about the social-friendship aspect of activism which binds followers to the core leadership or fellow activists? The content of this chapter raises the question of the extent to which the respondents have been anonymised or have given consent for their comments to be reported. See in particular the conversation on page 124.

Chapter 6

This chapter documents in great detail the use of pamphlets in the period 1994 to 2014. An extremely wide range of sources have been collated, scanned and analysed. The candidate presents well justified argument that the SPI advocated a more prosaic and parochial form of politics when contrasted with the AISF. The chapter also reports on the propaganda of other organisations including Dalit and anti-reservation associations. I am some sceptical that there is no other work on pamphleteering in India. There is an informative section on the convergence of left activism and atheism. Overall a very good sense of the rhetorical forms used by student activists is presented.

Questions

To what extent is social media replacing or supplementing the hard copy pamphlets?

In figure 6.2 the output of the caste based groups seemed to be on a equivalent scale to the dominant groups on campus. Can this be clarified?

I would like to hear more from the candidate about the reception of the leaflets. Are they read regularly? And how do the readers respond?

Also, is there a cross readership for this literature or does the writing remain confined to existing followers of the movements?

Chapter 7

This chapter provides an ethnographic insight into the process of electioneering at JNU. This is supplemented by quantitative data on 'panel' voting to show how party or organisation structures voting. We get insights into some aspect of performative politics and the social aspect of politics. The latter part of the chapter shows how other political mobilisation and activism occur with a discussion of queer, caste and dalit politics.

Questions: Are the elections held under SMSF rules? How does a candidate get nominated by their organisation? Was the respondent on p.161 talking of the record? I.e. has their anonymity been preserved?

Chapter 8

This chapter draws the argument together and makes a good case for the originality and contribution of the thesis. In the general discussion of student politics I would flag the protests by Tamil students after the end of the Sri Lankan war in 2009 that forced established politicians to look again at the issue.

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Questions: what is the character of left ideology expressed by students at JNU? In what sense does it go beyond being 'against' oppression? Is there a sense in which it expresses a new left ideology? Also, to what extent does JNU lead other universities through the 'export' of PhD graduates as post-docs and junior faculty.

Minor points

There are some (not many) errors in spelling, grammar and referencing. These can be found on pages: 29, 36, 42, 67 (x3), 68, 72, 74 (x3), 80, 86, 90, 92, 96, 98, 121, and 173.

There are a few references where it would be useful to have the page number(s). These can be found on pages: 33, 34, 40, 42, 63, 91

p.91 I was not clear what the connection between the Reddy name and the Brahman status was.

p.173 Periyar was not exactly the founder of the Dravidian movement, though certainly he was a seminal figure and icon of the movement. The movement can be discerned in renewed interest in Dravidian culture and the formation of the Justice Party that preceded his break with Gandhi.

In general

I would like to hear more from the candidate of personal stories of political socialisation. What is the chronology of political socialisation? Within the first term, or the first year? We need to hear more about the new sources of political knowledge that freshers encounter and the influential intellectual figures that offer alternative interpretations of the political work. What role does 'disconfirming evidence' (Babb) play in shaping the views of youth? Also, to what extent is the performativity part of fashioning a new self? As has been discussed with regard to AAP in Roy (2014).

The thesis is very well written and persuasively argued. The secondary research is excellent with many sources profiled in the text. There is a good balance of work discussed, both area studies and the wider theoretical literature. The ethnography is impressive and the written data collated is significant. This is a strong thesis, with obvious originality, and I do not expect the student to have to make many corrections (if any).

References

Sneha Krishnan's work is listed here: <https://www.sjc.ox.ac.uk/discover/people/dr-sneha-krishnan/>

S. Roy (2014), 'Being the Change: The Aam Aadmi Party and the Politics of the Extraordinary in Indian Democracy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49/15. pp. 45-54

“JNU is not Just Where you go, it’s What you Become”
Everyday Political Socialisation and Left Activism at
Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi

Jean-Thomas Martelli
King’s India Institute, King’s College London

1240006

Supervisors:

Christophe Jaffrelot & Louise Tillin

Abstract

This thesis focuses on everyday contemporary campus politics in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. My central argument is that institutional territories of new social and ideological experimentation, such as this elite and predominantly social sciences and humanities campus, create the conditions for the *reproduction* of alternative political cultures, pertaining to the historical formation of such institutions. Current scholarship tends to discuss political choices of educated Indian youth in a context of caste, class, community and gender cleavages, as a result of parental upbringing or as a creative interpretation of phenomena such as liberalisation. The original contribution to knowledge of this work is to show that specific campus-based cultures need to be considered as distinct factors of politicisation, in particular when they are the training ground for under-represented political traditions. Through engaging critically with one's social standings in light of contending left ideologies, young people in the JNU campus exhibit political activities and preferences that gradually distinguish them both from other youth and older generations. Consequently, features of political life are not only influenced by biographical components, but are renegotiated in light of selective political socialisation, carried on by one generation of activist to the next. Exposure to the Marxist-dominated activist culture of JNU fosters student politicisation and contributes to the widening of a political divide between conformist and heretic youth. The study is based on sixteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in JNU premises. Results obtained are complemented by a textual analysis of pamphlet discourses written by student organisations and a survey of political attitudes on campus. These contribute to the debates on student politics and the political participation of the educated youth in India.

Acknowledgments

These five years of academic gestation sit at a particular juncture in life: they are both about learning and growing up, and I found myself stitching together eclectic life fragments to the scholarly blazon. This marathon journey stands on the shoulders of wonderful personal encounters, at the crossroads of humbling new landscapes; for that reason, fieldwork was as much an initiatory quest as a structured data collection exercise.

In preparing the manuscript itself, I have benefitted immensely from the intellectual guidance and criticism of my supervisors Christophe Jaffrelot and Louise Tillin as well as the companionship, assistance, support, inspiration and advices from Aardra Surendran, Anqi Liu, Anna Ruddock, Arshima Dost, Barbara Weilenmann, Baris Ari, Caroline Fortunato, Chandrika Acharya, Chloé Leclère, Floriane Zaslavsky, Guillaume Loret, Hanui Choi, Johanna Felter, Julien Allio, Khaliq Parkar, Laurence Gautier, Lola Guyot, Mathilde Gal, Neil Wilcock, the ‘Ottawa and Wrocław cohorts’, Raphaëlle Khan, the ‘Safdarjung gang’, Sandrine Brachotte, Shafi Rahman, Smitana Saikia, Tamara Al Saadi and Xavier Houdoy.

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List of Abbreviations

ABVP: *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad* (All Indian Student Council), student wing of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS)

AISA: All India Students Association, student wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)

AISF: All India Students Federation, student wing of the Communist Party of India

BSP: *Bahujan Samaj Party* (Party of the People in Majority)

CPI: Communist Party of India

CPI(M): Communist Party of India (Marxist)

CPI(ML): Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)

CPI(Maoist): Communist Party of India (Maoist)

DSF: Democratic Students' Federation, associated with Left Collective

DSU: Democratic Students' Union, supporter of the Communist Party of India (Maoist)

EC: Election Commission (for Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union elections)

GSCASH: Gender Sensitisation Committee Against Sexual Harassment

JNUSU: Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union

JNUTA: Jawaharlal Nehru University Teachers' Association

NSUI: National Students' Union of India, student wing of the Indian National Congress

MP: Member of Parliament

RSS: *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (National Volunteer Corps)

SFI: Students' Federation of India, student wing of the Communist Party of India Marxist CPI(M)

SIS: School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

SL or SLLCS: School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

SSS: School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University

UDSF: United Dalit Students' Forum, sympathizer of the *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP)

VC: Vice-Chancellor

1 Introduction

In early 2016, I returned once again to Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, where I spent one more night with activist Azad in his in-campus student hall room. His recent release from jail after facing charges of sedition had catapulted him from serving as president of the Students' Union of the university to a figure of national importance. That night Azad unveiled his sense of alienation from broader Indian politics by showing us his forearm; "I am an anti-national, this is what the media have written on my skin." The statement made a direct reference to the figure of the Indian "angry young man" (Kazmi 1998) and the character of Vijay in Bollywood's classic *Deewar*. In the film, the hero experiences social denigration symbolised by his humiliating tattoo that says: my father is a thief (*mera baap chor hai*). If Azad moved his forearm towards me, pointing at his skin as the repository of his commitment, it was because at this precise moment he was embodying the politics of youth activism he had gradually embraced after joining the university (interview 2014, 2015). This feeling, heightened by the experience of incarceration, suggests that sustained political participation at JNU is a profoundly transformative experience that changes its participants at their deepest level. This doctoral work tries to understand how the incubation of alternative political experiments such as Azad's are sustained from one cohort to the next in an elite campus in India's capital.

This intense moment of exceptional character, epitomised by the bail of Azad and the mobilisation it triggered, caused many to forget that behind this momentum, daily instances of activism can be found at this site of higher education. While addressing the historical specificity of this academic institution, the scrutiny of *in situ* activist practices provide insight into the role of universities in Indian politics. This thesis will analyse everyday contemporary campus politics in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. While several survey studies argue that the political choices of Indian youth can hardly be distinguished from those of their parents (De Souza 2009; Kumar 2014), the thesis suggests that sections of the educated youth, set apart from the spheres of family and work, exhibit political understandings that differ significantly from other sections of the youth and older generation. The central claim of this thesis is that institutional territories of new social and ideological experimentation, such as a residential and predominantly social sciences and humanities campus, create the conditions for the *reproduction* of alternative political cultures pertaining to the historical formation of such institutions. The current scholarship tends to discuss political choices of educated youth in the context of caste, class, community and gender cleavages, as a result of parental upbringings or as a creative interpretation of broader phenomena such as liberalisation (Dyson 2008; Lukose 2009). Complementing these views, the work argues that specific campus-based cultures also need to be considered as distinct political phenomena. Through asserting the centrality of inter-cohort socialisation in the transmission of political orientations and practices, I make sense of why contemporary JNU campus politics sustains entrenched forms of public participation which appear as a continuation of left activism in the past four decades – even amidst an ever-changing ideological environment in India. Students' pre-JNU socio-political

backgrounds alone are not decisive in the forging of political attitudes; what actually matters is the interpretation of these in the light of an encompassing left-dominated campus culture.

This dissertation contributes to an emerging assessment of youthful dissent in India. The field of youth politics is of tremendous importance, as cohorts below 30 years old represent India's historic demographic transition into uncertain job-markets (Jeffrey 2010). In the context of post-1990s liberalisation, growing cohorts of graduates aspire for a middle-class lifestyle and new consumer practices (Lukose 2009), which depend on their ability to secure a skilled job in the service sector. As the government fails to generate adequate employment, these "dispirited" youth stand on the cusp of older forms of identity politics, caste and gender inequalities (Dyson 2008). There is an urgent need to understand how campuses become spaces of protest while an increasing number of young people are being drawn into formal education. The main question to be explored is whether Indian youth will emulate traditional authority structures or challenge the socio-cultural fabric.

The thesis argues that young people from various social extractions in the JNU campus exhibit political activities and preferences that gradually distinguish them from other age groups and students from other universities, qualifying them as a politicised cohort. Consequently, features of political life are not only influenced by biographical components, but they are renegotiated in light of selective political socialisation, carried on from one generation of activists to the next. Exposure to the Marxist-dominated activist culture of JNU fosters student politicisation and contributes to the widening of a political divide between a conformist and heretic youth.

The work focuses on JNU politics not as an isolated countercultural phenomenon, but embeds it in the larger context of youth politics in India. It examines the legacy of various streams of the Indian left – and several communist organisations – by examining their attempts to claim representation and recruit new batches of committed individuals. The doctoral contribution also assesses the consequences of daily politics on the professional careers of former JNU activists. For instance, I show how the display of a radical selflessness, labelled by left activists as "declassing," helps them to not only speak in the name of the deprived but also leads to their refusal of administrative and corporate jobs. While not only being an example of "declassing," but also an illustration of the personal trajectories of JNU activists, the reluctance to embrace the civil service vocation led many activists to embrace academic careers, which in turn facilitated the transmission of their ideas to younger generations of students.

Some commentators consider the JNU environment as the palladium of the right to dissent (*The New York Times*, 22 February 2016), while others perceive it as a nest for anti-national ideology, promoting iconoclast discourses against "mother India" (*The Economic Times*, 12 February 2016). Whether seen as intellectual freedom or intellectual outrage, JNU student politics has established itself as an epitome of Indian anti-establishment radicalism. Drawing on the data collected during my fieldwork, the thesis confirms that the campus has been successful in cultivating a distinctive ethos, demonstrating its ability to transform the political views of its residents. As an alumnus of JNU phrased it, "the greatest contribution of this campus lies in

injecting a leftist outlook in its pupils” (Alumni Association of JNU, 2008). As an external onlooker, encounters with the larger-than-life posters of Marx, Bhagat Singh,¹ a cosmology of left-wing heroes seemed to validate the common understanding of JNU as a countercultural space. Nested in a vast forested area inhabited by parading peacocks, blossoming bougainvillea, protected birds and approachable nilghau antelopes, JNU is often referred to as a privileged space, an “island, sanctuary, bastion,” or to put it in more academic terms, an educational safe-space (Dumont 2012) or a safe-territory (Bosi 2013) sheltering “endangered” forms of Marxist politics.² As both a place of study and place of residence, JNU exhibits homogenising patterns in which “members appear to have so much in common” (Goffman 1961).

The creation and further funding for JNU are part of a larger historic bias towards expenditure on Indian higher education rather than primary education (Tilak 2004). Jawaharlal Nehru University assumed the same Nehruvian premises as the then All India Institute of Medical Science, the Indian Institutes of Technology and the Indian Statistical Institute (Batabyal 2015), and therefore subsidises the cost of education to make it affordable to every class. Concretely, this means that life within the premise of JNU includes affordable but compulsory mess bills (canteen fees) for residents, near-free hostels (in-campus residence halls), and a wide range of services i.e. barber, vegetable shop, restaurants, spectacles shop, IT centre. However, the thesis contextualises the widely-accepted notion of JNU uniqueness by showing that taking JNU as a field of study in isolation to its broader environment has important limitations. In various chapters, I shed light on the multifaceted continuum between the campus and wider Indian society. This includes brokerage practices of JNU activists, the legacy of the Indian left culture on protest repertoires, the mirroring of larger national debates, and the carnival-like nature of student elections – the latter bearing commonalities with campaigning scenes observed at general elections elsewhere in North India (Banerjee 2015).

I locate my study with reference to broader literature on student politics, the sociology of protests, political participation, youth studies and everyday politics in India. More specifically, I engage primarily with post-liberalisation ethnographic accounts on the youth in South Asia (Jeffrey 2010; Lukose 2009). These studies stress the flexible and contingent agency of educated youth without approaching agency from the point of view of adulthood – they concentrate instead on the multiform reactions to stimuli that the youth receive from the larger environment. In this thesis, the youth attending university are not studied in a trajectory towards adulthood but as a self-perceived notion in constant evolution, as a cultural category and not a psychological stage in human development. I also understand the youth as actors engaging with values and norms

¹ Bhagat Singh (1907-1931) was a young freedom fighter who advocated a violent line during the Indian independence movement. Many discourses and pamphlets acknowledge him as an icon for youth of devotional political commitment (Tripathi and Singh 2007).

² The share of votes won by the various left and communist parties at the last parliamentary elections (2014) reached an all-time low. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) gathered 3.25 percent of the votes, Communist Party of India 0.78 percent and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation 0.18 percent. Historical and ideological differences between the two parties are introduced in Chapter 3.

surrounding them, such as friendship, marriage, professional and academic performance, etc. In the case of JNU, this means that the youth grapple with ideological notions such as Marxism, but also engage with their own identity as young people shaped by class, caste and gender identities. I am careful not to give stylised depictions of age roles that look at youth behaviours as a result of biological factors. I engage with caution with approaches that propose a totalising, sometimes *a priori* perceptions of youth selves – be it considering them revolutionaries in the making (Lave et al. 1992) or inherently deviant sections of society (Cohen and Young 1981).

This dissertation does not assert the distinctiveness of the highly educated youth as compared with less educated ones but relies on the results of several survey studies showing that further education has a positive impact on political interests (CSDS data,³ see De Souza 2009 and Kumar 2014).⁴ However, when looking at the concrete political involvement of the youth (e.g. voting, election-related activities, protests), CSDS data shows that higher education in urban India makes the youth less inclined to political participation when compared to their rural counterparts. Similarly, college-educated young women participate less than non-literate young women and the upper class records the lowest level of electoral participation overall (Sampat and Mishra 2014).

In contrast to these results, certain distinctive educational and urban territories such as JNU – which are conducive to political assertiveness – do not follow the general trend and involve students from various social milieus, including from the elite (though in somewhat smaller proportions). CSDS survey figures corroborate in part historical accounts of activism, which tend to present student participation as highly nationalist in ideology in pre-independence times (1905-1947) but more depoliticised in following periods (Hazary 1987), with the notable exception of the student movement in Bihar in 1974-75 (cf. Chapter 3). Conversely, studies on student movements in various western and non-western countries, particularly since the 1960s, acknowledge the leading role taken by elite universities in the social sciences (cf. examples in Chapter 2). By looking at the way JNU students become involved in politics, I demonstrate that this university does not contradict the global picture, and questions the all-encompassing portrayal of India.

At the theoretical level, I conceptualise the campus as a political field, consisting – in a Bourdieusian sense – of positions occupied by social agents within specific boundaries, in which they mobilise capital (economic, cultural, symbolic) and develop interests as well as normative beliefs (Bourdieu 1998 [1996]:40-41). The study accepts the idea that the campus field involves a hierarchy between agents, with an intricate nexus of student activists competing with rivals with the support of sections of the teaching body and the administration. In this thesis, I describe how activism is structured by the requirements set by student organisations, and by the influence of activist-professors, current and former political leaders, and influential non-affiliated individuals.

³ I.e. Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, a research institute based in Delhi.

⁴ Levels of political interests – which are different from political activism – are based on a survey question that asks respondents about their degree of interest in politics (Sampat and Mishra 2014).

Like in other “modern societies,” an effective division of social and professional labour is observable (Durkheim 1964 [1893]). Activist personnel are composed of candidates, union leaders, party councillors, de facto cadres, active militants, sympathisers, friends and members. The field of politics on campus territorialises a democratic game valorising both social and symbolic capital – oratory skills, networks of sympathisers, shared cultural experiences, the prestige of past actions and causes taken up. It should not be forgotten that the political field of a campus can also generate forms of in-campus *culture légitime*⁵ (legitimate culture) in which terms of political debates are set around certain ideas (e.g. social redistribution, liberal, nationalist, religious values etc.) and certain practices, thus reinforcing the group ethos and its *esprit de corps* (sense of belonging), understood as group solidarity, or more precisely the “reflex complicity of well-orchestrated unconsciousness” (Bourdieu 1989:84).

Overall, this study finds that JNU student activism cuts across community and, to some extent, regional boundaries – even though regional origins often drive students to join specific organisations. The majority of politically committed individuals are from Northern India but an active minority from southern states are also politically active. I reported the distribution of regional profiles of politicised students in Figures 5-1 and 5-2 (p.116). Regional roots are an indication of the type of political organisation one is likely to join. Three quarters of the student organisation All India Students Association activists are from the Hindi Belt and its surrounding states, and one in three of the Students’ Federation of India are from the state of Kerala at the south end of the country. The historical regional roots of political parties and their student organisations explain why certain political groups attract different geographical profiles. Such a feature of JNU activism is mainly due to the fact that political friendships and interactions between activists and common students are easier when activists and potential recruits share the same language and a common set experiences in a specific city or district. An additional factor favouring the regional tropism of each organisation is that previous knowledge and connections of students (largely via the family) can lead them to join the organisation that is the most established in their home state.

The diversity of activist backgrounds is used as supplementary evidence to illustrate the pervasiveness of the process of political socialisation on campus, which appears capable of integrating a variety of socio-economic profiles into its fold. Indeed, a large number of ‘jnuites’ are concerned with the phenomenon of politicisation at JNU. More than seventy percent (70.5) of JNU students participate in political activities organised on campus at least ‘now and then’ and almost a quarter (23.1 percent) indicate being formally part of a student organisation (Martelli and Ari, in press).

⁵ The process of inculcation by students of a legitimate culture is concomitant to the acquisition of scholastically recognised knowledge, according to Bourdieu (1984 [1979]:23). He readily associates political radicalism and campus enclosure, suggesting that Stalinist and Maoist commitments might be attempts to “rejoin the social world” (Bourdieu 2004:9).

Participation in JNU politics is not exclusive to dominant groups, and most minority communities are represented in proportions similar to the wider JNU student population. This is reported in Figure 4-1 and 4-2 (pp.88-89). In terms of membership among various castes, communities and religions, a striking diversity can be found. This result is mirrored by the data on attendance of political events at JNU; it appears that apart from officially designated Scheduled Tribe status communities (often referred as *Adivasi*), the minorities at JNU are the most common participants on campus. This is particularly true for Muslim participation at JNU contribute significantly to – while students from the North East usually refrain from participating. In contrast, it appears that most privileged (i.e. upper caste) students participate comparatively less in campus political activities than others at JNU.

The variability of profiles involved in JNU politics highlights a particular feature of activism that contrasts with examples of Indian student politics more widely, in which caste and communalism play a decisive role (Jeffrey 2010). At JNU, because campus organisations have the ambition to represent the entire campus community, they tend to file candidates from different categories of the student population. Also, as will be further developed, activists politicise through providing ‘political assistance’ to new students, as well as those from minorities, rural backgrounds and first-generation learners’ families. Finally, while observing JNU political life, I found that through advocating for a more socially inclusive campus, political organisations strategically “groom” activists from Dalit and Muslim communities over long periods of time, a conclusion corroborated by several interviews. However, members of these communities, through distancing themselves from dominant student organisations (including the left and the ABVP), also engage in grooming practices, producing alternative discourses on the empowerment of marginalised communities.

1.1 Research Methods

The following study is based on a political ethnography in the JNU premises, surveying encounters of students with formal activism and exploring the lived experience of campus politics. The work involves participant observation, semi-structured face-to-face interviews with former and current JNU student activists, professors, and “common students.”⁶ Therefore, my primary insights are based on sixteen months of fieldwork at JNU (February 2014-May 2015) and then on two short visits to Delhi in March and November 2016, in which I lived in a shared hostel room on campus, attended classes and political events, stayed with activists and travelled with them in their numerous political campaigns both in Delhi and outside the capital.

Results obtained are complemented by a textual analysis of written historical discourses produced by student organisations. My ambition was to perform a statistical data analysis of more than 70,000 JNU-based political pamphlets and other activist material (covering the period 1973-2015)

⁶ The list of respondents mentioned in this study can be found in Appendix.

that belonged to personal archives of activists, which I collected and digitised since 2013. Apart from pamphlets, the corpus also includes posters, leaflets, manifestos, reports, letters, press releases and newspaper cuttings revolving around JNU politics. The analysis of such material helps to define the competing language identities of each student organisation. The central role of student organisations in JNU's democratic culture was further substantiated through compilation and analysis of electoral data – in particular vote combinations – collected by political leaders in different campus elections (2004-2015), mainly for choosing the representatives of its Students' Union. I also collected information on former JNU activists, including occupation profiles of Students' Union members (126) since elections were first organised in 1971.

Last but not least, I conducted a survey of political attitudes on campus (1,223 respondents), which was essential in order to profile the sociological diversity (rural/urban, education, caste etc.) of students and political activists.⁷ I have explained elsewhere (Martelli and Ari 2017) that such a survey is also useful to measure the impact of campus presence on student politicisation, and in particular the extent of the correlation between time spent on campus and politicisation. As the analysis was conducted jointly with Baris Ari from the University of Essex I decided not to include the quantitative study in the present manuscript. However, the article aims at confirming the importance of political socialisation in JNU campus politics. Firstly, it shows that exposure to the JNU campus makes a student more likely to place herself in a radical position (i.e. at the extremities) on the left-right political spectrum. Second, students who have been studying longer at JNU are more likely to become members of a political organisation. Third, the longer a student has been studying at JNU, the greater the likelihood that she participates in political events. Fourth, students who live on campus are more susceptible to politicisation than those who reside off-campus.

In order to sustain my assertion that higher education institutions in India should be analysed in a more political way, I rely in this study on an interpretive research design. The qualitative framework aims at ascertaining the words and actions of the participants studied (Strauss and Corbin 1998). This perspective is adapted for an exploration of the micro-politics of activists, students and professors, because it is concerned with capturing participants' direct experiences in their everyday setting – and thus produces a thick and rich description of the phenomena under

⁷ All the respondents were current JNU students. Although the medium of education at JNU is English, the survey adopted simple English wording in order to ensure that comprehension would not be an issue. The questionnaire was restricted to a single (double-sided) page in order to encourage participation by keeping the questionnaire short. It consisted of 15 structured and two open-ended questions. I briefed my respondents and emphasised that all responses were strictly anonymous. The questionnaire was completed by the respondent and placed in an opaque ballot box. The questionnaire was distributed in every student hall (i.e. hostels) on campus. In addition, during the six weeks of data collection, I made five visits to four kinds of locations at JNU where I distributed questionnaires and placed an anonymous ballot box. These locations were: (1) all the university libraries, (2) all the 15 university buildings where teaching takes place, (3) all the school canteens, and (4) the main squares/forecourts and vicinities of on-campus tea stalls. I randomly assigned a time-slot (in terms of the day of the week and time, considering only teaching hours) for each visit. In addition, I randomly assigned a more specific locality if the location was a large building such as a main library or a teaching centre. For example, I visited teaching building A and delivered questionnaires on Tuesday at 10 am in the classrooms located on the second floor.

study (Varshney 2003; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2013). My research focuses mainly on union leaders, political organisers, part-time and full-time student activists, cadres, students in general, and their understanding of public commitments.

Interpretive research is distinctive in its focus on “meaning-making” rather than relying on *a priori* model specification (which involves measuring a social phenomenon using generalisable variables). A thick description of how activist practices are passed down from one generation to another is necessary in order to understand the institutional context in which ideas and commitments develop. The bottom-up approach to politics is the only perspective that can correctly understand how students transmit, negotiate and actualise the left heritage rooted in JNU. The evidence of politicisation at JNU is valid only if relying on the primacy of *in situ* and ideographic accounts, and how these accounts expose multiple perspectives on activists’ practices such as campaigning, recruitment across communities, pamphlet-writing, sloganeering or interpersonal mediation in daily campus issues.

The ambition of this work is to enable sense-making across multiple sources, thereby building a form of “intertextuality,” a dialogue between sources applied to the social realm, such as life accounts and activist productions, including pamphlets, posters, slogans, songs, etc. I engaged with these intertextual research tools to observe how sustained discourses of student organisations influence the meanings that the youth give to political action. Activists, students and professors offered interpretations of the way they participated in politics and made sense of the often complex nature of their affiliation to the “compensatory order” (Said 1983:19) i.e. the new system values advocated by various Marxist and non-Marxist parties.

In an initial attempt to grasp the organisational culture of various student outfits, I engaged with the material that they released on campus, mostly pamphlets. As many discussions are based on an interpretation of current affairs saw through various ideological lenses, it became important for the scope of this research to capture the wide range of student-based discourses flourishing at JNU. I created the “Pamphlet Repository for Changing Activism” (PaRChA),⁸ an online platform which forms the starting point of my textual analysis.⁹ It enables researchers to gain systematic qualitative and quantitative knowledge on micro and medium-scale countercultural student movements,¹⁰ the claims they make, and the evolution of pamphleteer-language repertoire through

⁸ A view-only version of the PaRChA project can be accessed directly here: www.goo.gl/sF1nwz. In January 2017, I also added to the archive a collection of newspaper clippings linking with student politics at the university. In order to query the archive, you need to login first. Please access first the following address www.goo.gl/Fy1jn4 and then sign in (on the top-right corner). The required ID is parchaproject.guest and the password [guest2015](http://parchaproject.guest).

⁹ The use of optical character recognition (OCR) enables the extraction of words from the printed material; it makes the huge body of texts suitable for statistical analysis through the use of various computer-assisted tools. One example of an open-source text analysis project is the one developed by the Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Lyon (France), which led to the creation of the TXM platform (Heiden et al. 2010).

¹⁰ As of now, materials on the following Indian student organisations have been collected: AISA, DSF, DSU, AISF, ABVP, NSUI. The PaRChA project also covers written documents released by elected student

time. The proposed methodology is based on textual narrative analysis, relying partly on the interpretation of word occurrences.¹¹

This thesis understands textual analysis as an inductive tool for grasping semiotic differences in sense-making practices (McKee 2003). There are two different epistemological traditions in the analysis of a large quantity of texts, I have chosen the one embracing the interpretive turn. The competing approach, derived from the field of computer science, is called *Natural Language Processing* (*NLP*), and is positivist in its approach. Based on machine learning, the computer is programmed to derive meaning from human texts on its own (unsupervised learning).¹²

Instead, this thesis uses the Statistical Analysis of Texts (*SAT*), an approach more applicable to social science research because it is inductive (Benzécri 1968). The idea behind *SAT* is to ask the computer to perform systematic statistical operations (i.e. factor analysis, correspondence analysis, cluster analysis) in order to understand what makes a text significant compared to others. The ambition of such analysis – including for example the calculation of words frequently appearing together, i.e. co-occurrence – is to question the text (Duchastel 1993), synthesise it (Beaudouin 2016) and outline “semantic cohorts”; understood as group of words that are semantically related but also share a common trajectory through time while being shared by a specific set of actors (Heuser and Le-Khac 2012). *SAT* is a hermeneutic aide, it breaks the linearity of a text and outlines its most salient features (Mayaffre 2014; 2016).¹³

The mix of ethnographic and textual insights embraces a common epistemological framework, as both approaches account for the subjective meanings of social action (and in this thesis, for student activism and political learning) (Bray 2008; Yanow & Haverland 2012). Bottom-up evidence constitutes the core of my analysis as it makes sense of the plurality of experiences that contribute to the constitution of the campus as an important space for the development of distinctive political cultures.

The study of student politics in the JNU context also involves the use of descriptive statistics in order to provide a better background of political actors on campus, including an estimate of the number of activists and details of their sociological profiles. Indeed, the primary ambition of the

representatives in bodies like JNUSU and GSCASH as well as teachers’ representatives in the JNUTA (cf. list of abbreviations).

¹¹ By using already-existing software, the project proposes to identify the lexicon overrepresented in a particular sub-section of collected corpuses. Additionally, “topics” – understood as a cluster of words frequently occurring together – will be identified. Topic modelling (Blei 2012) and upstream hierarchical clustering (Reinert 1990) are used as complementary statistical techniques to categorise individual texts.

¹² Trained correctly, and using *NLP*, a computer can identify proper names or names of places in texts, recognise letters in a photo containing text, attribute authorship, determine parts-of-speech or sentiments and in some cases, translate text from one language to another.

¹³ Such analysis, often more fine-grained than *NLP*, complements the human reading of texts (Princemin 2016) in order to deepen the knowledge of the documents at hand (Lebart 2016). While *NLP* is keen on removing human agency and automatizing the analysis of language, *SAT* is meant as a tool for observing and describing textual contents. At a concrete level, the *SAT* approach is more suitable when helping the researcher to present texts in compelling ways (Valette 2016).

survey I conducted was descriptive, aiming at comparing the profile of activists and those of students who described themselves as non-participants. As mentioned earlier in this introduction, I can affirm that those who define themselves as members of a student organisation, henceforth referred to as “affiliated students” (267 in my survey), have very diverse educational and caste profiles – proxied by their caste category of admission and the highest diploma obtained by their parents.

Interpretive research can explore the meanings of campus political experimentation and the multiplicity of its Expressions. A positivist research design would be less effective at representing political voices and their variations because it would reduce them to an Expression of a nomothetic causality. I strongly ascribe to the fact that a research question has to be answered within its own epistemic community (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2013; Walsh 2012). Therefore, it should be underlined that I present my statistical data not as conclusive facts but rather as additional evidence complementary to the ethnographic study. Overall, such an approach presents a harmonious picture and strongly suggest that the culture of political activism in the JNU campus shapes the political attitudes and behaviours of students.

1.2 Background of the Study

Before turning to the analysis of JNU political socialisation *in extenso*, I briefly discuss the commonalities, as well as the specific features of the university as compared to the broader educational landscape in India. Such features include an all-India elite character, lingering socialist leanings of sections of its faculty, and an increasingly diverse socio-economic background of its students, resulting from various caste and class-based affirmative action policies incorporated by JNU administration into the admission process of the university. In this section I point out how, in the early stages of JNU development, sections of the professorial body came to embrace conflicting streams of socialism – some of them being dominating credos at the centre – and how such stands fashioned the ethos of the university till today. After contextualising the study of JNU politics by recounting the creation of the university, I succinctly present its different components (administration, teacher and student body) and their sociological composition. I also introduce how the university is run and how it admits new cohorts of students.

1.2.1 The History of the Birth of JNU: A Socialist Idea

Before the independence of India (1947), the first Indian Communist party and its student wing, the All India Students Federation (AISF), communist since 1940, held the view that a “national bourgeoisie” exercised hegemony over the Congress (Lockwood 2016).¹⁴ In 1969, it decided to ally

¹⁴ The foundation conference of the AISF was held in August 1936. At the 6th conference in Nagpur in 1940, a split occurred and the communist group led by M. Farooqui took control of the main section of the

with the “progressive bourgeoisie,” led by Indira Gandhi against a rival faction of the Congress and in support to the reversal of mid-1960s liberalisation attempts (Kirk 2011). CPI embraced the “National Democratic Revolution” (NDR) line, which required to ally with the progressive sections of the Bourgeoisie in order to march towards the revolution. Therefore, the Party rejoiced to see Indira Gandhi elected Prime Minister in 1971 on a pro-poor, *Garibi Hatao* (abolish poverty) programme (*Political Resolution*, 3-10 October 1971; Krishnan 1975). It is in this context that the JNU Act (voted the 16th of November 1966) came into force on the 22 of April 1969, reflecting in many ways the then socialist zeitgeist (Gazette of India, 21 April 1969).

The discussion of the bill in the *Rajya Sabha* in 1964 and then in the *Lok Sabha* in September 1965 and November 1966 revolved around two major themes: its naming after recently deceased Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and the exact role it should adopt in the then social and academic landscape. Dr Madhav Shrihari Aney,¹⁵ the oldest member of the lower house of the parliament at 85, spearheaded the attack against the Bill portraying it as vague and undemocratic (Aney 1965). Other socialists and several Jana Sangh members strongly opposed the idea of adulating Nehru making him the embodiment of nationalism and conferring to his name qualities that personified the patriotic spirit. “The university is converted into a church and the character and appeal of national ideals are considerably overcast with personality cult,” said M.B. Lal – member of the joint committee who examined the bill – spurring a heated exchange with education minister Mohammed Ali Currim Chagla (Lal 1965). The latter held secularism and social justice¹⁶ as a unifying factor and sought to grant the JNU act as much autonomy as possible (Chagla 1964). The members of the *Rajya Sabha* opposed a clause in the bill stipulating that external inspections would have the right to review the working of the university (JNU Bill 1964). Joint committee members such as Triguna Sen and V.S. Jha argue that “[if he was] the chancellor, he would wish the MPs to trust him to find the best man and leave me alone to do this task” (Jha 1964). Debates reflected the socialist underpinnings of the time. In addition to the “social justice” principle of the then education minister Congress members, Dr. Chandrabhan Singh, Kanhaiya Balmiki, Yashpal Singh, Rup Narain and Diwan Chand Sharma supported the idea of an “university of the poor,” a discourse echoed by Jan Sangh Onkarlal Berwa and CPI Sarjoo Pandey (Singh 1965). The socialist spirit of the time was however best summarised by *Rajya Sabha* communist leader Bhupesh Gupta who advocated for the creation of an autonomous institution that could teach “scientific socialism.” He claimed that this notion was not only partaken by communists but also by Congress members such as Sadashiv Kanoji Patil, as well as sections of the civil society and also reputed industrialists, including Ghanshyam Das Birla and Jehangir

organisation. Cf. Rajimwale (2001). *History of student movement in India: Origins and development 1920-1947*. New Delhi: Manak Publications, 2001. See also *Student Action* (November 2013).

¹⁵ M.S. Aney was mainly concerned with the brevity of the bill and that the actual composition and nature of governing JNU bodies were to be set by “some other body” (Minutes of Dissent 1965:13).

¹⁶ “The university shall endeavour to promote the study of the principles for which Jawaharlal Nehru worked during his lifetime, namely, national integration, social justice, secularism, democratic way of life, international understanding and scientific approach to the problems of society” (Chagla 1965).

Ratanji Dadabhai Tata. It is important here to quote him in full (see next page), as Gupta's vision is central to understand the context in which the university was created.

That is what I say and therefore the first thing is to ensure that the sons of the working people, the worker, the peasants and the middle-classes do have the doors of the universities thrown wide open to them. [...] I would not like the bureaucratic set-up to come in. The autonomy should be completely guaranteed. [...] Students should have ideals before them. I should like this university to have a clear faculty, I maintain, for the studies of scientific socialism. And why should it not be there? Everybody talks about socialism. Mr. S.K. Patil talks about socialism. Mr. G.D. Birla talks about socialism. Mr. J.R.D. Tata talks about socialism. Mr. Hridas Mundhra talks about socialism when he gives money to a particular election fund. Everybody these days talks about socialism. But one does not know what it is... So, there should be a faculty for the study of scientific Socialism. [...] I know, in the postgraduate courses Marxism is taught but books are always from the United States of America which display no knowledge of Marxism at all. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I should like a faculty to be created to impart proper education of this kind (Gupta 1965).

In her inauguration at the university on 14 November 1969, Chancellor Indira Gandhi exhorted JNU to create a "climate conducive to social change" (*Times of India*, 15 November 1969). Accordingly, the choice of the persons nominated to make the university fully operational reflected the policy-centred orientation of the university. The first Vice Chancellor (VC) (1969-74) of the university, was diplomat G. Parthasarathi, endorsed by Indira Gandhi and her father (Jayaprakash 2009), who refused to interfere with the opinions and activities of JNU Students' Union during his term. Considering JNU as a "centre of excellence," (*Times of India*, 2 April 1969) he aimed for the university to replace the ill-equipped colonial educational system (*Times of India*, 16 March 1970). The second VC (1974-79), nuclear scientist B. D. Nag Chaudhuri, had been the Scientific Adviser to the Prime Minister and headed the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) (Sharma 1996:324). JNU assimilated the already-existing Indian School of International Studies (ISIS) which was then training Foreign Service probationers (*Times of India*, 28 July 1970) making it a leading expertise centre for Indian foreign policy. The faculty of the new JNU School of International Studies accepted the national framework of "non-alignment" and delivered military science bachelors to the defence administration (*Times of India*, 18 June 1972), including the National Defence Academy (Pune) (Bhambhri 1996), the Army Cadet College (Dehradun) (Committee Paper 1996) and the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (Bombay) (Bakaya 1996). JNU also absorbed the Institute of Russian Studies which developed pro-Soviet relations through the Indian mission in Moscow (Bakaya 1996). The third Students' Union president (1973-74) gives the following example of the pro-government "think tank ethos" of many faculty members:

[...] Rasheeduddin Khan, professor, Centre of Political Studies, is a member of the following bodies: Rajya Sabha; Indian Council of Social Science Research; Indo-US Joint Subcommission on Education and Culture; Board of South and West Asian Centre for Friends World Institute (USA) Bangalore since 1967; American Studies Research Centre, Hyderabad; and Executive Committee of the Institute of Asian Studies since 1965. He has additional onerous tasks on

the board of studies, selection commissions and examination committees of 26 Indian Universities (Karat 1975).

The influence of the CPI over the first faculty appointments was visible. In 1975, JNU advertised 80 posts for its School of Life Sciences only in *New Age* – the publication of the CPI (*Hindustan Times*, 5 May 1975). Further, P.C. Joshi, the first general secretary of CPI started his archival work on the Indian Communist movement with the Archives on Contemporary History at JNU in 1970 and died on campus a decade later (Chakravarthi 2007). In the early 1970s, a section of the JNU community were extending unconditional support to stirs from leftist forces such as the 1974 railway strikes (Karat 1975; Chopra 1996). Namvar Singh, formerly CPI Lok Sabha candidate (1959) and celebrated Hindi literary critic was appointed in the School of Languages while Moonis Raza, formerly state secretary of the Communist Party of India in Uttar Pradesh became the planning officer and first registrar (and later on rector) (Committee Paper 1996). This key figure of JNU who was in charge of most invitations for the early professorship appointments encouraged various streams of left student activism on campus (Jayaprakash 1996). He was, among others, the tutor of Suneet Chopra, one of the founders of SFI at JNU (Suneet, interview 2015). Baburam Bhattarai, the then Marxist Nepalese student leader and future 35th Maoist Nepalese Prime minister, mentions his meeting with Moonis Raza as the fundamental reason for joining JNU (Bhattarai 2008). In 1978 certain appointments of professors at JNU would come under media criticism after a Janata-led inquiry report of Prime Minister Moraji Desai (*Times of India*, 7 July 1978) accused the JNU VC of “manipulating appointments” (Banerjee 1978) and “making the university the preserve of a certain ideology” (Committee Paper 1996).

Within the first years of its existence, the School of Social Sciences (SSS), and more particularly the Centre for Historical Studies (CHS), became an avant-garde centre of Marxist Historiography. At the first executive council meeting of JNU, the VC appointed a three-person committee to draft the statutes of the university. The latter comprised Nurul Hasan, a prominent Aligarh University historian with strong links with the CPI and responsible for several of the first appointments at JNU.¹⁷ In 1970 Nurul Hasan became Education Minister and furthered the turn of Indian historiography towards secular, Marxist and post-colonial tenets. Historian Romila Thapar, one of the first faculty members in the Centre for Historical Studies, along with another Marxist-inspired historian, Satish Chandra, recalls the challenges set by the centre: “what might be called colonial historiography was still fairly influential and we were setting out to challenge this kind of historiography [...] the emphasis in looking at social and economic history was to recognize what some preferred to call class configuration in the history of Indian society” (Thapar 1996). Within a year, Bipan Chandra, a historian from the Delhi University also joined CHS. The

¹⁷ “In some areas [...] there was the perceptible role of the education minister, Nurul Hasan, a father figure among intellectuals, who was also close to P.N. Haksar, D.P. Dhar, P.N. Dhar and others, who were close to the prime minister’s policymaking group. Several members of the Communist Party of India found their way into the university [JNU] in this early phase due to this combined influence. [...] The rising tide of Marxist history and political science swept over Delhi University as well.” (Batabyal 2015:130).

leading historiographical role of JNU is most visible when looking at history textbooks produced at the time by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the organisation assisting and advising the central and state governments on academic matters. Examples are *Medieval India* (1967), by Romila Thapar and *Modern India* (1970) by Bipan Chandra. Both books, along with *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (1969) by Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra, and another JNU-based historian, Harbans Mukhia, were targeted for being too complacent with medieval Muslim rule by Hindu nationalist leaders during the Janata phase (1977-1979) (Rudolph and Rudolph 1983; Jaffrelot 2007), a period I broach in Chapter 3. In it I focus more specifically on the history of JNU-based student politics.

Another major intellectual contest witnessed at JNU in the 1970s regarded the mode of production in India and the characterisation of the Indian peasantry, which inspired an amused comment from the historian Batabyal: “Soon, JNU began to emerge as a sort of habitat for the Homo Academicus Indicus Peasantus” (Batabyal 2015:245-246). Defending the classical Marxist scheme, several JNU economists and senior JNU scholars entered into fierce debates on the question of class in rural India, against what they called “empiricist views” of other economists (e.g Ashok Rudra) with close ties to the Indian Planning Commission (Patnaik 1971a, 1971b, 1971c; Banaji 1973). These debates happened in a context of increases in agricultural production triggered by the Green Revolution (1968-1978). The pervasiveness of these academic controversies on the ‘peasant question’ is most visible when looking at the amount of PhD and MPhil theses (cf. bibliography) written on the question of JNU in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁸

1.2.2 The University at a Glance: National, Postgraduate, Residential, Pro-reservations, Social Sciences’ Oriented

Jawaharlal Nehru University is an educational space but a living space as well. The university is a residential campus, which means that most of its students live on campus. In September 2014, nearly three fourths of them lived in one of the 18 hostels of the campus (JNU Annual Report 2015). The campus area is exceptionally large and widely forested, covering more than four square kilometres of which only one fourth is used for residential constructions (JNU Fact Sheet 2016).

As one of the 46 central universities of the country funded by the central government, JNU can be considered an elite university in many respects (University Grant Commission 2015). It is labelled by the administration as an ‘all-India’ university and therefore has English as the medium of instruction. It is a postgraduate university and nearly three fourths of the students are registered

¹⁸ Among them, the dissertations of Sibbiah (1975), Bandyopadhyay (1976), Sinha (1976), Cowshish (1977), Luingham (1977), Mehta (1977), Menon (1978), Parimala (1979), Hangloo (1980), George (1980), Palat (1981), Raghvan (1981), Ramesh (1981), Rao (1981a), Rao (1981b), Kastala (1982), Kishan (1983), Ram (1983), Satapathy (1984), Karanth (1984), Kumar (1984), Ganesh (1984), Sangita (1984), Suri (1984), Bhattacharya (1985), Kurapati (1985), Gurukkal (1985), Gopinath (1986), Agnihotri (1987), Assadi (1987), Luithui (1987), Sangita (1988), Singh (1988), Jayatilaka (1989) are worth mentioning because they all focus on agrarian systems in different parts of rural India.

in research degrees. Because of its postgraduate orientation JNU students are on average older (24 years old, Attitude Survey 2014) than other Indian campuses. Nearly 80 percent (79.4) of Indian students enrolled in 2015 are undergraduates (All India Survey on Higher Education 2015), which is six times higher than at JNU (JNU Annual Report 2015).¹⁹ With slightly more than eight thousand students in 2014, JNU is a relatively small university, more than twenty times smaller than the number of students enrolled in the Colleges of the University of Delhi (University of Delhi Annual Report 2013).

The university is arguably one of the most selective educational institution in the social sciences and for this reason it has an all-India reach. In 2014, 3.4 percent of candidates who appeared at the entrance examination were offered a seat (JNU Annual Report 2014). The close relationship between the teaching faculty and the students is reinforced by the fact that classes are smaller than the average Indian higher education institution – the teacher/student ratio is 1:15 at JNU, 1:45 in State public universities (JNU Fact Sheet 2016; All India Survey on Higher Education 2015).

Most incoming students are registered in one of the three main schools, namely the School of Social Sciences (SSS, almost one third of 2014 entrants), the School of International Studies (SIS, 17.8 percent) and the School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies (often shortened to School of Language or SL, 35.6 percent) (Right to Information No 4667, 2015). In addition, JNU offers degrees in various other subjects in smaller centres and schools, including computer sciences and life sciences.

The regional origin of JNU students is very diverse but a clear majority comes from North India. Large sections (57.1 percent) of the new entrants received their last qualifying examination prior to JNU from the Hindi Belt or several surrounding North Indian states.²⁰ Most of the students came from populous northern states such as Uttar Pradesh (20.5 percent of the total) and Bihar (16.8 percent). At the time of their admission, more than ten percent of the students were domiciled in Delhi NCT²¹ (12.7 percent) and, perhaps more surprisingly, from north-eastern states (11.5 percent) (RTI 4667, 2015).

At the end of 2014, over 70 percent of faculty members (397) were male (JNU Annual Report 2015). Apart from gender imbalance, lower and intermediary castes were also underrepresented among teaching staff. In 2011, over 90 percent of the faculty could be considered upper caste, as only 47 teachers were from groups benefitting from government reservations (RTI 6-4/2009, 2011). The RTI shows that JNU ranks midway among the 25 Central Universities surveyed in terms of fulfilment of caste quotas. As opposed to the social unrepresentativeness of the faculty body, the

¹⁹ The actual percentage of undergraduates at JNU is 13.4.

²⁰ I included in the count the following states: Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Gujarat, Orissa and Jharkhand. Delhi NCR was not included.

²¹ National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCT) is a capital city and a union territory (i.e. a type of administrative division) of India.

varied sociological composition of students appears to better represent the social fabric of India. At JNU most of the students are from so-called ‘backward castes’. As per the JNU Annual Report 2014, only 44.3 percent of JNU students did not benefit from any government reservation. The quotas for weaker sections established by Indian law are scrupulously respected at JNU. Hence, 27.5 percent of students are Other Backward Classes (OBCs), 14.3 percent are Scheduled Castes (SCs) and 7.9 are Scheduled Tribes (STs) (JNU Annual Report 2014).

According to the Indian Census (2011), 68.8 percent of the Indian population is rural. At JNU, only 54.7 percent of students declare that the residence of their guardian (i.e. the household head) is in rural or semi-urban areas (JNU Attitude Survey 2014). The income of parents of JNU students is also much higher than the average urban Indian household. According to the latest empirical data available based on the India Human Development Survey (the IHDS-II), the top 10 percent of households (when equalised)²² earned more than 115,000 Indian rupees (Rs.) annually in 2011-2012 (Mishra and Parmar 2016). In 2014, the median income for the guardian of a JNU student was Rs. 360,000 (approx. 4,300 pounds yearly) (JNU Attitude Survey 2014). Few JNU students are from families with low educational backgrounds, which means that most of them are not first generation learners: 64.8 percent of guardians of JNU students are either graduates or postgraduates. English as a medium of instruction is a sign of middle-class assertiveness (Annamalai 2004): more than 80 percent (82.8) of those surveyed at JNU received their former instruction in English. At the all-India level, from standards 1 to 12 (i.e. primary to higher secondary) 62.2 percent of students had English as their medium of instruction (District Information System for Education 2016).

Apart from the Vice-Chancellor, who is the chief executive of the university, there are three other leading administrative positions at JNU. The ceremonial heads of the university are the two Rectors. The Registrar is the head of the university’s administration. One of the main roles of the Dean of students is to maintain the complex of hostels for students, which involves the sensitive task of supervising the allocation of residence seats for students. The Dean of Students supervises Provosts, who look after *khands* (units grouping several hostels) (Inter-Hall Administration 2016). They are the last resort in disciplinary matters, which involves fining and expelling from their hostels misconducting students (Hostel Manual 2016).

The second set of actors qualifying as ‘administration’ are those who occupy lower-rank bureaucratic posts and in permanent contact with the students. It comprises a significant number of assistants, operators, stenographers in every school and centre of the university, but also personnel working in student residences, including caretakers, enquiry clerk and cashiers. At the

²² Equalised household income is total household income adjusted by the application of an equivalence scale to facilitate comparison of income levels between households of differing size and composition (Eurostat 2016)

bottom of the administrative hierarchy are janitors, *safai karamcharis* (cleaners), *malis* (gardeners), cooks and security guards (JNU Hostel Manual 2016).

Two institutional bodies occupy a relatively central place in influencing the decision-making of the JNU administration. One of them is the JNU Teachers' Association (JNUTA) created in 1971 (JNUTA constitution 2005). JNUTA defends the interests of the faculty and serves as intermediary between students' claims and administrative imperatives. The political colour of the JNUTA has been mostly leftist and they are sometimes regarded as sympathetic to the views of the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Along with the JNUTA, the Gender Sensitization Committee Against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH) is also worth mentioning. The GSCASH was set up at JNU in 1999 in application of the guidelines set by the Indian Supreme Court in 1997 (Chaudhuri 2007). Its missions are formal enquiry and redressal of cases of sexual harassment on campus, assistance and mediation of complainants and the sensitisation of students on gender issues through the organisation of programmes and workshops (GSCASH Annual Report 2016).²³

In 1973, student admission to all courses was offered on the basis of academic record only (Committee Paper 1996; Bulletin 1992). Until the present, five different waves of reforms were implemented (1974, 1983, 1994, 2008 and 2016). Such reforms of the admission policy led to more inclusiveness for historically disadvantaged sections of the Indian populations. As per 2016 regulations, deprivation points are given at the entrance exam on the basis of the "backwardness"²⁴ of the district in which students attended high school. Additional points are given to female candidates (JNU Entrance Prospectus 2016). Additionally, quotas for weaker sections are scrupulously respected at JNU. Therefore, in 2014 27.5 percent of the seats were reserved to OBCs, 14.3 percent of seats for SCs and 7.9 percent of seats for STs (JNU Annual Report 2014). Further details about the political context in which affirmative action policies on basis of caste were implemented at JNU is given in Chapter 3. When it comes to filling the quotas of SCs and STs, JNU administration is more diligent than most other Indian institutions. As per estimates of the All India Survey on Higher Education, SC students comprised 13.5 percent of those enrolled in 2014; the figure for STs is only 4.8 percent and 33.0 percent for OBCs (All India Survey on Higher Education 2015). In terms of equal gender partition of seats, JNU scores better than average as it allots exactly half of its seats to women (JNU Annual Report 2014).

²³ Students' Union president Albeena Shakil (2001-02) recalls the objectives behind the GSCASH in these terms: "The most important offshoot of this struggle was that gender issues became a part of the mainstream political discourse of JNU. Though a similar scenario seems a distant dream in national politics, at JNU it has become practically impossible for student organisations to contest elections without stating their views on gender issues clearly before the student community" (Shakil 2004).

²⁴ The criteria are: low literacy rates, high levels of agricultural work and low agricultural productivity (JNU Prospectus 2016).

1.3 Thesis structure

Through a specific focus on student activism, the second chapter of the thesis proposes a literature review of the four prevalent approaches to the study of youth politics in India. I explain why it is relevant for the analysis not to approach the youth as a biological stage (i.e. as ‘unfinished’ adults) but as cultural and social activity. Consequently, youth politics should not be studied solely in relation to older generations but also to other young people – especially when developing collective sense-making practices. Keeping this framework in mind, I discuss an existing lacuna in the literature, namely the inadequate level of scrutiny of everyday political activities in university settings.

Chapter 3 aims at giving an overview of the history of JNU from the specific point of view of the political activities and orientations it has sheltered in the span of a half-decade, from the creation of the student union to the present day. Here I focus almost exclusively on the dominant forms of political activities initiated by students and student-run political organisations. I also use textual analysis of the PaRChA corpus in order to identify phases, changes of political leadership and the advent of new political debates in the university, which echoes those emerging in the country.

The proposition of Chapter 4 is to understand a key cultural practice of student-led Marxism and how the latter is used to gain the trust among students. I explore the discourses and behaviours of *declassing*, understood as an embodied language of renunciation and selflessness. By “becoming declassified,” activists acknowledge and represent deprived sections of the Indian population, thus creating a political space for a Marxist critique of mainstream politics and society. I make sense of declassified performativity as a visual, corporal and spatial given. It is a highly demanding activity, emotionally intense, and leads to professional deviance. Because the task of declassing is arduous, it is often renegotiated when activists demobilise or withdraw from their organisation.

While one side of the socialisation led by activists is linked to the declassified engaging, the other one involves everyday political brokerage, in which politically active individuals develop strong loyalties through providing tailored assistance to students. Consequently, Chapter 5 shows how the incorporation of activist values coincides with the practical conduct of service-based student politics. The revolutionary discourse of left activists is grounded in day-to-day activities assisting students who face various kind of hardships – administrative and personal. I conclude by describing how “the broker” and the “revolutionary” appear to be the same person, two sides of the activist coin serving as complementary strategies to embody organisational interests. In the final section of the chapter, I show how vocal left professors take active part in campus politics, therefore promoting forms of participation in line with their own youthful political experience.

Chapter 6 is mainly looking at the ideological consequences of political socialisation on campus. Through concentrating on the transition of power between two communist student organisations, I show how their approach to Marxism differs in the way political emotions are played out. The emphasis of the dominant organisation on social violence and its lack of interest in daily amenities

has resulted in the re-enactment of ideological idioms inspired by its past as an armed guerrilla in Bihar. The chapter further suggests that the variability of the emotional language of the organisation is an important marker of differentiation between various left movements in India, and is as relevant as ideological cleavages and personal rivalries.

In the last analytical chapter of the thesis, I examine more specifically the centrality of the student organisations, small and large, on campus life. The first section examines student elections and outlines certain emotional rewards of political participation in the university, in particular during polling and counting time. Then, through an analysis of the vote combination at student elections (2004-2014), I outline the importance of political organisations in representative campus politics. Results illustrate that student support for organised politics is strong at JNU. When students vote for campus-level student representatives, they give preference to the consideration of political stands made by student organisations, rather than favouring personal friendships with classmates and peers from similar regional backgrounds. Finally, through referring to social activist accounts of a group of Dalits and queer students, I explain why campus activism and its socialisation cannot be restricted to the politics of electoral-based parties and its left leadership. This wide range of organised political participation finally upholds a tradition of dissent which is in line with protecting the rights of free speech and the values of democracy.

2 The Campus as a Site of Politics: Literature Review and Theoretical Considerations

This chapter is written with two objectives in mind: firstly, to provide a literature review of the four prevalent approaches to the study of youth politics in India; second, to discuss the various accounts of the functioning of everyday political arenas in university settings. The overriding question is to establish why campuses are potentially relevant sites for the study of youth politics and the consequences of such participation. In other words, the central concern is to know whether the educated Indian youth, when set apart from the spheres of family and work, are influenced by exposure to campus environments. Thus, the aim is to describe how political sociology understands the political dimension of institutions such as universities as opposed to other environments, such as the family setting. Particular attention is given to the way the literature understands the process by which group's norms and behaviour are internalised. The study defines political socialisation as the gradual process through which political knowledge is acquired and negotiated, leading to the development of idiosyncratic views of the political world (Wong and Tseng 2008; Fillieule 2013).

At a general level, 'youth' in the Indian context has been often conceived as a heterogeneous – and therefore conceptually weak – category, divided on lines of caste, economic class, gender, level of educational attainment, religion and region of origin. More specifically, ethnographers reporting on political cultures of educated youth have emphasised the ways in which all-encompassing phenomena such as liberalism, consumption, unemployment, power, religion and patriarchy have been negotiated on the ground (Osella 1998; Benei 2000; Liechty 2003; Nisbett 2007; Ruud 2014), while overlooking more localised vehicles of political transformation such as higher education. Instead, residential sites for higher education, understood as mediated spaces between students and the broader society, may prove useful in providing students with new understandings of societal issues in resonance with a specific campus culture – itself informed by various contending ideologies such as communism, Ambedkarism, Hindutva and Maoism.

This chapter starts with a very brief demographic overview of the youth in India before introducing various approaches to politics led by the youth, conceptualised in turn as revolutionary forces, deviant generations, relays of representative democracy, and more importantly, cultural agents. This overview first discusses the youth in relation to other age groups, before stressing the need to approach the cultural realm of the youth in its own right. While summarising the debate on whether the educated youth can be understood as a separate political category, I show how such debates inform the study of campus political life. In the remainder of the chapter, I present theoretical considerations on the study of campus politics drawing on Bourdieu's concept of habitus and field. In this research, I understand politics and youth politics as one form, neither as claims on the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force (Weber 1978 [1919]:54-55), nor as a competition between agents for capturing state power and producing laws. Rather, I put an emphasis on the symbolic character of politics as a field, a

theatre for the performative representation of the social world (Bourdieu 1978:13-19; Wacquant 2004:6).

India is undergoing a demographic transition. The clear majority (65 percent) of the Indian population is 35 or under²⁵ (Census 2011; National Youth Policy 2014) and every third person in an Indian city today is a youth (UN-Habitat 2013). In concomitance with this phenomenon, India is experiencing growing enrolment in post-graduate education. Compared to levels at India's independence, student enrolment in 2015 has gone up 127 times, and between 2014 and 2015 as many as 1,147 new colleges were established (University Grant Commission 2015). Depending on the sources consulted, the number of university students enrolled in 2014-15 range from nearly 27 million (UGC 2015) to 33 million (All India Survey on Higher Education 2015). This has resulted in a spectacular increase of gross enrolment in higher education (age-group 18-23) from 15 percent in 2012 to nearly 24 percent in 2015 (UGC 2015; AISHE 2015).²⁶ The on-going opening of education to masses of urban and rural youth have however not resolved the various forms of youth under-employment²⁷ fostered by an enduring state of jobless growth.²⁸ Arguing over India's ability to harvest its demographic dividend (International Monetary Fund 2006), scholars and policy-makers have asked whether a 'youth factor' is at play in Indian politics.

Such questions arise in a context in which the definition of "youth" is constantly changing. If a student is quite widely understood as a person who is studying at a university, school or other place of education (The Oxford English dictionary 2013), a young person escapes easy identification which cannot be reduced to age or socio-professional activity (Morch 1994; 2003). Some scholars agree that "youth" is a social construct, as an "interval of transition" between childhood and adult membership in society (Brown et al. 2002). The term remains contested, however; Nsamenang (1999; 2002) affirms that youth and adolescent psychology is a Eurocentric invention, and that many societies do not recognize youth/adolescence²⁹ as a distinct stage of life. Verma and Sharma (2003) argue that adolescence is a recent construct in India that has been created by the double emergence of a middle-class and the extension of the time dedicated to education. This process involves tremendous disparities in terms of family socialisation, independent living, exposure to mass-media, gendered education, social leisure activities,

²⁵ Youth in the age group of 15-29 years comprise 27.5 percent of the population according to the 2011 census. Projections of the Economic Survey (2014-2015) estimate that in 2020, the average age of India's population will be around 29 years.

²⁶ The National Knowledge Commission has advocated for the creation of 1,500 new higher education institutions in order to reach 30 percent of gross enrolment by 2020 (The National Knowledge Commission is an advisory body to the Prime Minister of India constituted in 2005 and in charge of suggesting educational policy reforms).

²⁷ Scholarly accounts of youth unemployment are complemented beautifully by the fictionalised stories of the Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray, who was particularly keen to describe the urban middle-class as hopeless, especially in *Jana Aranya* ("The Middleman," 1976) and *Pratidwandi* ("Adversary," 1970).

²⁸ As of 2016, one million new Indian graduates enter the job market every month (Jaffrelot 2016) in a long lasting context of under-employment (Drèze and Sen 2013; Majumder 2013) cf. the average growth of employment is only 1.8 percent (Jaffrelot 2016).

²⁹ In India, the concept of adolescence has been subsumed under that of "youth" (Brown et al. 2002).

rural/urban cultural environment (Verma and Sharma 2003) and access to university education. As was just reported only a minority of the Indian age group 18-25 is enrolled in higher education institutions, and that almost 60 percent are either non-workers or marginal workers (De Souza et al. 2009). This entails strong disparities in the achievement of different indicators that symbolise the entrance into adulthood: finishing school, leaving parents' home, starting employment, forming independent household, marrying and bearing children (Settersten et al. 2008; Heath and Walker 2012).

2.1 The Heroes: Youth Politics as Resistance

A fair amount of literature exists on youth political culture in the Global South, focusing regularly on resistance to the state and the establishment (Wulff 1995). This stream of research portrays the educated youth as a politicised life-stage (Altbach 1970, 1984) at the basis of numerous social movements. Following the paradigmatic definition of McAdam (1982:36-37), I define social movements, whether involving the youth or not, as “rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through non-institutionalized means.” Protest demonstrations and revolutions, whether achieved or only planned, give a public voice to various grievances and press relevant authorities to attend to the associated claims (Snow 2013). Student movements are one of the types of collective action found in the Indian subcontinent, along with, among others, Adivasi, Dalit, women, peasant, working-class, environmental and anti-corruption movements (Singharoy 2013).

According to Meyer and Rubinson (1972:26), “the most politically active students are those with high social class backgrounds, high levels of academic ability, [...] and a high sense of social and political efficacy.” Studies on student movements in various countries acknowledge the leading role taken by elite universities in the social sciences (Altbach 1991; Luescher-Mamashela 2016). Dingxin Zhao (2004) finds that among people involved in the 1989 Tiananmen Square movement in China, students from the social sciences and humanities were overrepresented – for instance, of the 21 most-wanted student leaders of the 1989 movement, 14 majored in those areas. Ketchley and Biggs (2016) along with Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog (2016) find that Muslim political activism after the 2013 military coup in Egypt was imbued by university students and graduates.

The historical importance of students in progressive and revolutionary politics is undisputable. Examples range from the 1956 Hungarian Revolution (Lipset 1968), to the 1968 protests in France, Germany, USA, Japan (Gobille 2008), to the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War (Ludden 2011; Raghavan 2015), to the 2012 Québécois university strike (Dufour et Savoie 2014; Tremblay et al. 2015).³⁰ Marxist approaches to the youth as subculture, epitomised by the ‘Birmingham School’

³⁰ A range of other examples are worth mentioning. The 2009 democratic protests against the fraudulent election of Ahmadinejad in Iran was led by students at Tehran University (Farshad 2015). Similarly, a survey (Xypolia 2013) shows that half of 2014 Gezi protesters in Turkey were college graduates. Some student

in the early 1980s (Jenkins 1983; Lave et al. 1992), gave specific emphasis to the youth as an opposition against class oppression. The idiosyncratic approach to the politics of youth is often associated with the idiom popularised by Marx and Engels (Tucker 1978) labelling the youth as the “alchemists of the revolution.” Most accounts of the youth by communist organisations in India adhere to this approach and depict the Indian youth as a potential force of agitation against the establishment (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987:33). Various manifestos and press releases of Indian Communist and Maoist parties emphasise the rebellious nature of students. Examples of such documents are: “Student Front: Policy And Tasks,” adopted by the Central Committee of the CPI(M) (*The Marxist*, January-March 2007), “Urban Perspective Plan 2004 of the CPI(Maoist)” (cf. Chakravarti 2010:322-348) and the “Resolution on The Tasks and Orientation of the Student-Youth Movement,” adopted by the Ninth Congress of the CPI(ML) (*Liberation*, May 2013). Per these views, student political activists carry an inherent but mostly latent ability to reject the mainstream careerist party politics. They can “acquire a heightened or radical consciousness through ideological engagement and praxis in order to transform aspects of society through the political process” (De Souza 2004:26).

There are two historical cases of large-scale political movements involving the educated youth in the modern Indian context. The first one is what Albach calls the phase “radical nationalism.” The youth were involved at every stage of the Indian independence movement, as summarised by Reddy Muni (1947). With the triggering of the *Swadeshi* (self-sufficiency) movement in the 1905 partition of Bengal, figures of the Indian National Congress such as S. J. Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Arbin Ghosh and Lala Lajpat Rai (Chandra 1938; Singh 2012) started mobilising the youth and its leading figures, Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekar Azad, in order to advocate for complete independence (Gupta 1995; Rajimawale 2001). Early synergies started abroad; *The Indian Sociologist*, edited first in London and then in Paris and Geneva, awarded fellowships to Indian students. In 1913, the *Ghadar Party* was formed in the USA with Indian students and workers (Reddy 1947).

On Indian soil, during the first non-cooperation movement, boycotts of schools and colleges were carried out.³¹ It was in the course of the preparations of non-cooperation that the first country-level organisation of college students, the *All India College Students’ Conference* (AICSC) was

mobilisations, such as the 1918 Cordoba movement – which prompted independence for Argentinian universities from state control (Bernasconi 2008) – aimed at reforming existing institutions. Democratic student-led revolutions such as the 1987 June uprising in Korea (Hyuk-Rae 2002; Choe and Kim 2012) rather aimed at change in the institutional structure of the country. Others were identity-based, such as the anti-apartheid struggle led by South African students of the African nationalist Pan Africanist Congress (Diseko 1992). Jungyun Gill and James DeFronzo (2009) summarise various types of student politics and provide compelling examples of what they call “social revolutionary” movements aiming to replace both the institutions and cultural underpinnings of their society.

³¹ “We consider gradual withdrawal of boys and girls from schools and Colleges and suggest earnest attempts to establish National Institutions. [...] Vigorous propaganda should be organised and carried on among parents, school masters and school boys, who are 18 years of age” (Lala Lajpat Rai, draft instructions to carry on the Non-Cooperation resolution, Special session of the Indian National Congress, Kolkata, 4 September 1920, in Reddy [1947]).

born in 1920 (Rajimwale 2005), foreshadowing the creation of regional Students' Unions all over the country.³² It followed the appeal of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and young leaders such as Jayaprakash Narayan (Bajwa 1987; Bhattacharjea 2004). By the end of the 1942 Quit India Movement, about 10 percent of the student population of India (circa 15,000 students) were involved in the day-to-day organisational work of the nationalist movement (Altbach 1968), circulating underground pamphlets, airing clandestine radio shows, disrupting British administration and, importantly, taking over leadership when senior leaders were arrested (Altbach 1970).³³ The independence activist Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), a product of the Swadeshi movement (Masani 1977), was also the leader of the only post-independence movement gathering significant sections of students (Jeffrey 2012). The 1974 "JP movement," protesting against corruption and the doubling price of food grain in Bihar, is seen by some historians as a re-enactment of the non-cooperation movement, this time involving the post-independence generation (Carasco 2016:203).

The second watershed case of rebellious politics was the peasant-oriented Maoist rebellion starting in the late 1960s, which attracted an academically accomplished and highly educated youth (Banerjee 1984; Singh 1995), especially during the so-called "Bengali-phase," a period of intense urban and rural agitation in West Bengal that started around 1967 and declined progressively from 1972 to the mid-1970s (Ray 2002). If we look at the broader picture, student indiscipline escalated in the 1950s and 1960s, triggered by economic reasons – the food crisis in 1956 and 1966, or issues related to campus life like the demands for better salaries for teachers in 1954 (Bandyopadhyay 2010). Student politics soon radicalised and a critical mass of low-prospect university students emerged as a demand group, which involved an increase of the magnitude of incidents in "student indiscipline" between 1967 and 1974 (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987). Student unrest had in common an anti-establishment spirit, uncertainty towards future employment, and a combination of decreased expenditure on higher education and the proliferation of student numbers, especially from rural backgrounds (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987; Banerjee 1980, 1984). Banerjee (1984) lists four reasons for student indiscipline: the lack of proper academic atmosphere, absence of respect for authority, ideological frustration, and political indifference.

What most singularly distinguished the Naxalite Movement from earlier and contemporary youth movements was the attack on educational institutions – perceived as part of the Establishment and also as the embodiment of the "great men" of Bengal (Bandyopadhyay 2010). These idol-

³² These included: Bombay Students' Union (BSU), Assam Chatra Sanmilian (Assam Students' Conference and then renamed Assam Students' Federation), Sindh Students Federation, Punjab Students' Federation (PSF), Lahore Students' Union (LSU), UP University Students Federation, Madras Students Organisation (MSO), CP-Berar Student Organisation (and later All Burma Students' Union, ABSU), All Utkal Students Federation (Bora 1992, Rajimwale 2001).

³³ Chandra Bose presided over the second conference of the AISF on November 1936 in Lahore and stated that: "leadership requires idealistic enthusiasm and reckless abandon, of which youth alone are capable [...] I look to the youth of my country to evolve a movement, essentially political and economic, but at the same time, social and cultural." in Reddy (1947:72)

smashing campaigns intended to destroy icons and effigies of the Indian cultural elite: Tagore, Vivekananda, Iswar Chandra, Vidyasagar, Sir Asutosh Mookerjee (Dasgupta 1975). The movement was especially active in Kolkata and its most symbolic action was the attack on the Gandhi Centre at Jadavpur University in April 1969 (Dasgupta 1975). “Iconoclasm”³⁴ against 19th century social reformers and bourgeois political leaders (Banerjee 1980) was the most significant feature of unrest. They perceived universities as colonial institutions that inspired the youth with “reactionary” ideas (Dasgupta 1975). The young generation responded to the call of the charismatic leader Charu Mazumdar to carry raids on educational institutions, boycotting examinations, disfiguring the statue of national leaders and hoisting red flags (Singh 2006). As a consequence, “some of the finest brains and the cream of India’s youth in certain areas left their homes and colleges to chase the dream of a new world, a new social order” (Singh 2006). Newspapers at the time described them as the “cream of Bengali youth” and the “flower of Bengal” (Banerjee 1980). They were pictured as belonging to a *new left* that expressed distrust in the trade unions and called for boycotting grades and exams, and showed preference for a loosely organised party structure in the name of fighting “party bureaucracy” (Dasgupta 1975). Naxalite ideology attracted many students in the Presidency College university campus in Kolkata, where around 50 full-time Naxalites were active with hundreds of supporters (Singh 2006:123). Students and the working youth were advised to form red guard squads in their schools, colleges and respective localities.

Subsequently, the movement of youth radicalism spread to Delhi in places like St. Stephen’s College, Delhi School of Economics, Miranda House, Lady Sri Ram College, and in the politico-cultural club known as “Yugantak.” The movement reached its apex in 1972 with – according to Amnesty International – 17,000 jailed political activists in West Bengal alone (Amnesty Annual Report 1973). Between March 1970 and August 1971, 1,788 young boys were killed in Kolkata alone (Dasgupta 1975). One of the specificities of the time was the spontaneity of the movement in urban areas (Dasgupta 1975; Banerjee 1980; Mukherjee 2007) compared to the rather politically organised movement in the countryside (Banerjee 1980). The urban programme – such as the 1973 circular – of the newly formed CPI(ML) started with the incorporation of the impulsive acts of destruction that were indulged in by radical students.³⁵ The Naxalite annihilation programme in rural areas was more organised and directed against subordinates, traffic constables, plainclothes policemen, police officers and personnel of paramilitary forces like the Central Reserve Police (Banerjee 1980). In urban Bengal, Western ideas of liberalism, democracy, abundance, and remarriage (etc.) reached Indian students and contributed to creating a huge divide between the “progressive” city and the “conservative” village (Banerjee 1980). Having one foot in each of these two worlds, the 250 members of the newly formed CPI(ML) were all between the ages of 15 and

³⁴ “Iconoclasm” is the deliberate destruction of a culture of symbols and monuments, often for political or religious reasons (Gamboni 2013).

³⁵ The 1973 circular played a significant role in the initial period [...] Though the document had stated that the main concentration should be on the working class, the emphasis in urban areas was more on students and youth. “Maoist document: Urban Perspective” in Chakravarty (2010:323-348).

25 (Banerjee 1980); this figure is linked to the fact that the party was particularly interested in recruiting college union leaders by promising them leadership against the “existing education system” (Ghosh 1993).

2.2 The Villains: Youth Politics as Deviance

Contrary to approaches depicting the youth as the spearhead of social resistance, other accounts depict the youth as a category of social deviance, and a potential source of delinquency and conflict with older generations (Cohen and Young 1981). Probably the most salient example of this psychological approach today is adopted by Olivier Roy (2014), who labels youth fascination for violent political Islam not as an Islamic phenomenon, but as a nihilist drive of a generation – converts or second generation migrants – in search of a cause and at odds with the culture of their parents. Deviance is often associated with the status of the youth as unfinished adults, establishing the precariousness and instability of the pre-adult phase (Hall 1972 [1904]; Steinberg 2010; Crone et al. 2016). Because “youth” here means the transition from more established social categories of childhood to the independent unknown of adulthood, it embodies developmental variability and potential space for anti-social commitments.³⁶ It usually comprises individuals in their late teens through to their twenties, with a focus on ages 18-25 (Arnett 2000).

In the deviant approach, pioneered by American sociology in the interwar period – and championed by the sociology department of the University of Chicago (Bulmer 1986) – the youth tend to constitute alternative systems of symbolic meaning for individuals sharing a similar subculture (Cohen 1955) and labelled “deviant” by members of the dominant culture (Becker 1963). Explanations of student protests in the post-independence Indian context, and in particular in the 1970s and 1980s, lay stress mostly on deviance and inter-generational conflicts. Adulthood in the making is seen as turbulent in terms of changes in status (Fusselland and Furstenberg 2005), such that potential radical political commitments often happen at that fateful critical moment (Giddens 2001; Thompson et al. 2002) inherently related to the development of the individual’s personal identity (Erikson 1980).

In India, some authors have focused on conflicts in values between parents and dependants (Rege 1971; Singhvi 1972) while others emphasise the weakening of traditional authority structures (Sinha and Gangrade 1971; Malik and Marquette 1974) in the family and at school (Shils 1969), and the alienation of youth from the decision-making processes of political institutions (Singh

³⁶ This phase is characterised, among other things, by a relative independence from age normative tasks and involves experimentation with social roles (Arnett 2001). Recent scholarship emphasises “individualist” transition markers toward adulthood and concentrates on how this independent adulthood is self-perceived (Shanahan et al. 2005). Youth as *social individuation* involves psychological instability, and the development of an individual personality (Morch 1994; Hudon and Fournier 2012) that links with their formative milieu (Morch 1994). Pathways to adulthood being variable and extended in time (Morch 2003), more and more emphasis has been made on the first period of the transition that is called “emerging adulthood” (Arnett 1994, 1998, 2001; Arnett and Taber 1994; Aronson 2008).

1968b; Di Bona 1966; Ahluwalia 1972). As Shah (2004) summarises, the prevalent theory adopted by Indian sociologists and social psychologists in the 1960s and 1970s crystallised the notion of the “generation gap,” marked by youth impatience to acquire autonomy, urging them to get rid of their tutelage and enter conflicts with adults (Kakar and Chowdhary 1970; S. L. Sharma 1971).

Additionally, through focusing on the conflict between generations, this literature relied heavily on the idea of “student indiscipline,” stressing the inarticulate feelings of the educated Indian youth. Accounts on this matter depict political participation by the youth either as a component of party politics (Reddy 1947; Altbach 1968a, 1968b; Oommen 1974; Vidyarthi 1976b) or as an aspiration for agitation (Kabir 1958; Sardesai 1974; Gopalakrishnayya 1974). Altbach (1970) reports that 5 percent of student agitations were due to non-academic issues in 1964, 5 percent in 1965, and 17.4 in 1966. Such indiscipline is often the synonym of *goondaism* (criminal behaviour) (Oommen 1974; Sinha 1975), violent disturbances (Cormack 1961; Gusfield 1970; Di Bona 1966; Singh 1968a; Ross 1969; Vidyarthi 1976b) and a sustained effort to bribe voters in order to secure elective posts and further political careers. As Tables 2-1 and 2-2 (on the next page) suggest, the incidence of student agitations increased gradually in the 1960s and recorded high levels of incidents during the 1970s, with some years of exceptional numbers (in particular the period 1978-1980 and the year 1974).

Table 2-1. Reported Incidents of Student “Indiscipline” (1968)

Year	Incidents	Year	Incidents
1958	93	1971	4,380
1959	120	1972	6,365
1960	80	1973	5,551
1961	172	1974	11,540
1962	97	1975	3,847
1963	109	1976	1,190
1964	395	1977	7,520
1965	271	1978	9,174
1966	607	1979	9,203
1967	-	1980	10,600
1968	2,665	1981	7,740
1969	3,064	1982	5,200
1970	3,861	1983	7,188

Sources: Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, “Student Indiscipline” (1967, mimeograph), Report, 1979-80 (Delhi, n.d.), Report, 1980-1981 (Delhi, n.d.), and Third Report of the National Police Commission (Delhi 1980); and Data India, September 18-24, 1978, p.594.

Table 2-2. Examples of Student Agitation (1968)

Allahabad University (Uttar Pradesh)	Anti-rustication agitation
Osmania University (West Bengal)	Anti-defection agitation
Rajasthan University (Rajasthan)	Anti-English agitation
Ahmedabad University (Gujarat)	Anti-fee rise agitation
Students in Madurai/ Mysore and Gudur etc. (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh)	Anti-hindi agitations
Banaras Hindu University (Uttar Pradesh)	Eligibility of a candidate
Teacher's training College (Haryana and Punjab)	Pass percentage
Kurukshetra Uni. and Sudhar (Haryana and Punjab)	Girl molestation
Delhi University (New Delhi)	Hostel facilities
Lucknow University (Uttar Pradesh)	Arrest of protesting students

Source: Yuvak Kendra (1973).

The deviance approach to youth political culture has strong links not only with cinema³⁷ but with policy-oriented scholarship (e.g. McLean Hilker and Fraser 2009; UNDP 2006) aimed at resolving problems among younger generations as perceived by adults (Wulff 1995). Appointed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in order to curtail cases of criminalisation of student politics, the Lyngdoh Committee Report (2006) is probably the best illustration of student activists being perceived as a source of nuisance to adults and a disruption to other students on campus. The report's ambition is to maintain "academic atmosphere [and a] certain modicum of decorum and discipline on the campus" and to avoid "criminalisation in student elections." It recommends a set of guidelines³⁸ with the ultimate goal being to disassociate student elections and student representation from political parties (Lyngdoh 2006:112). The report had in mind cases of student violence in Kerala, especially one incident reported to the High Court of the state by principals of a college (affiliated to the universities in Kerala), complaining of a "state of chaos and anarchy." In her fieldwork on the social life of the youth in low-caste communities in a small town in Kerala, Lukose (2009) notes that, fearing violence, anti-*bandh* (anti-strike) movements developed at the end of the 1990s in an attempt to label mass politics as a form of corruption.

³⁷Numerous movies set in India depict the youthful generation as troublesome and/or socially victimised. Ketan Mehta (1984) in *Holi* pictures a rowdy lot of students on the campus hostel of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) becoming wild after being told by the principal that there will be no holiday on the day of the festival of colours. *Langde* (The Lame) in *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro* directed by Saeed Akhtar Mirza (1989) is a young small-time vandal living in communally tense Mumbai with his parents. Mira Nair in *Salaam Bombay!* (1988) portrays street adolescents of Bombay as thieves and Hashish consumers away from school. Quashiq Mukherjee depicts the life of *Gandu* (2010), a druggie and frustrated teenager in Kolkata stealing money from his parents. Even more famously, the rise in popularity of Amitabh Bachchan was inseparable from his roles of "angry young man" in *Zanjeer* (1973), *Deewaar* (1975) or *Muqaddar Ka Sikandar* (1978). In the 1970s and 1980s many movies also ascribe to the "resistance category" described in this chapter (pp.29-33). This is also the case for features belonging to the Naxalite-genre, with directors such as Tapan Sinha (*Apanjan* 1968), Mirinal Sen and his Calcutta trilogy (*Interview* 1970, *Calcutta '71* 1972 and *Padatik* 1973), Shyam Benegal (*Ankur* 1974, *Nishant* 1975, *Arohan* 1982), K.A. Abbas (*The Naxalites* 1980), Gaum Ghosh (*Maabhoomi* 1979), Prakash Jha (*Damul* 1985), Adoor Gopalakrishnan (*Mukha Mukham* 1985), Kumar Shahani (*Tarang* 1984), Govind Nihali (*Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa* 1998), Gaganvihari Borate (*Lal Salaam!* 2002), Gautam Ghosh (*Kalbela* 2009), the popular Sudhir Mishra (*Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi* 2003) and the militant Sanjay Kak (*Red Ant Dream* 2013).

³⁸ E.g. age and grade eligibility criteria, single attempt for candidates, expenditure ceiling, indirect elections, and nomination for large universities.

Fictional accounts of youth protesters as troublemakers are not rare in South Asia, as best exemplified by the case of Raju in the novel of S. Weeraperuma, *Sunil: The Struggling Student* (2009), in which a Sri Lankan up-and-coming young student leader, Raju, galvanises protesters towards murder and loot.

2.3 The Inheritors: Youth Politics as Recruitment

Apart from youth deviance and youth resistance, scholars have also scrutinised the more concrete roles taken by the youth in democratic institutions. ‘Youth’ implies not only an important section of voters, but constitutes also a share of the elected body. Political scientists have looked at youth candidates and their role as representatives of Indian democracy in two ways. Firstly, studies have scrutinised the performance of young heirs of political families (Chandra and Umaira 2011; Amundsen 2013; Carvelan 2015). Among the Members of Parliament (MP) elected in 2014, more than 20 percent are from political families (Chandra 2016) and around 40 percent of MPs from parties such as the Indian National Congress, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi party (SP) in 2009 had a family member preceding them in electoral politics. Patrick French (2011) has counted that among elected members of the current parliament (i.e. 15th Lok Sabha) aged 40 or below, two-thirds are from a political family background. In a democratic context, young heirs are seen as capable of compensating for the organisational weakness of their party (Chandra and Umaira 2011). Kanchan Chandra (2016) goes as far as to argue that young politicians backed by influential families are able to represent the “youngest ever electorate” (Rukmini 2014) and thanks to their presence, old patriarchs are more likely to step down in order to transfer power to them.

Second, the literature also considers student politics as a spring board for prospective leadership³⁹ (Hazary 1987; Singh 1974; John 1969). Philip Altbach (1970, 1992) notes that because of the legacy of the student engagement in the independence movement in India (and more generally in so-called new nations) political responsibilities assumed by students are more easily accepted than in the West. Even in an age of mass education, he claims that students can be more readily referred to as an “incipient elite” that has a legitimate say in political affairs.

Regional political mobilisation has often favoured the emergence of young leaders chosen for their ability to agitate sections of youth. Former Chief Ministers (CMs) of Bihar (Lalu Prasad Yadav of the Rashtriya Janata Dal, 1990-1997 and Nitish Kumar from the Janata Dal United, *inter alia* 2005-2014) and Uttar Pradesh (Mulayam Singh of the Samajwadi Party, *inter alia* 2003-2007) began as activists in the aforementioned youth-based JP movement. In Assam, current (2016-)

³⁹ For instance, the last two General Secretaries of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Prakash Karat and Sitharam Yechury, started organised politics in Jawaharlal Nehru University (Lochan 1996). As I write (June 2016), three of the five Chief Ministers who succeeded in the Legislative elections of last month have a record of student activism in their youth. Here are two cases: Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal began as a student leader in the Indian National Congress party (Goshal 2016); Pinarayi Vijayan in Kerala was a communist district secretary in what became the present Students Federation of India (SFI).

Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal worked under former Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, and both gained prominence as student leaders of the ethno-nationalist All Assam Students' Union (AASU) (Baruah 2016). This must be understood in the context of the emergence of a longstanding linguistic and regionalist movement in the region.⁴⁰ Similar examples can be found when scrutinising communal militancy,⁴¹ other regional/linguistic movements,⁴² and conflicts over the implementation of positive discrimination.

At local levels, youth and student wings of parties are visible during various electoral campaigns (general election, state assembly elections, campus-level elections, etc.) and on a day-to-day basis in some cases. These student organisations – I introduce some of them in the historical section of this chapter – build on the fairly long legacy of political alignment and mentoring on campuses across the country (Emmerson 1968; Singh 1974; Baran 1978). This tradition has taken root in the 1930s when leaders such as Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru started using student forums both as a recruitment agency and a tribune to pressurise the Congress towards more independent and radical positions (Altbach 1970). This approach was soon emulated by the then united Indian communist party which took control of the main organised body of students at the All-India Students' Conference in Nagpur in 1940 (Reddy 1947; Rajimwale 2001). After independence, various new political outfits created their own student wings in order to gain control of university campuses. For many aspiring youths, political participation is viewed as an instrument for future leadership in national or regional politics. Often derided by students as opportunists or sycophants (*chamchas*) (Kashif, interview 2015), leaders (*netas*) among the students are associated with politicians and blamed for their careerism (De Souza 2004). While the pre-independence (1905-1947) student movement is presented as highly nationalist in ideology (Chandra 1938; Reddy 1947; Hazary 1987; Rajimwale, 2001), many studies portray campus students after the colonial period as highly de-politicised (Altbach 1969, 1970a, 1970b; Mehta 1971; Vidyarthi 1976a; Chopra 1978).

⁴⁰ In the 1980s (1979-1985), the AASU (All Assam Students' Union) advocated for the detection and eviction of Bangladeshi immigrants from the state and the granting of greater autonomy (Bora 1992; Sinha 1995; Baruah 2002; Deka 2013).

⁴¹ Hindu students were key players in pogroms against Muslims in the 1980s onwards as well as anti-Dalit attacks, especially in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (Beteille 1992; Heuzé 1992; Brass 1997; Engineer 2002).

⁴² Students substantially supported the 1965 anti-Hindi protests (Forrester 1966) in Madras State (today's Tamil Nadu) and participated in the movement for the creation of the state of Telangana, including the 1952 *mulki* agitation (Ram 2007) and more recent mobilisation leading to the formation of the state in 2014.

2.4 The Impressionable Years: The Distinctiveness of Educated Youth

Some scholars have asked whether in the context of South Asia youth political practices are generated by much stronger norms present in wider society. The question is whether younger generations in India are more likely political refractions of broader phenomena, such as class and ethnicity, space and place, gender and sexuality, media, the politics of multiculturalism, artistic production and forms of consumption (Sampat and Mishra 2014). Two survey studies show that the young generation have similar voting patterns when compared to other life stages. Basing her argument on a study of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in New Delhi, Vibha Attiri (2014) reports that the awareness of political events among the Indian age group 26-33 years is lower compared with the average of their younger counterparts (18-25 years, cf. also Sampat & Mishra 2014). Furthermore, through analysing five parliamentary elections covering the period 1996-2014, Kumar (2014) recognises that the voting patterns of the youth does not differ from those of other generations. The study concludes that overall educational experiences of the Indian youth does not increase their political consciousness in the long run – “consciousness” entailing both long-lasting political knowledge and transformative ideological understandings.

CSDS data show that education has contradictory effects on youth. Though education shares a positive relationship with interest in politics (see also De Souza et al. 2009), it does not necessarily increase participation in election-related activities – such as attending meetings, distributing pamphlets, and collecting funds for parties. In urban areas, non-literates are a more participatory group than the college-educated youth, while in rural areas the opposite is true, as attaining education also make rural respondents more likely to participate. Moreover, at the aggregate level (rural and urban), and contrary to male peers, uneducated women overall participate more than their college-educated counterparts. As shown by De Souza and colleagues (2009) – also using CSDS data – the youth display a moderate interest in political matters, and such interest is more likely when parents are themselves interested in politics. Authors conclude that there is evidence that an inter-generational transmission of interest in politics is at play. “The youth do not seem to be very different from the general population when it comes to Expressing opinions about politics and democracy” the study concludes.

Such findings, emphasising the political continuity between parents and the youth, echo the significant outcomes of quantitative literature in the West, which shows that political partisanship is most influenced by childhood socialisation (Settle, Dawes and Fowler 2009; Healy and Malhotra 2013). Most surveys that take time as an independent variable stress the importance of the parents’ worldview in the development of radical (Førland, Korsvik and Christophersen 2012) or conservative (Barni et al. 2014) worldviews of children, which display stability across adulthood (Stoker and Jennings 2008; Lewis-Beck, Nadeau and Elias 2008). These studies concentrating on pre-adult family transmission show that parents have more influence than professors and peers (Percheron, Mayer and Muxel 1993). Effects of family socialisation on campus behaviours are many. Children with more egalitarian gender-related attitudes have higher

probabilities of better educational expectations (Davis and Pearce, 2007) and college students select subjects to study in line with familial political views (Elchardus and Spruyt 2009).

It is very possible that these studies in fact underestimate the political outcomes of the ‘college moment’. Recent scholarship has shown the limits of the *persistence model* which argues that residues of pre-adult learning persist through life (cf. previous section). Studies asserts that certain young adults are particularly open to changing their early acquired political perceptions in consistence with the *impressionable years model* (Hatemi et al. 2009; Henry and Sears 2009; Ho et al. 2012) or the *life-cycle model* which claims that individuals are attracted to certain attitudes at specific life junctures, such as conservatism at the age of retirement and radical ideas at a young age (Jennings and Niemi 1981; Fillieule 2013). The argument is that the cognitive schemes of the youth (Johnston 2012) cannot draw on an extensive accumulated experience in socio-emotional realms to solve problems successfully, therefore lead to the adoption of innovative strategies – potentially radical – rather than routine strategies (Blanchard-Fields 2007). In general, fresh encounters (Mannheim 1928; Keniston 1968) and the accumulation of new experiences among legitimate peripheral participants – that is, newcomers – are presented as the transformative forces of individuals, leading to the development of new *Weltanschauungen* shaped by influential persons and masterful elders (Lave and Wenger 2008 [1991]). Experiences in alternative spaces facilitate exposure to alternative trustworthy recipes for interpreting the social world by “interrupting the flow of habits” (Schutz 1976:96), by bringing remote changes into proximity, creating the conditions of a “generational effect” (Mannheim 1928), “affective commitments” (Klandermans 1997) and a “sense of the game” (Bourdieu 1990 [1980]:81) for non-mainstream politics. Karl Mannheim (1928), as mentioned earlier, was the first person to articulate this view. He famously argued that each generation, since it grew up in a particular and distinct socio-historical environment, has a type of “fresh contact” with its surroundings. Inglehart (1990) reminds us of this formative process stating: “Fundamental principles and the order of priorities are established in the formative years leading to maturity.” This led to the conclusion that the youth as a life experience can be analysed diachronically, as a dialectic between individual strategies and the effects of a new social environment (Corcuff 2001).

Several studies show that the adjustment to the *qualità dei tempi* (features of time)⁴³ can influence the generation of that time (Jennings 2002). Traumatic events for a given population, such as for the French youth during the Algerian War and the protests of May 1968 (Percheron 1991), or for the Americans during the Vietnam War (Erikson and Stoker 2011), contribute to the construction of a collective political memory.⁴⁴ The work of Annick Percheron (1974) identifies three possible roles of education in shaping political attitudes of students. The content of classes (from secondary

⁴³ This is a notion first introduced by Machiavelli in *The Prince* (2010 [1513]:XXV).

⁴⁴ The current young generation in Western democracies have in common a mistrust for institutions and representatives, lower voting turnout and partisan allegiance, a lack of belief in political narratives, and greater involvement in participatory forms of democracy (Muxel 2015)

school to university) determines to a certain extent the understanding of institutions and norms of one's society. School is also a place where certain democratic mechanisms are taught (class representatives, school councils, life in community) (Percheron 1984). Almond and Verba (1963) for instance showed the efficiency of school participation in the preparation for political life. Finally, school at all levels is the place where the youth learn certain forms of horizontal social relations with peers (Percheron and Bonnal 1978). Existing scholarship usually supports the notion that higher education has an impact on socio-political attitudes since students socialise with each other (Dey 1996) and university provides free space to cultivate alternative ideologies (Polletta 2012) and interact with class-mates from diverse cultural and social backgrounds (Bowman 2013).

Several ethnographic studies in the West rely on the fundamental assumption that local contexts such as a campus space influences political preferences (Gallego et al. 2014), thus emphasising the transformative impact of interpersonal relations (Johnston et al. 2005; Johnston and Pattie 2006). This approach is at odds with most behavioural studies in the United States that consider political attitudes as a product of personal calculus, irrespective of an individual's immediate social environment (Beck 2002). Recent literature on social movements has been less hesitant to acknowledge the importance of physical and social environments on the selective socialisation of youth cohorts. Literature looking at biographical consequences of social movements identifies several possible outcomes linked to participation in a particular setting. Commitment to political activities not only involves political learning (Beck 2002), but also the opening up of new life chances (Goldstone and McAdam 2001) and the acquisition of new identifications (Whittier 2009) fostering in turn the institutionalization of grassroots protests (Giugni and Grasso 2015). Personal transformations are accompanied by shifts in political imagination (Blee 2016) and religious orientation (Sherkat and Blocker 1997), they trigger feelings of satiety over victorious issues (Gupta 2009) and are preceded by a phase of cognitive liberation (McAdam 2010 [1982]). As summarised by Giugni (2004), follow-up studies of student-based American New Left activism show that participants remained differentiated from non-activist generations even years after this transformation. They displayed more radical ideologies and greater participation in conventional politics and protests. These studies acknowledge the long-lasting effects of collective exposure to political environments. Within these settings, cohorts of participants build distinct collective identities (Whittier 1997). Campus peer relations are often fuelled by a dual process: on the one hand an already formed group assimilates the new student, and on the other, the student accommodates the new environment with her own expectations (Levine and Moreland 1994).

2.5 Do-it-yourself: Youth and Everyday Grassroots Politics

If the overall relationship between youth and politics is now clearer, there is still uncertainty regarding how youth politics is operationalised at the grassroots level, in distinctive cultural spaces such as youth clubs, political associations, NGOs and informal meeting spaces. Perceptions of the youth presented in previous sections focused on relationships between groups on the basis of age (Durham in Merritt 2012), rather than as local cultural agents in their own right. In the last

twenty years of scholarship, more and more emphasis has been given to the youth as social actors embedded in the cultural politics of everyday life (Lukose 2012), indexing forms of social action and power relations. These approaches see the youth as *shifters*. The word shifter is a linguistic term used by Deborah Durham (2004) in order to name a phenomenon in the cultural world that can be understood only in the context of particular use. She considers “youth” self-identification by eclectic individuals in Botswana to be relative and ideographic, thus qualifying them as shifters. The youth therefore appears to be based on social circumstances rather than chronological factors, thus leading sociologists and anthropologists to scrutinise how the youth negotiate, renew and reproduce cultural forms in a specific social context (Bucholtz 2002).

This approach coming from various fields using ethnography as a tool of enquiry (including political science and education) warns about stylised depictions of age roles (Jeffrey 2009). It proposes to go beyond the totalising, and sometimes *a priori* approaches to youth selves (Baizerniain and Magnuson 1996), either as class-based sites of resistance or as deviant subcultures.⁴⁵ This new approach of the youth stresses the flexible and contingent agency of the youth (Aitken 2001; Jeffrey and McDowell 2004) without approaching the category from the point of view of adulthood, concentrating on multiform reactions to stimuli that they receive from the larger environment. This conception bears similarities with the anthropological notions that try to make sense of social innovation. The paradigm of *bricolage* (do-it-yourself) developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966:22) comes to mind, a principle in which *bricoleurs* “build up structures by fitting together events, or rather the remains of events” and in doing so develop a “science of the concrete.” In this regard, the youth are not seen mainly as a “trajectory” towards adulthood but as an “identity” in constant evolution, as a cultural category and not a psychological and biological stage of human development (Hannerz 1992; Ides 2009).

In view of this, ‘Indian youth’ becomes a lens through which to think about many of the political questions being debated in the region, for example around governance, gender and the structural transformation of the economy. The youth are associated with the notion of agents of change at the local level. New young and educated political entrepreneurs, the *naya netas* (new leaders), have mushroomed in many rural areas (Mishra 1977, 1980; Manor 2000, 2015; Krishna 2002, 2013a). Building on rising educational levels and the lowering gap in educational achievements, this non-caste-based section of youth has developed a culture of assertiveness that belonged in the past to local landlords, establishing themselves as middlemen between the state and ordinary citizens. *Naya netas* reject formal bonds with certain political parties, bargaining with politicians and government officials to leverage better development resources. On a rather different note, Osella and Osella (1998) show how youth college structures can subvert hierarchies in everyday life though friendship and flirtation, a finding replicated by Nisbett in his study of cybercafé

⁴⁵ While the British tradition prefers to see the youth as political activists, the American tradition of deviant youth subcultures is associated with unsympathetic public perception of youth (Durham 2004).

culture in Bangalore (2007). Youth culture has also accelerated the trickling down of globalisation at the local level. Several ethnographers have questioned processes of liberalisation through the lens of youth culture, considering for instance youth middle-class informants in Kathmandu and Bombay as the vanguard of consumer culture (Liechty 1995, 2003; Mazzarella 2003). Globalisation does not mean the end of traditional values, however. For example, Sarangapani (2003), Benei (2000) and Parry (2003) offer a picture of how primary school children in South Asia have integrated decade-long ideological functions such as nationalism and regional identity-building.

This conceptual turn, discarding chronological age as a meaningful analytical category (Meyer-Fortes 1984), has a major impact on the study of youth politics because it pushes researchers to concentrate on the youth as experienced by respondents – instead of naturalising assumptions about the youth and age-dependent behaviours. Some have justly argued that youth culture is not only generated but generative (Nisbett 2007) so on an everyday basis the youth can creatively interpret ways of doing politics. This perspective, interested specifically in grassroots forms of politics, underlines the need to diversify approaches to youth politics and go beyond studies on large scale mobilisation only. Recent social movement studies on the youth acting in defiance against public policies⁴⁶ or authoritarian regimes (in particular in the context of the Arab Spring⁴⁷ in the early 2010s) described participation as pro-social, technology-friendly, prefigurative activities, and outline ideals of spontaneity, leaderlessness and non-hierarchy as core underpinnings of these movements (Glasius and Pleyers 2013; Biekart and Fowler 2013; Mercea 2016). However, such accounts tend to forget to inquire whether these aspects of political youth pertain also to non-movement based politics, or what happens during the long intervals between periods of mobilisation.

The accounts below are good examples of how the educated youth indulge in ‘interest-based politics’ on an everyday basis. Building on the categorisation that Craig Jeffrey proposes in a working paper (2014), I distinguish three overlapping forms of grassroots youth politics in the South Asian context. The first entails organised forms of political activities involving small groupings such as gangs⁴⁸ or local institutions.⁴⁹ Related studies are usually less interested in or focussed on formal electoral and party politics, and more on local issues of resource access (Jeffrey 2014). The work of student organisations counts as organised youth politics, but its social role in South Asia has not been studied properly. A few notable exceptions can be found, portraying student organisations not as an ideological space but as a tool for local prestige and influence. Lukose (2009) notes that the public nature of student activism led by the Students’ Federation of

⁴⁶ i.e. *Occupy* (Van Gelder 2011; Calhoun 2013), *Indignados* (Atak et al. 2014; Gerbaudo 2016) or *Nuit Debout* (Ruzé 2016).

⁴⁷ For a literature review, see Howard and Hussain 2013a.

⁴⁸ Research on gang culture includes ethnographies in Chicago (Venkatesh 2008), Central America (Rodgers 2009), and Nigeria (Pratten 2008).

⁴⁹ Case studies include accounts of Kenyan slumdweller federations (Makau 2011) or “youth-focused” contemporary volunteer groups in urban Vietnam (Valentin 2007).

India (SFI) in small colleges of Kerala attracted young men indulging in masculine sociality, including what one of her informant calls *chethu-fying* (i.e. acting like a *chethu*, a Malayalam word for being fashionable).

Jeffrey (2012) is also interested in the way everyday politics is practiced by these small groups of youth for personal gains. He describes cultures of limbo among middle-class educated men (predominantly Jats) in Western Uttar Pradesh, showing how they reproduce their power at the local level, mainly through dominating campus politics and channelling contracts for businessman and seats for students in private local universities. He argues that aspiring middle-class leaders, even those formally involved with the Students' Union of Chaudhary Charan Singh University (CCSU) and aspiring career politicians, had not developed close links with a political party, concentrating instead on organising student protests on campus (Jeffrey 2010). Kumar (2012), sharing the same fieldsite as Craig Jeffrey, places an emphasis on the competition between non-ideological candidates of the *biradari* (Jat community) to gain support from their community and capture the presidency of the Students' Union. In his account, student organisations seem to be useful only in providing tickets for the election; in return, young men form an important base for a political party and provide logistical support during local and parliamentary elections. Ruud (2010, 2014) claims in his fieldwork that student organisations gain power through resource allocation. He notes that after the Bangladesh Nationalist Party victory in 2001, the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCP) took control of student halls in Dhaka, nursing *mastan* (political bullies) and practicing what he calls 'seat politics' (Ruud 2014:307) – coercing students into joining JCP and protesting for them in order to get a seat in a campus residence.

Other recent publications have confirmed the current consensus that organised student politics is an articulation of such interest-based politics, dealing mostly with campus accommodation, administrative efficiency, job prospects and daily amenities (Altbach 1970; Hazary 1987; Shah 2004). The only recent account of a value-oriented (as opposed to norm-oriented) form of youth activism orchestrated by student organisations is reported by Snellinger (2005). In the context of the Nepalese civil war (1996-2006), she identifies the rebirth of ideological indoctrination and democratic polarisation on campuses, a move led by seven Free Students' Union (FSU) organisations along with the Marxist-Leninist All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU).

Recent student movements suggest that moral values have played a stronger role in mobilising students around a variety of causes. This includes the Jadavpur University *Hokkolorob*

movement,⁵⁰ the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) protests,⁵¹ the Rohith Vemula agitation⁵² as well as the JNU mobilisation in February-March 2016. Thus, it may constitute a very visible re-politicisation of the educational institution in the public imagination (further discussed in Chapter 3).

At the grassroots level, organised youth politics bears similarities with “social youth politics” (Jeffrey 2014). This type of political practice includes young individuals or small groups busy mediating between different institutions not primarily for personal gains and not in the name of organised institutions or political parties. A few examples are worth mentioning: Krishna (2012) shows how the youth in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh often serve as change agents within their families and the village community through engaging in social entrepreneurship, tutoring and personal care. In his opinion, the educationally successful youth in impoverished environments could serve as a model for raising the aspirations of others (Krishna 2013b). Similarly, socially active youths from minorities often prove useful in leading community organisations (Kanungo 2012). Dalit and Muslim young political animators serve as points of contact for their community in various settings such as student hostels where they can help to access the administration and write official letters (Jeffrey 2010). Here again, it is the figure of intermediary that best defines the social utility of youth. Jeffrey and Dyson (2016) describe how *jawaans* (young people) in the Indian Himalayas through defining themselves as social men serve as intermediaries or interstitial generations (Naafs and White 2012), using their recent experience of the arenas of education, marriage, health and employment to assist younger youth (cf. also Mines 2014) and negotiate with state authorities.

The last strand of grassroots politics involving the youth concerns the work of individual profit-seeking political entrepreneurs, thoroughly grounded in the nitty gritty of “getting work done.” This category can be conveniently labelled as ‘individual youth politics’. Studies on youth fixers resonate with the larger literature on political intermediaries and middle-men (*dalals*) in the subcontinent (Manor 2000; Berenschot and Piliavsky 2014). For example, the figure of the *Fixer* (Poonam 2015) in a piece by the same name is embodied by Prasad, a 24-year-old young man with IT skills in a small town of Jharkhand, making a living as intermediary between needy citizens and the state through providing legal documents for various welfare schemes. In practice,

⁵⁰ The *Hokkolorob* (literally, “let there be noise”) movement started on 16 September 2014 after an alleged case of molestation of a female student in Jadavpur University in Kolkata. A day later, police entered the university campus where protesters had *gheraoed* (locked in) the Vice-Chancellor. The violence of the assault triggered protests across India, including Mumbai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru. JNU students participated in most of the protests organised in Delhi.

⁵¹ Agitating students of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in Pune (Maharashtra) went on a half-year (139 days) strike from June to October 2015 following the appointment of a politician from the Bharatiya Janata Party (and former television actor) as chairperson of the Institute.

⁵² Rohith Vemula, a Dalit PhD student in University of Hyderabad (Telangana and Andhra Pradesh), committed suicide in January 2016 after being expelled from his student residence over baseless charges of violence against a rival ABVP activist. His death, accompanied by a poignant suicide letter, provoked huge student protests against what several politicians labelled as an “institutional murder.”

youth practitioners seem to obscure the distinction between traditional fixers and social workers and it is important to acknowledge how “profit seekers” also appear to be “community aides.”

Youth-based practices of patron-client relations are skewed towards maintaining existing class, gender, and ethnic hierarchies (Martin 2014). Jeffrey and Young (2012), through showing how young Jat in Meerut creatively appropriated processes of liberalisation, demonstrate that their *jugaad* (i.e. popular Hindi idiom meaning “finding a way around”) entrepreneurial careers have successfully converted political know-how into economic capital. Jats have dominated campus politics and benefited from privileged networks acting as brokers between private educational entrepreneurs and universities, therefore reinforcing their relative social privilege (Jeffrey, Jeffrey and Jeffrey 2010; Jeffrey 2012). Individualised youth political action also includes the creative management of “vital conjunctures” such as prolonged unemployment – experienced as “boredom” (Masquelier 2013), “being stuck” (Sommers 2012) and “in limbo” (Honwana 2012). Such hardships can lead young people to join labour institutions (Mills 1999), indulge in everyday politicking (Mains 2012) or initiate innovative waste recycling ventures (Thieme 2010). Occasionally, in a more surprising way, the memory of political youth becomes an apologetic construct. Hughes (2013) shows how fixers involved in the Sri-Lankan left insurgency Janatha Vimukti Peramana (JVP) label their past as “youth” in order to seek a moral excuse, an absolution for engaging in self-interested politicking.

2.6 Establishing Campuses as Autonomous Political Fields

These various explanations for the role of the youth in Indian politics have proved useful in making sense of the youth’s interactions with parents, the state, political parties and local organisations. I find particularly useful the empirical views of the youth as an autonomous sociological category. These accounts place the youth at the crossroads between familial, recreational and professional contexts, and avoids essentialising them into turbulent cum revolutionary others reduced to a set of psychological postures. Although these studies on the youth in the Indian context provide terrific insights, two major observations can be made about them.

The college period, the time between adolescence and “passing out”⁵³ has become for many middle and upper classes in India a protracted affair like in many other Western countries (Furstenberg, Rumbaut and Settersten 2005). However, youths’ political understandings are not primarily approached academically in the light of particular social consequences of protracted residential higher education. In this thesis, I demonstrate the importance of viewing university campuses –

⁵³ In popular Indian English, the act of graduating and finishing studies is often referred to as “passing out”.

and the contextualised interactions⁵⁴ they shelter – as *specific* sites of political socialisation, not simply embedded within larger city of social contexts.

In the South Asian context, the current overreaching tendency is to consider campuses as unspecific spaces, integrated in the wider ecology of the city in which broader societal tendencies crystallize.⁵⁵ In such approaches which lack micro-historical contextualisation, campus presence is not an analytical variable but rather an accidental ethnographic setting reflecting dominating political trends. Examples were introduced earlier: socially and economically dominating Jats reenact their power in Western UP campuses (Jeffrey 2012) and middle-class Malayali students renegotiate masculinity and consumer culture in their university (Lukose 2009). It should be asked whether a specific campus culture, contradicting the hegemonic tableau, is able to reproduce itself, irrespective of the background of its members. It is fundamental to know if a particular non-dominating ideology and culture, deposited in campus premises by history, can be transmitted from one generation of youth to another by various generational units.

The question is whether the “college moment,” as an interstitial time-space between students and the broader society, can pass down a political culture that is at odds with the wider environment. To put it simply, what needs to be learned is whether a campus can be described as an autonomous territory, incorporating selectively the political traditions it draws upon. Assessing such cultural autonomy of campus spaces is not an easy task, as it requires reconsidering the way everyday politics in educational institutions is approached. My suggestion is in addition to looking at campuses as repositories of life stories mediated by broader political phenomena, scholars should pay more attention to how campuses mediate the understanding students have of broader politics. See the world through campus lenses; this perspective on educated youth requires conceptualising universities as potential micro-territories of new social and ideological experimentation.

Moreover, there is a need to scrutinise how different small cohorts of individuals among the youth are important in forging the political views of their peers. As summarised in this literature review, there is a strong emphasis on the youth as a life stage impacted by the political attitudes of parents and the broader community. However, the politicisation of everyday life emerging among individuals who enter a social movement within a year or two of each other are rarely taken into account. These finely graduated groups – called micro-cohorts by Whittier (1997) – are observable in Indian universities because of the informal hierarchies established between senior students and junior ones. The nature of the interaction in the space of campus between *freshers* (new students) and more advanced students can inform the researcher about the way political generations emerge and are sustained in universities such as JNU.

⁵⁴ Put in more academic terms, we can understand approaches to interactional contexts as “situational logics” (Schelling 2006; Fillieule 2012).

⁵⁵ As we have seen, current approaches of everyday politics portray educated youthfulness as an experience reflecting broader phenomena such as unemployment prospects, globalisation and patriarchy. When looking at the variables affecting the youth today, the emphasis is not on educational spaces *per se*, but on caste, class, community, family and residential backgrounds and, more rarely, age as a developmental indicator.

While youth can be understood as a particular category of socialisation, through which certain students develop specific attitudes and cultures, it cannot be considered as a completely homogenous group. When young individuals from various backgrounds join JNU, a variety of initial opinions are found, but because of continuous inter-generational transfer of political values, such variability tend to be streamlined overtime after spending time on campus. Hence, it is the specific environment of campus that makes educated youth a relevant category of analysis, because JNU students undergo a series of distinct political changes shaped, to a certain extent, by the exposure to political activities led by older generations on campus – including those of senior activists and influential professors.

In Whittier's definition (1997), "Micro-cohorts are clusters of participants who enter a social movement within a year or two of each other and are shaped by distinct transformative experiences that differ because of subtle shifts in the political context." This approach draws on Manheim's (1928) idea that within the same age group, several "generation units" can be found (Whittier 2013). Put simply, I want to claim the relevance of the notion of seniority when looking at the way political values are passed down from one generational unit to another in the context of campus life. It is quite common when looking at university students' political attitudes to scrutinise the interaction between professors and their students. In the ambit of daily politics within university premises, the knowledge of ideology and Indian history is not only transmitted in the classroom but outside of it by authoritative students, elder students, *bhayya*, *didi* (older brother, sister, cousin and friend). It is necessary to examine how such key political figures on campus serve as intermediaries between formal organisations, official ideologies of political parties and others, including freshers and 'regular students'. I consider the possibility of theorising the importance of campus spaces as sites of new political learning conveyed by a network of influential figures, including affiliated elders, friends, and professors. I call the sequential process through which grounded political knowledge is internalised and negotiated (involving attitudes such as political rejection and assimilation) within campus space as *campus political socialisation*. For my purpose, *campus political socialisation* can be defined as a continuous, multi-situated and processual interaction (Fillieule 2001) in which campus-based Indian youth develop new understandings of society, gender, labour, caste and post-independence history.

As the study concentrates on the political life of an institution of higher education, structural constraints of a university campus need to be taken in account. Verma and Sharma (2003) note that in India the burdens of schoolwork at the university reduce the time for developmental activity. Though predominantly interested in the way young people negotiate post-educational terrains, Jeffrey (2009) points out that the youth in search of pleasure often find themselves integrated in "organised recreational time" on campuses, leaving space for new political commitments. In the process of negotiating autonomy, the young student usually reduces his home-based leisure time and concentrates more on community-based activities on campus (Verma

and Sharma 2003). More generally, Lipset (1968) claims that the “academic ecology” of the campus is extremely important in order to understand the political commitment of students.

Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus proves useful to unravel mechanisms of youth politicisation and substantiate the notion of campus political socialisation. He notes that the passage of the child through educational institutions restructures the socialisation of the primary habitus – i.e. “transposable system of definitions acquired initially as a result of the conscious and unconscious practices in the family” (Bourdieu 1990 [1980]:134) – and the result of this socialisation gives birth to secondary forms of habitus. Bourdieu understands habitus as a “conductor-less orchestra” and a precondition for the coordination of practices among individuals of social bodies who share an identical history (Bourdieu 1996 [1989]:84). Because individuals brought up in the same school have similar experiences they internalise the same capital (cultural, economic and symbolic) and therefore have more chances of reproducing the same practices, social trajectories, and chain of determinations that structure action. The social mechanisms that “ensure the production of compliant habitus are, here as elsewhere, an integral part of the conditions of reproduction of the social order” (Bourdieu 1990 [1980]:59).

The campus has its own spatial and temporal rule that contributes to make the university a separate field in the Bourdieusian sense, “as a network of relations between and among positions actors hold within particular structural or organisation systems” (Eisenberg 2007). Bourdieu and Passeron (1979 [1964]:32-33) explain that because of the sudden disappearance of the traditional machinery of community integration, the university brings a transformation of social relationships and renewed forms of cooperation. Because of the existing competition for best grades and academic positions, students may experience loneliness and longing for the comforts of the family atmosphere and they are inclined to build strong networks of solidarity on campus – and subsequently identify with them in order to distinguish themselves from other competitors. From a different angle, it can be also considered that because university is often for Indian youth the first experience of ‘freedom’ away from the social control of relatives, friends on campus can sometimes become a sort of surrogate family.

By insisting that these ingrained dispositions of habitus are a “generative mechanism” (Jeffrey 2014) enabling autonomy in ideological orientations (Percheron 1992), Bourdieu provides the ethnographer with the conceptual tools to understand how social reproduction also involves inventiveness, agency and a capacity to draw on older idioms. Put differently, I acknowledge that the habitus of a young person is often derived from her parental and social upbringing, but then acts as a generative set of principles from which quite different social and cultural forms can be subsequently produced (Bourdieu 1990 [1980]:54-55). To construct his or her own identity as a student first implies defining the identity you do not want to have; this can lead the student to reject conformity to the majority of non-politicised students; “to distinguish oneself as a student means, in fact, to distinguish oneself from the student essence in which one encapsulates others” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979 [1964]:39). To paraphrase Bourdieu again, it is possible to see the youth as the result of a “socially constituted subjectivity” (Bourdieu 1990 [1980]:122; Bronckard

and Schurmans 2001; Corcuff 2001; Lahire 2001). This consideration is important when attempting to make sense of an individual's reinterpretation, rejection or reproduction of their cultural and traditional environment. In this regard, adolescence and post adolescence are crucial in creating and consolidating values that will belong to the individual's personality. This theoretical insight, influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, is crucial when assessing whether campus political socialisation can grasp processes by which Indian university students acquire or discard political attitudes.

In conclusion, primary and secondary socialisations might be at least equally relevant in the socialising process of the contemporary Indian youth. A significant stream in the literature outlines the importance of everyday school participation in the preparation for political life, and the body of work of Pierre Bourdieu proves relevant to conceptualise the mechanisms of political socialisation influencing a university setting. In the context of JNU, the thesis will then examine what kind of political knowledge is socialised and how such transmission is operated on a daily basis in the space of campus, vehiculated by peers, seniors and elders. Through engaging with the history of youth activism at JNU, the next chapter will examine how the political culture of the left has been empirically grounded in the campus landscape from one cohort to the next.

3 Student Activism and Left Legacies at JNU: An Historical Account (1971-2016)

This chapter explores the roots of JNU student politics. Before turning to the study of the effect of political activity on campus, the following pages explore how politics became a central aspect of campus life in the first place. Indeed, a phenomenon of political socialisation is a consequence of an already existing political culture, which need to be traced historically back to its various original instigators. The continuities of the ideas promoted by these groups serve as an indication of a certain persistence of specific political practices, suggesting that inter-generational political socialisation might be at work. Because it deals with the origin of campus politics at JNU, this chapter serves as a prerequisite to understand the functioning of *in situ* political socialisation. It does not answer the question of how such a phenomenon works on campus, it tells us rather why it is made possible through sustained youth-based political activity.

Relying on various sources, including on the material of the PaRChA archive, I look at the way left political organisations, through their student wing, and supported by outspoken sections of professors, influenced campus culture and contributed to the forging of a left-leaning, value-based and increasingly anti-establishment activist voice in the Indian political landscape. Building on historical accounts, I argue that JNU, as well as being the centre of high learning,⁵⁶ can be described both as a space of competition between various left organisations and as an autonomous space informed by the broader culture shared by these organisations, secularism and social inclusion, scepticism over the liberalisation process, and democratic values of freedom of speech.

JNU displays specific and overarching political features, which I summarise here. Just a few years after its debut, JNU students started electing dissenting Marxist-inspired candidates, thus becoming in the collective opinion a bastion of the student left along with a few other campuses such as Jadavpur University, Presidency College (West Bengal), Osmania (Telangana) and several colleges in Kerala (Aikara 1977). Most commentators, whether enthusiasts or sceptics, consider JNU from its inception as a landmark in Indian politics (Batabyal 2015). It has been recognised as a socialist bastion (Pattnaik 1982), a space of academic and political dissent through debate and discussion (Shakil 2004), a place where professors preach new-left ideologies (Bhasin 1974) and an environment in which activism is an integral part of student life (Lochan 1996).

As mentioned in the introduction, the establishment of JNU first reflected the ambitions of the socialist left at the centre (1964-1975). Contemporaneously, a generation of highly educated upper-class students created and strengthened a proactive Students' Union. The Union, which was meant as an instrument of politicisation of the campus and which was deeply influenced by Marxist thought, the union took direct part in the affairs of the university from the very beginning. After

⁵⁶ A substantive historical account of JNU history, covering the period 1964-1989 has been published recently (Batabyal 2015), focusing on the institution as a centre of excellence. For a more detailed picture on the discipline thought at JNU, its curriculum and the faculty, I invite the reader to refer to this reference as my aim here is to concentrate on its student politics.

the Emergency, the Union reflected more clearly the regional domination of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) in West Bengal and Kerala (1977-2004). Finally, in the last decade, it has been promoting the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) CPI(ML), a formerly Naxalite Bihari-centric organisation converted to parliamentarism. I also account for the emergence on the campus of new contending pan-Indian organisations, particularly the Hindu nationalists of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). I point out in this chapter the various steps that led JNU to progressively stop mirroring political trends at the national and regional level, thus indicating a relative marginalisation of the type of politics it professes.

3.1 From Redbrick to Redbrick: Generation 1971 and the Establishment of JNU Students' Union (1971-1977)

From all the accounts which I could gather, it appears that the first batch of students admitted in the red-brick-walled JNU had a significant impact on the way the campus valued left ideology. “Many of them came to JNU from red-brick British universities where they had acquired *avant-garde*, left-wing tendencies” acknowledges a Committee of former professors and students when recalling the early days of the university (Committee Paper II 1996).⁵⁷ Two figures give a good indication of the elite composition of the first JNU batch. In 1971, there were only two MA and 19 MPhil students originating from rural areas out of a total of 179. Thirty-four percent of the students admitted that year were domiciled in Delhi (JNU Administration Data 1982), a number falling to around 9 percent for 2015 admissions (RTI 4667 2015). At the Centre for Historical Studies, 60 percent of the seats were reserved for students from the capital (RTI 4667 2015).

Two additional characteristics of this generation qualify them as a “privileged cohort.” Firstly, as showed by Trow (2007), the elite character of a university is highly dependent on the relationship between teachers and scholars. In the first years of JNU the teacher-student ratio was 1:5, a number four times lower than the Indian average then (Koshey 1973c). A former student recalls that there were only 12 students in her class (Rao 1996) and many alumni remember the privileged interactions which they used to have with professors whom they regarded as mentors (Souvenirs 2009:22,28,74). Romila Thapar indicates that the first faculty put great emphasis on a new form of interaction between students and teachers, which was based on the interdisciplinary discussions of concepts such as feudalism, colonialism and capitalism as well as on the use of the tutorial system which was in place at Cambridge and Oxford (Thapar 1996). Aforementioned Prof. Namvar Singh says that the School of Social Sciences developed a semester system that aimed at facilitating increasing interaction between students and teachers. According to him, “the hostels and teachers’ flats were built next to each other to help promote free interaction” (Rao 1996).

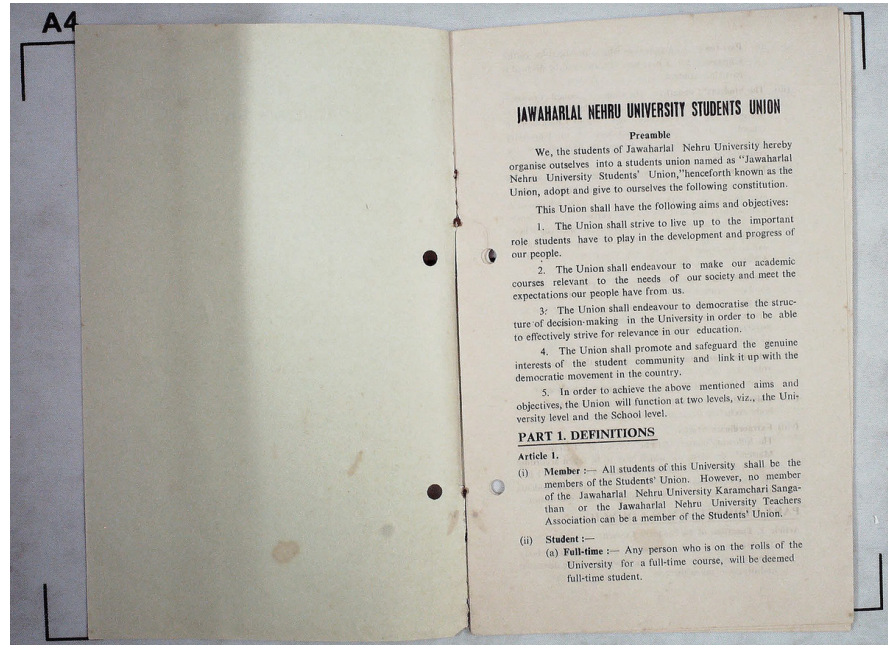
⁵⁷ A “Red-brick university” initially referred to six prestigious universities – now part of the so-called Russell Group – with buildings of brick, founded in the major industrial cities of Great Britain in the 19th century (Truscot 1951).

Several senior JNU professors who were also JNU student leaders (Kumar 2008), such as Prof. Kamal Mitra Chenoy and Prof. Anand Kumar note that this special interaction between students and professors was naturally sustained by the fact that students of the first generations later joined JNU as faculty members (Chenoy 2009). Often, when the young generation of JNU students started engaging in political activities, they had in mind the political past of JNU faculty. “Our new-found intellectual bravado drew encouragement from the fact that many teachers had political pasts” admits Prof. Dipankar Gupta, another early-day JNU political activist turned professor (Gupta 1996).

The second component of JNU elitism was the ability of leading students to articulate ideological axioms of various streams of the left in English. The year 1977, notes Harbans Mukhia, stands out as an example of such a linguistic practice concerning Marxist theory. JNU student – and now professor in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) – Jairus Banaji was a “superb speaker in English” (Mukhia 1996) advocating the Trotskyite line against D.P. Tripathi, an expert of the Indian communist movement (and later to become general secretary of the Nationalist Congress Party of India) (Banaji 2016). In the early 1970s, another highlight of the politico-intellectual life on campus was the Friday evening seminar on Marxism (Suneet, interview 2015) organised by the Student Federation of India (SFI), the newly formed student wing of the CPI(M). SFI’s main aspiration to monopolise the representation of subaltern groups was, however, challenged by a non-affiliated group, the Free Thinkers, whose political leaning relied on the thought of socialists Ram Manohar Lohia and Jai Prakash Narayan (Pattnaik 1982:38).

It was in this atmosphere of left-leaning debates that the JNU Students’ Union was founded in September 1971 (Karat 2004). The establishment of such body was done independently from the administration (Tripathi 2016) as mentioned in the preamble of the constitution, shown in Image 3-1 on the next page: “we, the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University hereby organise ourselves into a Students’ Union named as ‘Jawaharlal Nehru University Students’ Union” (JNU Constitution 1980). The main feature of the constitution was the provision which allowed students to form an Election Committee (EC) in order to hold Union elections (Karat 2004). The EC is still an autonomous body today.

Image 3-1. Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union's Constitution (1980 copy)



JNUSU became a central institution from a very early stage. Student-Faculty committees were set-up and looked into all matters concerning students (Singh 1996), including problems related to admission (Karat 2004). The Union reflected the progressive dominance of SFI over the newly formed campus politics, which translated into newer critiques against the way the university selected its new batches. The second Students' Union president (1972-1973), SFI-affiliated Koshy, repeatedly criticised the elitist nature of the university by quoting the JNU ambition for JNU of V.K.R.K Rao, former Union Cabinet Minister for Education: “[JNU needs to] create among our elite, a sense of social awareness and promote compassion and attitude of identity with the masses” (Koshey 1973).

In two articles denouncing the elitist structure of the university, SFI leaders made public their dissent with administrative polices (Karat 1975; Chopra 1978). These critiques were published in the *Social Scientist*, the journal edited today by JNU-based economist and CPI(M) affiliated Prabhat Patnaik. In 1973 weightages (Koshey 1973b) were given for students from deprived socio-economic backgrounds following the first *gherao* in the history of the university (Mukhia 1996). Such politics proved efficient as Prakash Karat, the future general secretary of the CPI(M) (2005-2015) was elected president of the Union (1973-4). In 1975, the SFI-led Students' Union precipitated the university to its first closure (i.e. *sine die*) when on 7th April (Chenoy 1975a) 300 students squatted at the administrative block paralysing its functioning (Pattnaik 1982:43). The bone of contention was the possibility for students to assess teacher's grading practices and to denounce, if needed, cases of victimisation. Such concern over grading reflects the tendency of Indian student politics at the time to concentrate predominantly on internal issues (cf. Chapter 2).

The JP movement (also called Bihar movement) mentioned above, exerted a certain influence on JNU politics by temporally enabling the emergence of new non-affiliated political voices. As said by a collective of the alumni: “By the time JNUSU conducted the fourth election [1974], the left hegemony was seriously challenged under what may be described as the inspirational appeal of the students’ movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan (JP)” (Committee Paper 1996:184).

After initial student agitations in Ahmedabad, Gujarat (Narayan and Amritlal 1977), another group of college students decided in early 1974 to organise themselves in Patna, Bihar. The newly formed Bihar *Chhatra Sangarshan Samiti* (BCSS) (Bihar Student Struggle Committee) protested, among other things, high tuition fees, poor-quality student accommodation and the rise of food-grains prices (Chandra 2003; Carasco 2016:210). Supported by the veteran freedom fighter Jayaprakash Narayan and by a heterogeneous range of opposition parties (Jana Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal, Socialist Party, Swatantra Party, dissidents of the Congress, etc.) a Delhi branch of the *Chhatra Sangarshan Samiti* was soon created in both Delhi University and JNU (Pattnaik 1982:39). In the latter university, the division between the formerly allied communist parties, SFI (sympathetic to the JP movement) and AISF (whose parent party supported the Congress government) led Prakash Karat to lose the 1974 student elections (Committee Paper II 1996). The winning presidential candidate, Anand Kumar, had strong ties with the JP movement (Vijetha 2013; Anand, interview 2015) and activist credentials from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) (Bhoomika 2008) left for the United States a couple of months later to pursue his PhD. Consequently, in the mid-term student elections that followed, a SFI candidate won back the presidential post (*The Indian Express*, 1 February 1975). It appears that except AISF, the vast majority of student activists and the Students’ Union supported the Bihar movement, “Expressing solidarity” with the anti-corruption agitation (*Times of India*, 18 March 1975). They also came out of the campus to join hands with the all-India general strike organised in May 1974 (Karat 2004).

3.2 Delhi’s Left Front: the SFI-AISF years (1975-2004)

After its initial steps, the political setup at JNU became institutionalised, and it can be argued that many characteristics of contemporary student politics at the university took roots during that period. To understand how national events – in particular after the turn of the 1990s – influenced campus politics will be useful when turning to the study of JNU political socialisation. The anti-establishment ethos of the Students’ Union dates back to the anti-Indira “Resistance” movement (see next subsection) in the mid-seventies. The anti-Hindu-right discourse goes back to the escalation of communal politics in the early 1990s, and the intensification of the left-left rivalry dates from the early 2000s when AISA successfully challenged the SFI hegemony.

Let us start with the broader political picture. In West Bengal, a populous eastern Indian state, an alliance between communist and socialist parties ran the government for 34 years, from 1977 to 2011. This alliance was called the Left Front. At the centre, from July 1977 to July 1979, a

disparate coalition of anti-Congress forces ranging from the Hindu-right to the proponents of Gandhian socialism took over (the Janata government), but that same year (1977) the CPI(M)-led Left Front won its three-cornered contest in Bengal. Jyoti Basu became Chief Minister, and other left forces, either parliamentary (i.e. CPI) or anti-parliamentary (i.e. CPI(ML)), were reduced to a minority role for the next three decades (Bhattacharyya 2016).

On a smaller scale, JNU mirrored this historical trend in Delhi. CPI(M), which had managed to make inroads into JNU campus politics a couple of years earlier through its student outfit, the Students' Federation of India (SFI), became in 1977 the quasi-hegemonic political organisation of the university. It was already dominant from 1972 to 1975, winning the post of president twice, even though it was defeated in the 1974 election. As indicated in Table 3-1, SFI won the presidential post 22 times between 1971 and 2015, indicating its historical dominance over JNU campus politics. After the state of Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi (1975-1977), SFI successfully gained the trust of students (and of part of the faculty) and struck a one-time alliance with AISF. JNU's SFI not only trained a significant section of the CPI(M) leadership, it left a longstanding imprint on the Marxist culture of the campus.

Table 3-1. Political Affiliation of Elected Presidents of JNU Students' Union 1971-2015

Student Organisation	Parent Political Party	Number of Presidents
SFI	CPI(M)	22 (52.38%)
AISA	CPI(ML)	9 (21.43%)
AISF	CPI	1 (2.38%)
NSUI	INC (Congress)	1 (2.38%)
ABVP	RSS	1 (2.38%)
Other (Non-affiliated org.)	None (Indep. or renegade)	8 (19.05%)
Total		42 (100%)

The main elected student organisations are:

AISA: All India Students Association, student wing of Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist CPI(ML),

SFI: Students' Federation of India, student wing of Communist Party of India Marxist CPI(M),

AISF: All India Students Federation, student wing of Communist Party of India CPI,

ABVP: Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, student wing of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh RSS,

NSUI: National Students' Union Of India, student wing of the Indian National Congress.

Other student organisations at JNU are:

DSF: Democratic Students' Federation, associated to Left Collective,

DSU: Democratic Students' Union, supporter of the Communist Party of India Maoist CPI(Maoist),

UDSF: United Dalit Students' Forum, sympathizer of the BSP Bahujan Samaj Party BSP.

I outline in this chapter three different sub-phases which show how JNU student politics started to be influenced by larger political developments. Firstly, I observe how the repression against JNU students by Indira Gandhi's police led to the establishment of an anti-Congress front on campus (1975-1983). Second, I look at how the SFI-AISF dominance was challenged by mostly independent student groups (1983-1991). The last section gives an account of how these contending groups were progressively replaced on campus by nation-wide student organisations, including the National Students' Union of India and, more importantly, the RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (1991-2004).

3.2.1 The Anti-Indira Front: “The Resistance” and its aftermath (1975-83)

On the 8th [1975] of July at 5 in the morning hundreds of armed police jeeps raided the hostels in Jawaharlal Nehru University Campus [...] Among those arrested four have been associated with Students’ Union in the past [...] despite all their best efforts the police could not arrest the president of the Students’ Union. (Collective the Resistance 1975a)

The so-called Emergency had begun and many activists,⁵⁸ facing arrest by the police, formed a group called “The Resistance” (Yechury 2004). SFI affiliated student Prabir Purkayastha was captured by mistake in place of Union president under Emergency law (i.e. Maintenance of Internal Security Act, MISA) (Collective the Resistance 1975b), while JNUSU was suspended and the chairman of the Student Council (Collective the Resistance 1975c), Ashok Lata Jain (Collective the Resistance 1975c), was expelled from JNU after calling for a boycott of lectures (Collective the Resistance 1975c; Chandiramani 1975a). Later in the year, after staying underground for four-and-a-half months, the president of the Union, D.P. Tripathi, was arrested on November 11, 1975 (Tripathi 2004).

At a recent alumni conference (2013), Sitharam Yechury, the current general secretary of CPI(M) and an active SFI member at JNU during the Emergency noted that: “The character of JNUSU went through a qualitative change after Emergency...we [JNUSU] functioned during Emergency, it was a learning period for this generation” (Yechury 2013). This period was indeed a turning point because the university sided behind the Students’ Union who became an anti-authoritarian body. In 1975, teachers supported the boycott against the removal of 11 names from the list of students admitted in the university. In a pamphlet circulated at the end of August, the underground student-based group “The Resistance” indicated that “most of them [teachers] did not go to take the classes despite a circular from the Registrar asking heads of Centres to report names of teachers who did not take the classes” (Collective the Resistance 1975d, Chandiramani 1975b). Second, the student wing of CPI, rapidly disobeyed and went against the party leadership by siding with “The Resistance.” On September 23, 1975, the secretary of AISF at JNU, Kamal Mitra Chenoy issued a pamphlet, entitled *Once Again Closure of JNU?* which followed the pro-Emergency CPI line: “we must not allow anonymous groups [i.e. The Resistance] to disrupt our academic life” (Chenoy 1975b). Two days later, on 25th, he repudiated his former stance and announced that AISF had decided to boycott classes on the next day – in order to protest against the abduction of Prabir Purakayashtha (Collective the Resistance 1975e). This 48-hour turnaround indicates the birth of an anti-establishment front, and the beginning of a long collaboration between SFI and AISF at JNU.

The collective experience of the Emergency united the students, professors and activists behind the idea of democracy. From April 1977 to February 1978 (JNUSU pamphlet 1996), no less than

⁵⁸ The “Emergency” is a period between 1975 and 1977 in which the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi restricted Parliament powers and curbed civil liberties after Allahabad High Court invalidated her 1971 election at the Lok Sabha i.e. the lower house of India’s bicameral Parliament.

three elections were organised on campus (*Times of India*, 24 February 1978). As indicated by their manifestos, SFI, AISF and Free Thinkers asked in 1977 for an inquiry against administrators who collaborated during the Emergency (Manifesto of the Democratic Front 1977, SFI-AISF Appeal n.d.). This led a large section of the students (*Times of India*, 21 November 1977) to prevent the VC from entering the campus premises (Nagchaudhuri 1996). It triggered the closure of the university for three weeks, pushing the students to self-manage the library (Pattnaik 1982:57), messes and classes which were taught by seniors and volunteers (Yechury 2004). Once again the Teacher's Association (JNUTA) sided with the students and opposed the closure (Committee Paper III 1996). Similar acts of irreverence continued in the following years, in particular on a specific occasion in October 1981, when Indira Gandhi was invited to inaugurate a function on campus (*Times of India*, 31 October 1981). Activists, who could not forget the repression of the students which she had unleashed during the Emergency (Gupta 1996) welcomed her with a cacophony of slogans to protest against her visit (Mukhia 1996).

3.2.2 Three Non-Affiliated Contenders (1983-1991)

In the 1980s, new political opponents emerged on campus. Unlike SFI, what characterised them was the absence of links with broader national platforms. Things started to change after the so-called "May 1983 turmoil" (Mohanty 2008) which led to the closure of the university during summer (Mohanty 2004). The president of the Union at the time, Nalini Ranjan Mohanty, was elected on a pro-Lohiate platform, the *Samata Yuvajan Sabha* (Equal Youth Assembly) (Mathoo 2013). His term was followed a couple of years later by a term of a *Free Thinkers'* (FT) representative (1986-87), FT being another non-affiliated socialist platform inspired by the ideas of Jayaprakash Narayan, which successfully challenged the electoral hegemony of SFI on several occasions.

Mohanty recalls that towards the end of March 1983, and after an alleged altercation with a hostel warden, a student was asked to shift residence. Protesting against the fact that no inquiry preceded the administrative decision, he and the secretary of the Students' Union went and broke the seal affixed by the administration on the student's room (Nalini, interview 2014; *Times Of India*, 15 May 1983). The former VC tells the end of the story.

At about 4 p.m. a big procession came to my residence, [they] cut the telephone wires and disconnected electricity. About 250 students forced into my house shouting slogans. [...] The *gherao* [sequestration] continued for 50 hours but I refused to yield [...]. My house was also ransacked and set on fire. [...] We were ultimately rescued by the police (Srivastava 1996).

In 1984, in a disenchanted climate,⁵⁹ a new admission policy was imposed (Committee Paper 1996; Srivastava et al. 1994; JNUSU Office Bearers 1998), which followed the closure of the university

⁵⁹ "The age of romanticism came to a sudden end, as if a torrential stream was damned by the fall of a meteorite. JNU saw its glasnost in 1983, when many curtains were lifted. A year later came the perestroika.

between May and July 1983, the exclusion of 17 student activists, and the administrative decision not to admit any new student for the academic year 1983-84 (*Times of India*, 16 July 1983; *The Indian Express*, 19 July 1983; *The Hindu*, 22 July 1983; *Hindustan Times*, 29 July 1983).

Several years after this event, another independent group, calling itself *Solidarity* caused student unrest in February 1990 (Sengupta 2013; Committee Paper III 1996). The group, which was inclined to discuss international issues and in particular the democratic movement in the Eastern Bloc,⁶⁰ had won the main post in the 1989 students' elections (De Souza 2004:24). The demands articulated by the president of the Union, Amit Sengupta, included the installation of telephone booths, the entry of women into men's hostels, student representation in the university's executive bodies, the implementation of the more inclusive old admission policy and the fulfilment of the Scheduled Caste and Tribe quotas. The protests that followed included the planting of saplings in campus residences, the encircling of the Vice Chancellor, and a 19-day fast (*Hardnews*, May 12 2016). Beside the electoral success of Sengupta and Mohanty, the period 1983-1991 witnessed the consolidation of the dominance of SFI over JNU student politics as they won nearly three-quarters (26 out of 36) of the elected seats at the university level during that period.

3.2.3 New Affiliated Contender: the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (1991-2004)

As highlighted in the previous subsection, during the first years of JNU student politics anti-incumbency political opposition to the CPI(M) dominance came mainly from unaffiliated student groups – embodied by the *Free Thinkers* collective and other small outfits. However, in the 1990s, the campus witnessed the growing influence of campus organisations linked with national parties dominating at the centre. Pranay Krishna, president of the Students' Union in 1993-4 notes:

The 1990s had brought a curious turn in JNU's political, academic and cultural life. The bi-polarity of SFI and FT [Free Thinkers] had broken. The politics of 'anti-SFIism' had disintegrated and the relatively peaceful, self-contained political life of the campus was increasingly coming under pressure from forces hitherto considered alien to JNU. The upper caste reaction against Mandal Commission recommendations prepared the ground for the advent of real right wing politics on the campus. Initially it was NSUI which championed it and later on after Babri Masjid demolition the ABVP gained substantial grounds. (Aijazuddin 1996:27)

In 1991, soon after the assassination of former Congress Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, an NSUI candidate was elected president for the first time.⁶¹ The same year, the ABVP, a student wing

The icon of a university could be demolished in just a few days' time in the year of the grand pause shows how fragile it was to begin with. The fall of the left bastion was celebrated far and wide" (Aijazuddin 1996).

⁶⁰ The name *Solidarity* is inspired by *Solidarność*, the independent trade union who challenged martial law and led the democratic transition in Poland (Sengupta, interview 2014).

⁶¹ Tanveer Akhtar, currently (June 2016) Congress member of the *Bihar Vidhan Parishad* (Bihar Legislative Council), was elected president of the Students' Union (Chand et Ahmad 2002) from NSUI (National Students' Union of India), the student wing of the Indian National Congress; the same year Badrika Nath Mahapatra (JNUSU Office Bearers 2004), a candidate of the ABVP, was also elected in the Union as joint-secretary.

part of the *Sangh Parivar*, or ‘the family of the Sangh’ (that is, of the RSS, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* or the National Volunteer Corps) made its first inroad into JNU politics and became particularly influential in the years 1996-2002 (ABVP pamphlet 2002). The ABVP’s strength at JNU peaked in the early 2000s when an ABVP candidate was elected president of the Students’ Union (Saikia and Mahapatra 2001).

The ABVP, arguably the largest student organisation in the country, was created in 1948 in Delhi (ABVP pamphlet 2014a) by Balraj Madhok, an RSS member who strongly advocated for an ‘Indianisation of minorities’ such as Indian Muslims (Jaffrelot 2012). Possibly because of its later repudiation by the RSS (Jaffrelot 2012), the legacy of B. Madhok is not mentioned even once in ABVP pamphlets at JNU. Instead, the figure of Prof. Yeshwantrao Kelkar, a lecturer in Bombay – who became its main organiser in 1958 – is put forward and exemplifies ABVP’s attempt to create a common platform for the teacher and student community (Kumar and Kumar 2009). Few former ABVP students could find a place of importance within the RSS and the BJP, which might suggest a certain aversion of the organisation for intellectual activists – a notable exception being the current editor of *Panchjanya*, the Hindi mouthpiece of RSS, who is a former JNU alumnus (Naveneet 2013).

As mentioned by the only ABVP Students’ Union president from ABVP, the politics of his organisation when elected was “very inclusive and campus-centric” (*Indian Express*, 22 March 2016). Accordingly, service and welfare-oriented activism was put at the centre of the anti-left narrative of the ABVP. Achievements put forward by the organisation included the creation of a Railway Reservation Counter inside JNU, the installation of the first cash dispenser, fast-track post, inter-university buses, the construction of a new student residence, the purchase of new library resources (Kumar 2001), and the lowering of minimum grades to register as PhD student (Routary 2000). Attempts to promote pro-Hindu-nationalist ideology were also witnessed. ABVP felicitated the opening in 2001 of a centre for the study of Sanskrit, an administrative decision that left student organisations opposed (Devi and Shakti 2001). Portraits of nationalist leaders and thinkers such as Bhagat Singh, Swami Vivekananda and Subhas Chandra Bose were installed in the Students’ Union office and the practice of flag hoisting by the Union on Independence Day was established (Devi and Shakti 2001).

It might be useful to see ABVP at JNU as a polariser, which concentrated critiques coming from all the left student organisations (Gyan, interview 2014). Most left activists I interviewed claimed that JNU’s ethos implies unity against the incidents of “right intrusion,” as RSS and BJP-inspired student politics are portrayed as non-secular and pro-capitalist. This claim should be nuanced, as the campus seems to instil political values in ABVP members that are at odds with some of their own leadership. One ABVP candidate acknowledges in a one-to-one discussion his “socialist

leanings” (Hrishabh, interview 2014), another activist criticises “caste humiliations” by Brahmins (Bharat, interview 2014), while a third, an elected representative derides RSS cow vigilantes (*gau rakshak*) (Saurabh, public speech 2016). I will elaborate more on this in Chapter 7 (pp.161-163).

The influence of ABVP politics, which promote Hindu-pride and nationalist assertion, needs to be acknowledged. Although it was never a leading force in JNU campus, its presence forced left activists to go beyond intra-left debates. For example, in October 2014, a raucous campus protest was organized by Hindu-centric groups including ABVP. The protests followed a seminar on “Mahishasur Shahadat Diwas” (Mahishasur Martyrdom Day) by a group of OBC and Dalits, who described this mythological figure (traditionally portrayed as a Yadav demon, i.e. killed by Hindu goddess Durga) as an allegory of upper-caste oppression (ABVP pamphlet 2014b, AISA pamphlet 2014a). A year later, an ABVP was elected as joint-secretary of the Union (2015), reiterating the performance of Sandeep Mahapatra (1999-2000) who was last to obtain a post of office-bearer (i.e. president) in the Students’ Union. “I must admit that it was in JNU that such an improbable thing could happen. It only reinforced my belief, that JNU is all encompassing and it has place for all irrespective of the ideology you follow” confesses the now Supreme Court Advocate (Mahapatra 2009).⁶² Now that the oppositional role of Free Thinkers, NSUI and ABVP has been clarified, let us examine the general features of the historical dominance of SFI over JNU student politics on campus.

3.2.4 “Study and Struggle”: An Overview of SFI Rules on Campus

The seriousness of students who were involved in search for difficult answers to difficult questions would become clear by referring to the slogan of “Study and Struggle” which was the guiding philosophy of student democracy [in JNU]. The philosophy of “Study and Struggle” was concretized by bringing Theory and Practice on the same level of intellectual activity. This marriage of Theory and Practice was reflected in interdisciplinary seminars on the Mode of Production, Semi- Feudalism, the social content of Indian Bourgeoisie, and the nature of anti-colonial struggles and the relationship between India and the Cold War Bipolar World. These seminars outside the class rooms were pioneering enterprise because they were participatory and transcended disciplinary boundaries. (Bhambri 2008)

For emeritus JNU professor C.P. Bhambri the slogan “study and struggle” best define the ethos of JNU activism. However, he omits to mention that this is a motto of the Students’ Federation of India (SFI), an organisation created in 1970 in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala (Banerjee 2008). The Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the SFI states that “theory without practice is lame and practice without theory is blind, which is reflected in our slogan ‘study and struggle’” (SFI booklet 2008). The reason for such an overlap between SFI motto and the alleged ‘spirit’ of JNU students is that, for many years, student politics at JNU was synonymous with SFI. In the thirty-year-period, between 1975 and 2004, 70 office bearers who were elected came from that organisation. SFI-AISF combined represents more than three-quarters (77 percent) of the total

⁶² In the same note, he feels the need to thank his supervisor at JNU who allowed him to pursue student politics while being in the process of writing his MPhil dissertation.

students elected in that period.⁶³ As I have outlined in the last section, the newly created organisation was the first organised political group and, by and large, the most influential inside the university.

Several explanations for the success of SFI can be given. Firstly, from the standpoint of the CPI(M) and its student wing, SFI, JNU was suitable in terms of party-building as, contrary to other campuses, fewer political competitors could be found. As a new university, RSS and the socialists were not as strong as in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, NSUI was not as influential as it was in Kerala, and the Chhatra Parishad – another student wing of the Indian National Congress – was not a relevant force as it was in West Bengal. Second, CPI(M) could find at JNU a suitable place for training ideologically a new incipient elite. As Surajit Mazumdar, former SFI JNUSU president (1988-89) and now JNU professor indicates, he could see at JNU the proof that “student politics and high quality of academics are not contradictory to each other but go in tandem” (interview 2014).

SFI's founders at JNU were two figures from the CPI(M) Central Committee,⁶⁴ namely Prakash Karat and Suneet Chopra, both of whom joined JNU after studying Marxist ideas in the UK; Chopra at SOAS and Karat at Edinburgh University (Suneet, interview 2014). Even a cursory look at the table of contents of No 50 of the Journal *Social Scientist* (1976), with its constellation of eminent JNU Marxists and CPI(M) leaders,⁶⁵ enables one to see how SFI-JNU placed itself at the core of the political and intellectual debates of the time.⁶⁶ The Centre for Economic Studies and Planning (CESP), launched its MA programme in 1973 and soon became not only the point of convergence of Marxist and Classical frameworks of political economy, but also a centre providing advice and support to numerous SFI activists (Mishra, interview 2014; Thrissuri, interview 2015; Kanjira, interview 2015). Some of their professors, along with a few others (in particular at the School of Social Sciences) and many CPI(M)-affiliated students became very skilled at giving public lectures, Though the PaRChA archive lacks SFI material for the period 1978-1993, I have gathered in Table 3-2 (at the end of this section) a few examples of public meetings organised at night in hostel canteens in the period 1996-2005. Since these events were introduced by SFI activists, they were also announced in one of their pamphlets on the same day

⁶³ Between 1975 and 2004, 110 elected Students' Union members were elected. 85 were from SFI, 15 from AISF, 4 from the Free Thinkers platform, 3 from SYS, 7 from AISA, 7 from ABVP, 2 from NSUI and 2 from Solidarity.

⁶⁴ Central Committee Elected at the 20th Congress, April 4-9, 2012, Kozhikode, Kerala (CPI(M) Central Committee 2016).

⁶⁵ The journal *Social Scientist* has been running since 1972. It has a Marxist orientation, dominated by the CPI(M).

⁶⁶ *Social Scientist*, Table of Contents v.5, no. 50, 1976: p.3 Bipan Chandra “Indian Peasantry and National Integration” p.30 Prakash Karat “The Peasant Movement in Malabar 1934-40 p.45 A V Balu “Marxian Political Economy Part Five” p.55 E.M.S Namboodiripad “Mao Tse-tung’s Contribution to Theory and Tactics of Revolution” p.67 Suneet Chopra “Problems of the Muslim Minority in India” p.78 S.K. Mittal “Agrarian Movements and Gandhian Politics”.

or the day before. These meetings reflected the ability of SFI to draw strong ties with the teaching body in order to gain additional support for their already well-established organisation.⁶⁷

Prakash Karat notes that SFI instituted the customs of visiting other sites and extending solidarity to causes outside campus (Karat 2004). Sitharam Yechury mentions that JNUSU organised relief teams of students after the 1978 Andhra Cyclone, a practice which other organisations have also taken up since then. JNUSU “relief missions” or “fact finding missions” are often sent on tragedy sites. This was the case, for instance, in Gujarat after the riots in 2002 (Shakil 2004:39) (along with relief funds and material) and in Muzaffarnagar twice (JNUSU pamphlet 2013; Radeshyam 1997) after the 1994 firing on unarmed Uttarakhand statehood activists at Rampur Tiraha Crossing and after the 2013 communal riots.⁶⁸

SFI protests on international issues are many, and most of them denounce Western imperialism. In 1973-74, the Union protested American invasion in Vietnam (Karat 2004). In 1981-82, they closed the university for a day in solidarity with Palestinians after the massacres in Sabra and Chatila (Sirohi 2004). In 1985-86, they held a debate on Apartheid in South Africa, the Polisario movement in Western Sahara and the Sandinista rule in Nicaragua (Arun 2004). Vijoo Krishnan, SFI Students’ Union president 1998-99, recalls protests against the French Ambassador who had been invited to speak on “peace in the nuclear age” (Krishnan 2004a). The SFI-led JNUSU in 2001-02 led a people-to-people contact programme in order to normalise Pakistan-India relationships, and a human chain was formed on 14 March 2002 to protest against Muslim pogroms in Gujarat (Shakil 2004). Rohan De Souza, AISF JNUSU general secretary (1989-90), takes the example of the Beijing Tiananmen Square Massacre and its impact on the question of socialism at JNU to establish the interconnection between the campus and broader issues (De Souza 2004).

In the same piece, De Souza (2004) establishes the need for bridging broader issues to the ones on campus, such as “construction workers right on campus and restoration of the old admission policy,” along with “the usual ‘struggle list’ for more hostels, buses, library facilities etc.” In January 1975 buses were hijacked to force the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) to reach campus hostels (*The Hindustan Times*, 15 January 1975). From early 2000 onwards, one of the principal sources of protest was related to the lack of in-campus student facilities (Abhay and Bose n.d.; JNU Discussion Forum Release 1996). However, the main long-running concerns on campus was the admission process and its inclusiveness. Since 1973, JNU examination board had

⁶⁷ SFI at that time could be characterised by its ability to combine a strong organisational presence and a focus on both national/international issues and concrete campus-based demands (cf. Chapter 6 for more). Vishnu Hans, a former SFI activist in the 1990s notes: “In Delhi University organisations do festivals during student admissions...in JNU we organise you...room to room campaign for at least a month prior to the elections. At that time SFI was so influential that we could appoint one person per hostel floor, we were that organisationally influential you know.” A section of a report pamphlet of the 27th Annual Conference of SFI JNU unit (February 19, 1994), entitled the *Future tasks of the organisation* emphasises the need to build strong ties with the students: “Live contact with the student community has to increase substantially at the earliest. For this, there is necessity of multifarious activities such as cultural programmes, debates, etc.” (SFI pamphlet 1994).

⁶⁸ An AISA pamphlet mentions several of their fact-finding teams in the period 2004-2011 (AISA pamphlet 2011a).

been distributing additional points on the basis of “economic and social backwardness” (Koshey 1973c). Still in 1982, the Union could help secure up to 15 points (20 earlier) of “positive discrimination” (Sirohi 2004) at the entrance exam for candidates from deprived socio-economic backgrounds (Karat 2004).

Table 3-2. Fifteen Public Meetings Organised By SFI-Affiliated Bodies (1996-2005)⁶⁹

PaRChA ID	Organiser	Title of the Public Meeting	Speaker	Date
ID-39409	Discussion Forum (SFI)	Neocolonisation Process in India	Prof. C.P. Chandrashekhar, Prabhat Patnaik	22/02/1996
ID-39519	SFI-AISF	Issues before the Indian People	M.P. Gurudas Dasgupta, CPI(M) Mohd. Yusuf Tarigami	28/02/1996
ID-40751	Marx Study Forum	Unfinished Task of Nation Building	Prof. Dipankar Gupta, Gurpreet Mahajan	04/03/1997
ID-37909	SFI-AISF	2nd Election Meeting	Prof. Irfan Habib	04/11/1998
ID-67923	SFI-AISF	One question to the ABVP	Com. Sitharam Yechury, Com. Battilal Barwa	09/11/1998
ID-37845	SFI	Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism	Prof. Utsa Patnaik, Prakash Karat, Prasenjit Bose	11/02/2000
ID-61441	JNUSU (SFI)	To Talk a Slide Show on Disarmament	Prof. Kanti Bajpai	12/02/2000
ID-61465	JNUSU (SFI)	Public Meeting on Withdrawal of SC/STs reservation in PhD	Prof. Mohan Rao, Prabir Purkhayastha	03/04/2000
ID-39116	SFI-AISF	Pre-election public meeting	Brinda Karat	09/11/2000
ID-48087	JNUSU (SFI)	Attacks on Education: The saffron Onslaught	Prof. Yashpal, Iqbal Niyazi	12/10/2001
ID-41590	JNUSU (SFI-AISF)	Unity March Against Criminal Violence	Prof. Prabhat Pattnaik, K.M. Chenoy, Jayati Ghosh	12/08/2002
ID-61629	JNUSU (SFI)	Gujarat: Reaping the Harvest of Hatred	Prof. C.P. Bhambri, Utsa Patnaik	21/08/2002
ID-68029	SFI	The Struggle Against Communalism: Where do we stand today?	Com. Sitaram Yechury, Com. Nilotpal Basu	05/12/2003
ID-44665	SFI	Onwards to the 18th CPI(M) Party Congress	Prof. S.K. Thorat, P. Sainath, Jayati Ghosh, Krishna Swaroop, Praveen Jha, Vikash Rawal	13/03/2005
ID-68153	SFI	Politics and Violence: Question of Democratic Culture in Campus	Prof. Girijesh Pand, Praveen Jha, Vivek Kumar	10/08/2005

3.3 The Flaming Fields of Bihar at JNU: the AISA years (2004-)

While in the 1990s the emergence of nation-wide opposition student groups at JNU threatened the hegemony of SFI over campus politics, in the 2000s an effective change of student leadership took place in the university. In order to understand the change in dominant JNU Marxist politics on campus in the last decade, it is important to do a brief historical detour, looking more precisely at the state of Bihar.

⁶⁹ In the period 1994-2015 (till February), 823 pamphlets announce explicitly public meetings in which at least one “Professor” or a “Dr” is invited to speak. The actual number of appearances of such professors is much higher as some of the speakers or guests are not introduced with their academic title (Prof., Professor, Dr.); for convenience reasons I decided to leave them out of the total count.

In 1986, a document called “Reports from the Flaming Fields of Bihar” was released in order to sustain the political line of a Maoist-inspired group, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation (CPI(ML)), commonly called in south-Bihar *Maley*. In its introduction, the general secretary (1975-1998), Vinod Mishra (1947-1998), draws the line between its movement and other left ones. On the one hand, he criticises the social-democrat and anti-Maoist line of Bengal’s CPI(M), who have failed to make inroads into the landless sections of rural Bihar (Krishnan and Fazal 1994). On the other hand, he reassesses the “annihilation line” advocated by various rival⁷⁰ Naxalite groups in the Region.⁷¹ At the third Party Congress (Mishra 1982) of the CPI(ML) he admitted that armed struggle somehow impeded the construction of mass peasant movements (see also Bhatia 2006) and antagonised middle peasants and landless Dalits (see also Kunnath 2009). The same year, through the reinterpretation of the guerrilla-oriented founder of the movement, Charu Mazumdar, the organisation created an overground platform, the Indian People’s Front (IPF), which progressively accepted the ideal of contesting elections (Sen 2010). In 1989, CPI(ML) Rameshwar Prasad was elected as Member of Parliament from the Ara constituency (Jaoul 2011). In the following Bihar Assembly elections (1990), IPF won seven seats and finished second in another fourteen (CPI(ML) Party Document 1997). The All India Students’ Association (AISA) launched at Allahabad on 9 August 1990 subsequently won student elections in a number of universities (Singh and Rai 2010, Menon and Inteshar 2004), including Benares Hindu University (Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh), Allahabad University (Uttar Pradesh), and Kumaon University (Nainital, Uttarakhand) (Siddhardha and Awadhesh 2006). AISA also made inroads into JNU student politics as early as 1993, winning three out of the four major posts.

3.3.1 AISA’s First Attempt: The Chandrashekhar Triennium (1993-6)

AISA had a successful though short-lived debut at JNU, but an important one for the history of its campus politics. Firstly, AISA was instrumental in the emergence of an emblematic figure of JNU activism, who appeared capable of successfully bridging campus activism with ground-based politics in rural areas. Chandrashekhar Prasad was born in 1964 in Bihar’s Siwan district and belonged to the Kushwaha community (JNUTA and JNUSU Collective 1997). After quitting military school, he came to JNU in 1990 as a CPI activist but soon joined AISA in its formative years (AISA leaflet 2008). He was elected first as vice-president of the Union and then president twice in 1994 and 1996. A year later, while returning to Siwan as a full-time *Maley* activist he was

⁷⁰ In the region of Bihar in the 1980s, many Maoist groups were rivals. It included the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Class Struggle [led by Kanu Sanyal], the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) People’s War [usually called People’s War Group or PWG], Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Party Unity and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC). Most of them joined hands to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist) in 2004.

⁷¹ Naxalites and Maoists are two words used interchangeably to denote extreme-left wing political commitment in India. This predominantly rural-based movement began to undertake insurgent activity in several north and central district of West Bengal (Midnapur, Birbhum, Jalpaiguri) and in the Telangana part – mainly Srikakulam – of Andhra Pradesh. The initial Naxalite movement had a meteoric phase after the formation of a party – i.e. the CPI(ML) – in May 1969 and relied at the time on intellectuals and upper social milieu educated mostly in Bengali universities.

killed by a local criminal (Alam and Anlyan 1997; Sharma and Krishnan 1997; Venkat and Awadhesh 2006). A pamphlet, dated from 3 April 1997 signed by the “Friends of Chandrashekhar” mirrored the spontaneous emotion of the campus:

“The angry but restrained students broke through the security cordon and sat on a dharna in front of the UF [United Front] office at Akbar road, surrounded by hundreds of *lathi* [fighting stick] wielding policemen [...] they rightly pointed out the hollowness of the ‘social justice’ of JD [Janata Dal, the party in power in Bihar at that time] and asked why the party protected *goondas* [criminals] like Shahabuddin and his henchmen. [...] Let us challenge the might of this brutal State! We can! We must! We should! We want justice! Justice! Justice!” (Friends of Chandrashekhar 1997a, from more see also 1997b; JNU Students Coordination Committee 1997; Free Thinkers Pamphlet 1997).

After the tragic episode of the Emergency, the assassination of Chandrashekhar marks one of the few movements of unity across party lines among students, professors and activists at JNU. Consequently, Chandrashekhar started embodying the sacrificial figure par excellence; I will engage more with the notion of martyrdom in campus politics in the next chapter (cf. in particular Table 4-1 p.88).

The rooting of AISA at JNU in the mid-1990s enriched its ideological repertoire, while training a small group of individuals who led, a decade later, the organisation to complete dominance over JNU campus politics. Tapas Ranjan, a JNU AISA activist in the mid-1990s, notes that Pranay Krishna Srivastava, the first AISA Students’ Union president reinforced the organisation’s ideological affinities with the socialist thought of Ram Manohar Lohia (Tapas, interview 2014). Pamphlets of the time show AISA’s emphasis on women’s rights, often signed by joint-secretary (1995-96) Kavita Krishnan,⁷² the future secretary of the CPI(ML) All India Progressive Women’s Association (AIPWA) (Krishnan et al. 1997, Ahmad and Ranjan 1996, JNU pamphlet 1996). In July 1996, the AISA unit came with a proposal of enquiry committee for “gender related crimes” (Nagalia, Ahman and Anjum 2014).⁷³

Contrary to SFI, AISA did not have close relations with the teaching faculty and JNU academia and both leaders of the time, Kavita Krishnan and Tapas Ranjan, did not complete their PhD.

⁷² Kavita, a CPI(ML) politburo member from Tamil Nadu but raised in Chhattisgarh by a metalworker father (interview 2014) is responsible for making women issues compatible with the orthodox Marxism of the party. The following section of a 1997 pamphlet written by her is a perfect example of the Feminist-Marxist combine: “Free thinking feminism, which, since it does not define itself as Marxist, necessarily has no consistent agenda for social change; and is thus in no position to change patriarchal structures. This leaves them in the position of defining *sati* [widow immolation], dowry, or rape as evils in a basically good society rather than the symptoms of an oppressive class-divided society. This deplorability inadequate position is paralleled by a “Marxism” which refuses to see the specificity and materiality of gender oppression and thus refuses the need for a feminist politics. AISA reiterates the need for Marxist Feminism and a feminist Marxism as integral and synonymous parts of our ideology and struggle” (Krishnan and Tanweer 1997).

⁷³ A year later, the Vishaka Guidelines were promulgated by the Indian Supreme Court in August 1997. This led to the creation in 1999 of a Committee at JNU enquiring into cases of sexual harassment, the Gender Sensitization Committee Against Sexual Harassment, an outcome strongly supported by the SFI JNUSU at the time (Krishnan and Himanshu 1999; Kumar and Bose 1999; Pritpal and Bose 1999).

However, as mentioned earlier, their union managed to restore (Krishan and Tanweer 1997) part of the deprivation point system for JNU applicants (Krishnan 2004b).

After the death of Chandrashekhar, the organisation lost its popularity. In 1996, a split within the organisation occurred, with the creation of an independent outfit, the Co-ordination Committee for Revolutionary Democracy (CCRD) led by a student called Ashok Sharma – whose student room previously served as party office for AISA (Panda 1996; Sharma and Kent 1997). Another reason for the setback could have been the inability of the organisation to ally with other left student organisations. A 1994 hand-written letter from the president of AISA unit proposes a formal alliance with AISF, on the grounds that “AISA is becoming the mightiest political pole against communal-fascist forces on the campus” and that “in many north Indian universities, we have fought unitedly and against the big brotherly attitude of certain forces on the question of left unity” (Srivastava 1994). However, AISF remained a major ally of SFI until the 2012 elections and up to now has never allied with AISA at JNU.

In campus, ideological differences among left organisations are not always articulated publicly, however, they do exist. Apart from tactical and historical divergences, the main point of contentions between SFI, AISA and AISF regard the nature of the revolution to come. Bluntly, SFI opposes the National Democratic Revolution line of AISF, which relies on an alliance between the “progressive sections” of the Indian bourgeoisie and the working class (Rajimwale 2004). The People’s Democratic Revolution line advocated by SFI, which calls for an alliance between the proletariat, the peasantry and the so-called “petty bourgeoisie” (Karat 2000) is challenged by AISA, mainly because of CPI(M)’s anti-peasant “opportunist line” and their embrace of a neo-liberal industrial development model in West Bengal (Mishra 1988; *Liberation*, August 2016).

3.3.2 The Gradual Fall of SFI (2004-07)

It is significant to note that SFI’s fall from grace is associated to a region-wide controversy with nation-wide repercussions: Nandigram (Bhattacharyya 2016:155-212). In an interview with former JNUSU president (1989-90) and current CPI(ML) general secretary, Dipankar Bhattacharya made clear that the episode of forceful eviction of peasants in Nandigram in West Bengal – for the purpose of construction of industries⁷⁴ – became the central focus of the anti CPI(M) discourse of CPI(ML) (Dipankar 2009):

All civil society organisations, people’s movements, have to forge forces. The CPI(ML) is known for its history of peasant resistance – and it has to play a special role in this convergence. Because of the Nandigram massacre there is also a ‘*Lal Hatao*’ campaign, an anti-communist scare. If one section of the Left in power is pushing for the SEZs [Special Economic Zones], other communist forces are fighting against it also.

Consequently, from 2007 onwards a deluge of critiques fell on SFI’s parental body and finalised the transition of representation power from them to AISA. Roukeli, general secretary of the SFI

⁷⁴ The aim was to acquire land for SEZs, i.e. Special Economic Zones for industrial projects.

national unit admitted that the organisation is still “paying the costs” of the industrialisation policy conducted by the Left Front in West Bengal, as “many students who got admission at that time are still PhD students at JNU” (interview 2015). In order to grasp the importance of the Nandigram controversy in leftist student politics, I reproduce on next page (Table 3-3) three public discourses of Students’ Union candidates (2012-14) which attack SFI candidates for not defending the cause of displaced peasants

Table 3-3. Three Quotations from Students’ Election Speeches (2012-14)

Ashutosh Kumar, AISA presidential candidate, September 2014	I want to remind you that they [SFI] are talking about revival but when they were in power they have killed farmers in Singur and Nandigram. It was CPM government and their supporters were killing the farmers. The rape of Malik was given political context [support?] from this platform here. They have associated themselves with administration and ignoring the workers. Please tell them we will work for workers.
Abhishek Kumar Yadav, AISA vice-presidential candidate, March 2012	JNU has no place for corrupt Congress. People from government leftist also come up to you...they who are responsible for killing farmers and workers in Singur and Nandigram. Tapasi Malik was raped and burnt alive in Nandigram, which kind of politics we are heading for?
Lenin Kumar, SFI-JNU [in dissidence with SFI unit], presidential candidate, September 2012	We believed in Left Democratic alternative. What is happening in Left Democratic Party, you can see. The biggest force is CPM...but they did a series of blunders one after another. Nandigram, Singur rape of Tapsi Malik. Abdul Razzak opposed it, what happened to him, he got expelled from the party. ⁷⁵

At first, SFI members rejected AISA’s accusations regarding CPI(M)’s police killings. They then went on Expressing regrets for the death of farmers (Ranjan and Chowdhury 2007a); they also relayed a statement of the members of parliament representing CPI and CPI(M) asking the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) (Ranjan and Chowdhury 2007a; Kumar and Rajiv 2007; SFI-AISF pamphlet 2007) to temper its report on the case (SFI placard 2007). The case of Nandigram came after two other emotional polemics.

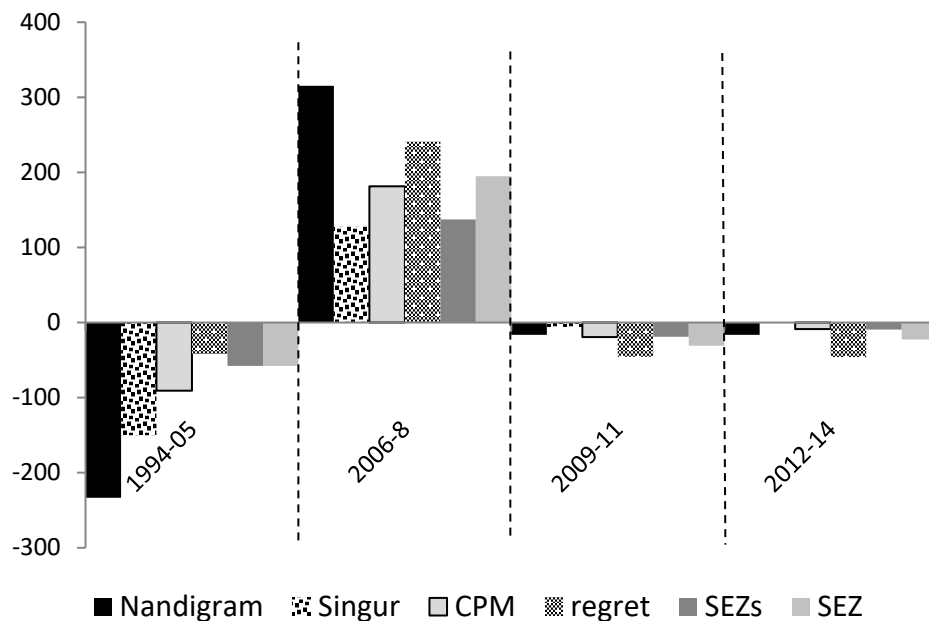
A couple of months earlier, an 18-year-old girl was raped and burnt alive while protesting against another land acquisition in West Bengal, this time for the construction of a Tata car plant in Singur (Singh 2006; SFI-AISF pamphlet 2006; DSU pamphlet 2007). Earlier on, in 2004, a SFI-led JNUSU representative had “by mistake” (Bhima, interview 2014) approved the administration’s decision to allot a campus outlet to Nestlé’s dairy company – which led other left organisations to accuse SFI of letting “market forces” penetrate the campus (Yadav and De 2011).

SFI refused to support the cancellation of the contract (Bhattacharya and Sudhakar 2004; Khan et al. 2004). After a one-year long controversy, which ended in a students’ vote to ban Nestlé from campus in January 2005, SFI had lost its leftist anti-corporate status on campus (Chowdhury 2005; Chakraborty and Shekhar 2005). Even if it won the convenor elections that year the presidential post went to AISA (Ranjan and Sudhanshu 2007).

⁷⁵ Verbatim translated from Hindi.

I have not yet introduced in detail the textual analysis of JNU pamphlets (cf. Chapter 6) but I would like at this stage to introduce a specific result obtained through the use of statistical tools applied to the analysis of text. More specifically, the use of textometric methods allows for a periodisation of activist discourses based on the themes discussed and their frequencies (Sousa 2012). As indicated on the vertical axis of Figure 3-1, specificity scores – indicating the likelihood of over-/under-representation of words in specific parts of the corpus – of terms such as MNCs⁷⁶ (score of specificity is 47 in 2004, 191 in 2005) or outlet (219 in 2014, 66 in 2005) climaxed in 2004-2005, thus revealing acrimonious debates on campus to the detriment of SFI. Thanks to its image of an organisation more strongly committed to the revolutionary ideal, AISA gained political mileage in order to become the leading student organisation on campus.

Figure 3-1. Singur and Nandigram Controversy in the Pamphlet Corpus



Dhananjay Tripathi (2006-07) was the last SFI member to preside the Students' Union, a few years before CPI(M)'s fall in West-Bengal. The final blow to their former domination came in the summer 2012. The main leaders on campus decided to oppose CPI(M)'s decision to support Congress' Finance Minister for the Indian presidency, a move that was supported by the CPI(M) in-charge of the SFI unit, the head of CPI(M) research unit and former JNU activist Prasenjit Bose (interview 2014) – who was then expelled from the party (AISA pamphlet 2012a; AISA pamphlet 2012b). Consequently, CPI(M)'s leadership, after a failed attempt of mediation by former JNUSU president Prakash Karat (Prasenjit, interview 2014; SFI-JNU Unit pamphlet 2012), decided to dissolve the JNU unit and support a small group of loyalists to re-create an embryonic unit (SFI pamphlet 2012a, 2012b, 2013). In the following election, the dissident

⁷⁶ MNCs stands for "Multinational Corporations".

presidential candidate, Lenin Kumar, won the post and led the creation of a new organisation, the Democratic Students' Federation (DSF) (DSF pamphlet 2013). However, most of the original SFI activists of the time became "passive" and demotivated (Bhima, interview 2014; Atul, interview 2015; Divya, interview 2015).

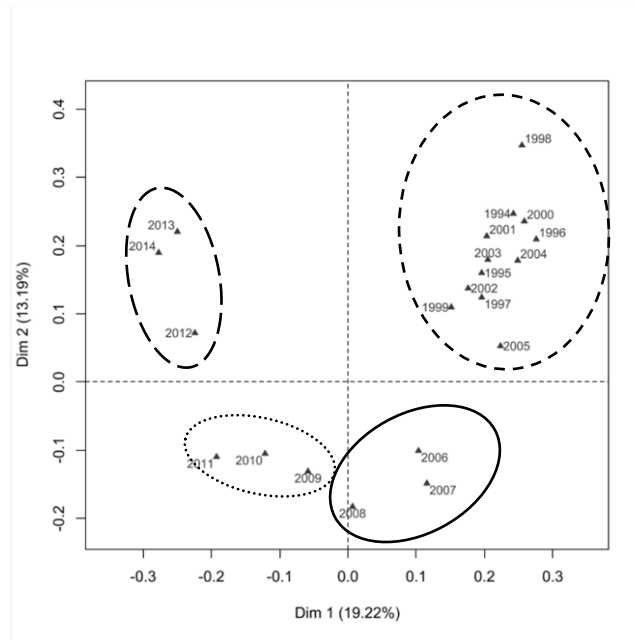
To conclude this subsection, it is once again useful to turn to textual analysis and to correspondence analysis (CA)⁷⁷ – a statistical visualisation method for picturing associations – (Brunet 2011) in order to identify the years in which pamphlet publications have displayed a similar vocabulary (see Figure 3-2). In the case of Jawaharlal Nehru University's history during the period 1994-2014, it is possible to distinguish four homogeneous lexical periods.⁷⁸ I suggest that the change of dominant forces might best explain lexical changes between the periods: 1994-2005 (top-right corner in Graph 1), 2006-2008 (bottom-right), 2009-2011 (bottom-left) and 2012-2014 (top-left). In simple terms, the results of the correspondence analysis can inform us of a change in the main speakers at JNU campus politics.

The reading of the graph corroborates the historical account presented above. Let me summarise it here. From 1995 to 2005, 32 out of 44 elective posts (campus level) at JNU were occupied by activists affiliated (or in alliance) with SFI. The academic year 2004-05 constituted a turning point as the post of president was won for the first time in a decade (since 1995) by AISA, then a new and arch-rival communist organisation of SFI. From that year onwards, the previously dominant student organisation never regained the topmost representative post in JNU campus politics (except in 2006-7), paving the way for a hegemonic dominance of AISA, especially after 2012-13 and the organisational split of SFI. Another turning point in campus politics is the period 2009-2011, during which no Students' Union was elected. This followed an order of the Supreme Court of India in 2008, based on violations of government recommendations by the JNU Students' Union constitution regarding the conduct of student elections. Changes in political representation do not take place in a vacuum; rather, they are marked by events that polarise public opinion and make electoral change possible. JNU as a political space is no exception to this, and each lexical period, as well as the transition between them, tell us more about the main polemics that have fuelled political life on campus. In our case, these controversies are important as they provide context for the decline of SFI.

⁷⁷ Correspondence analysis is a descriptive/exploratory technique designed to analyse categorical variables – in this case frequencies of words in sections of a text corpus.

⁷⁸ Chronological textual sequences have to be interpreted globally according to their curbed orientation around the centre of the graph (Mayaffre 2000). Because time series are ordinal values, their gradation is unidimensional; for this reason, they should not be interpreted by looking at axes separately (Salem 1991). In the field of statistical analysis of texts, this is commonly termed the Guttman effect (Camiz 2005).

Figure 3-2. Correspondence Analysis of the Pamphlet Corpus Partitioned per Year



3.3.4 AISA Politics and the Implementation of Reservations (2006-2016)

The V.P. Singh government's decision to implement the Mandal commission that summer [1990] in one stroke exposed the most ancient fetid wound that criss-crosses Indian society like interminable faultlines. [...] New political lines emerged overnight within the student community. [...] In a University General Body meeting in August the Council's resolution was defeated and all the office bearers and councillors chose to resign (Mazumdar 2004:21).

This testimony (2004) from the then JNUSU SFI president Surajit Mazumdar (1989-90) shows how the implementation of positive discrimination for so-called "Other Backward Classes" (OBCs) – castes putatively above SCs and STs in the caste system, but nevertheless suffering from forms of social and economic backwardness – created divides within CPI(M)-SFI and CPI(ML)-AISA. The aforementioned Vinod Mishra initially opposed (Kumar and Anand 2010) the way the then Prime Minister (1989-90) moved forward Mandal OBC reservations in 1990 (*Liberation*, November 1990, January 1991). Several rival organisations such as AIBSF (AIBSF pamphlet 2011), SFI-AISF alliance (SFI-AISF pamphlet 2006), DSU (ex. SFI-JNU) (Ingole and Kumar 2012) and the anti OBC-reservations Youth for Equality (Grover 2008) frequently remind CPI(ML) of its short-lived slogan of the time: "*No Mandal, No Kamandal, Inquilab Zindabad*" (No Mandal, No Communalism, Long live Revolution).

AISA, like other left outfits, rapidly joined the cause of OBC reservations, a stand even easier to defend since several of its leaders are from this community in Bihar or Uttar Pradesh (Singh and Awadhesh 2006). AISA was extremely proactive in lobbying for the effective implementation of OBC quotas at JNU, especially when it was at the head of the Students' Union. As already evoked, passionate tensions emerged in April 2006 when the then Congress-led government decided to extend the OBC reservation to educational institutions funded by the central authorities

(Deshpande 2006; Sundaram 2006; Ghosh 2006; Sen and Basant 2010) e.g. central universities, IITs, IIMs, AIIMS, and other professional institutions. Upper castes reacted furiously to the so-called Mandal II (Deshpande and Yadav 2006; Jayal 2016). According to some reports, more than 150 students attempted to immolate themselves in different incidents of protest across India (Jeffrey and Harriss 2014). AISA bitterly opposed a new campus-based political outfit, Youth for Equality, particularly active at JNU, which emerged in opposition to caste-based reservation in the name of “merit” (Youth For Equality pamphlet 2012) and the enforcement of positive discrimination based exclusively on economic and gender disparities (Youth For Equality pamphlet 2006).

AISA’s coming to power was not simply due to its commitment to OBC reservations, but more generally on its ability to draw from previous activist experiences. Former vice-president (2006-07) of the Union admits that because AISA was a relatively new organisation on campus, it had to rely on a strong leadership: “When I joined AISA, it was a small organisation, and most of the activists were inexperienced to know what to do. In that period, it was ok for Tapas Da [i.e. aforementioned] to micro-manage everything.” This led the student leaders of the time to set high standards of daily work in order to gain trust from students: “On any given day, I’m doing everything from helping people with their [student] registration to helping them with hostel problems to dealing with – to writing posters or giving speeches on the war in Iraq, or the World Trade Organisation” (John, interview 2015).

The ability of AISA to win election after election repeatedly also had to do with the ability of their activists to draw on personal connections with students. A former SFI activist notes:

“On the one hand, SFI suffered from the industrial policy of CPM [i.e. CPI(M)] in Bengal, but on the other they were not able to talk to students on something else than CPM correctness. AISA on the other hand will ask you what you like, your favourite poems, your family situation. They take you for chai, ‘Oh you read Neruda?’...and then slowly they will connect this with larger ideological issues.” (Sachin, interview 2016).

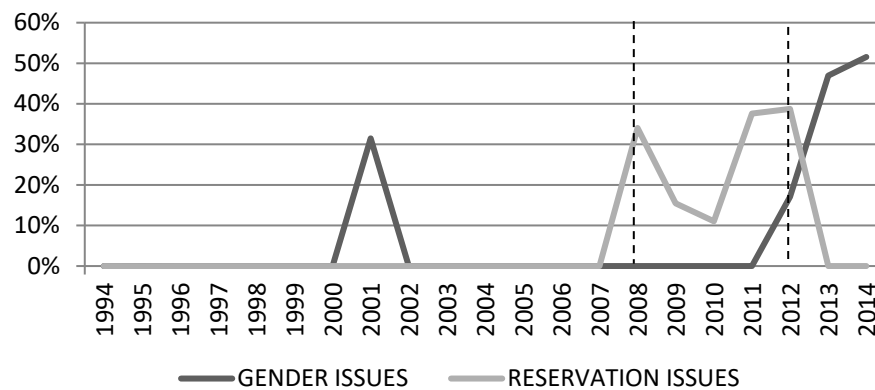
Many activists from various platforms acknowledge the ability of AISA cadres to do work for students without expecting immediate results, especially in the so-called “Lyngdoh period.” Between 2009 and 2011, no elections were organised at JNU as the Students’ Union constitution did not follow the 2006 Lyngdoh recommendations, a set of guidelines for the conduct of students’ elections directed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD).⁷⁹

The fact that AISA and the wider activist community engaged with the emerging Mandal question is an evidence that JNU campus politics, while reproducing some of its ideological idioms over

⁷⁹ For more information, I invite the reader to consult the exhaustive timeline of the contentious episode given by the Democratic Students’ Union (DSU), the pro-Maoist organisation which took active part in the opposition against the Lyngdoh recommendations (Joint Front Against Lyngdoh; JNUSU pamphlet 2008; JNUSU pamphlet 2010; AISA pamphlet 2011c; Zico and Anand 2011).

generations, has also been capable to adapt to broader political currents. In addition to its ability to embrace the Mandal turn, AISA efficiently rallied the cause of women’s empowerment when it became a central issue in public debates. It is again relevant to turn to the use of textual analysis and look for patterns in the use of words in JNU pamphlets, in order to determine whether words related to the subject of women’s empowerment have increased in time. Indeed, after the 2012 gang-rape on the outskirts of JNU (in Munirka), which created an immense outcry across the country (and abroad), discussions related to gender violence gained tremendous prominence on campus. As indicated in Figure 3-3, the weight of this topic accounted for 50 percent of the total weights of other topics contained in the corpus of pamphlet in years 2013-14.⁸⁰ Such a topic includes words such as women, sexual, struggle, gender, justice, rape and harassment. The extent of focus on this particular issue was unheard of since 2001, when a JNU council had approved of the Gender Sensitisation Committee against Sexual Harassment (2001).

Figure 3-3. Weight of Topics of Gender and Reservation in the Pamphlet Corpus



Predictive words for the Topic “Gender Issues”: gscash, women, sexual, struggle, gender, elections, justice, harassment, struggles, lyngdoh, mcm, movement, committee, recommendations, rape, protest, hostel, rights, hostels, left (sample 1 out of 2).
 Predictive words for the Topic “Reservation Issues”: obc, reservation, protest, seats, seat, land, reservations, increase, year, violence, implementation, intake, blasts, lyngdoh, court, deal, category, nandigram, communal, workers (sample 1 out of 5).

⁸⁰ For this analysis, I used *Mallet*, a topic modelling tool (McCallum 2002). A “topic” consists of a cluster of words that frequently occur together.

3.4 JNU Today: A Political Campus

3.4.1 Action Taken: Current Affairs, Campus Democracy, Welfare, Reservations, State Repression

Contemporary student politics at JNU inherited the rich activist history recounted in this chapter, which is structured around protests, debates and political positioning. In the following paragraphs, I present how the history of student organisations and their ideologies on campus translate into daily political argumentation. In short, I would like to put an emphasis on the diversity of political concerns at JNU, which is the direct legacy of the activist history charted in this chapter.

Pamphlets are a good way to recount the many protests and micro-mobilisations initiated by JNU activists, involving the socialisation of various student cohorts. A simple cursory look at some of the pamphlets contained in the PaRChA archive gives a strong indication of the variety of issues addressed by student activists. Politically active students engage daily with current affairs – both national and international – commenting on regime changes, government and party decisions, military interventions, caste atrocities, corporate wrongdoings, peasants living conditions, etc.

It is useful to examine the distribution of the vocabulary produced by JNU activists in order to have a global and synoptic view of the topics that preoccupy them and trigger political mobilisations. I identify the main themes (also termed ‘classes’) put forward by activists by presenting the various lexical worlds (Reinert 1993:11-12) in the PaRChA archive. Such result is obtained through plotting the results of a text classification resulting from my textual analysis (cf. Chapter 6 for details).⁸¹ Each lexical world has a colour label and is presented in a two-dimensional graphical format at the end of this subsection (Figure 3-4). By running the analysis twice with different settings I obtain two graphs: one displays four classes, and the second five.

It might be useful to show a few examples of recent (2012-2014) JNU student protests, which give a good example of the kind of issues raised by JNU activists. The seven-pamphlet series presented on page 75 (Image 3-2) provides examples of mobilisation actions reported in pamphlets. The first pamphlet is a call by AISA for a demonstration in support of the workers of the automobile manufacturer Maruti Suzuki, 147 of them being jailed after launching strikes in 2012 which led to the burning-to-death of a manager in Manesar plant (Haryana) (Nowak 2014). The second pamphlet relays a 2014 call for protest in front of Israeli embassy, in opposition to illegal settlements in Palestine’s West Bank – following which the police detained several activists. The third pamphlet concerns the communal riots which took place in Muzaffargarh (a district of Uttar Pradesh) in 2013, which led to the displacement of tens of thousands of individuals and to the death of 42 Muslims and 20 Hindus (Berenschot 2014). The Students’ Union sent a “fact-finding” team to collect evidence and to provide assistance to the victims. The fourth is a pamphlet issued by the pro-Maoist JNU organisation in support to the early 2014 protests against the one-year

⁸¹ The method used is a descending hierarchical classification analysis (Reinert 1998).

extension of bachelor programmes from three to four years (i.e. the FYUP, or four-year undergraduate programme) in Delhi University. The three last pamphlets reproduced in Image 3-2 are also related to important issues at the core of the political discussions in Delhi at the time. Pamphlet 5 was issued to commemorate the first anniversary of the gang rape of *Nirbhaya* (fearless one), a pseudonym given to the student who was gang-raped in a bus in the surroundings of JNU on 16 December 2012. The last two show angry reactions after the suicide of individual members of weak sections of Indian society, namely Dalits and farmers.

The term “current affairs” used here can be applied to four different kinds of events. The first one is linked to international affairs, including foreign policy decisions of India, as well as decisions taken by capitalist countries such as the United States or by socialist ones such as Venezuela (cf. Figure 3-4, *yellow* class, including words imperialism, history, foreign, India, nuclear, power, capitalist). The second set of events are related to national policy decisions and to the declarations of central or state governments, parties or other mass organisations. For most left organisations, the political targets are Hindu nationalist groups such as the BJP and all the groups which are part of the *Sangh Parivar* (the umbrella of organisations affiliated with the RSS) (Figure 3-4, *dark blue* class, including words sangh, communal, fascism, muscle, rss, bjp). The third type of political reaction is based on the reporting of macabre tragic events such as rape, murder, aggression, and suicide, which provide evidence of the unequal and violent nature of the Indian society (more on this in next section). The last kind of initiative is more specifically related to political decisions taken by Communist Indian organisations, which are often used by student organisations to praise its parental organisation and discredit rival ones. Irrespective of the kind of “abuse” uncovered by student organisation in discourses and pamphlets, a highly ideological vocabulary is used, making frequent references to historical figures such as freedom fighters, social reformers and exemplary martyrs (Figure 3-4, *purple* class, including words Bhagat, Singh, Ambedkar, Ram, legacy, anniversary, history, colonial, freedom).

Image 3-2. Seven JNU Pamphlets (2012-2014)

demands, it has marked a year of government insensitivity, nay repression, on our legitimate demands.

18th July also marks a year when no dharna or rally or even mere pamphlet distribution, all within ambit of our democratic rights, have been allowed in the industrial area of Manesar. This area has been turned into a militarized zone where workers can be exploited at will and the capitalists can openly flout all labour law norms of the country. This is the exploitation of us and all workers in the area especially the contract workers, against which we had started to raise our united voice for which we are being punished. After the 57-day dharna and 8-day hunger strike in Kaithal, Haryana on 18-19th May, we and our family members and sympathizers were brutally lathi-charged and 11 arrested, of which 10 workers and trade unionists and sympathizers still languish in Kaithal Jail. We are now not even being allowed any space to put up a dharna under the pretext of this being against public interest.

In our General Body meeting on 23rd June 2013 in Gurgaon, we the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union have decided to mark this 18th July with the call of **Manesar Chhodo**. To make the deaf ears of the government hear, we will mark this date by starting an indefinite sit-in demonstration and hunger strike in Manesar. We will campaign throughout this month leading up to 18th July across Haryana, and take the struggle to the centre of struggle of our worker brothers and sisters in Manesar, Gurgaon. We appeal to workers, organizations and all sections of society to join us on this date in Manesar and organize solidarity actions before and on 18th July across the country, so that we can register the united voice of workers, and other sections of society.

Engilich Zindabadi! Mazdoor Ekta Zindabadi!
Maruti Suzuki Workers Union

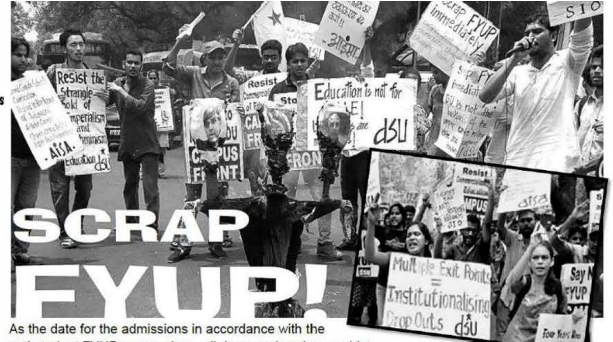
Join The Struggling Workers Of Maruti Suzuki

In Demanding:
Immediate Release Of All Jailed Workers And Activists In Gurgaon And Kaithal !
Immediate Reinstatement Of All Terminated Workers

Indefinite Hunger Strike And Demonstration
at Tau Devital Park, Int'l Manesar
18 July 2013, 11 Am

Assemble at Ganga Dhaba at 8.30am

ALISA



As the date for the admissions in accordance with the anti-student FYUP comes close, all democratic voices amidst the student community marched the streets of Delhi University and India Gate rejecting FYUP. The anger and solidarity of students and teachers was visible as they blocked roads & burnt the effigy of the architects of FYUP in DU.

Threatened by the increasing solidarity, the police detained 200 protesters who had gathered at India Gate to protest against FYUP. The students and teachers were grossly man-handled and forced into buses and thereafter taken to Parliament Street police station. A protest meeting was thereafter held within the police station.

DSU condemns this police crackdown on protesters by this sham of a 'democracy'. This, however, only shows that rather than being the brain child of one VC, FYUP is only one amongst a series of measures of the Indian state to sell away education. UGC has even formed an Advisory Committee on FYUP to oversee its successful implementation in DU. This makes it clear that the UGC and even MHRD had been in the thick of things from the beginning in the imposition of FYUP in DU.

DSU appeals to all progressive and democratic sections to forge an uncompromising solidarity in the coming days to reject FYUP and all such moves aimed at privatization of education.



Real Tribute to Nirbhaya ...

An Uncompromising Resolve To Stop Violence Against Women!



What happen to the land of Periyar Annihilate caste system Social justice and freedom of choice Long live



HE HINDU Dalit youth Ilavarasan found dead TN love story that sparked violence has tragic ending

NOTV A love story that triggered Tamil Nadu riots ends with a death

Three days after his wife said she would never go back to him, 20-year-old Ilavarasan, whose wedding had triggered riots in Tamil Nadu, was found dead on a train track in a part of the state not far from where the couple spent eight months living together. Sources in the police claimed a suicide note had been found but did not elaborate. A political party spokesman said: "We don't think it's a case of suicide, there could be more to it."

Ilavarasan's father, N.P. and President of the Viduthalaitharuvu (Viduthalaitharuvu) Katchi, which draws large support from Dalits and lower-caste castes, On Monday, Dicky Nigard, 23, told the Madras High Court on Monday why her marriage to Ilavarasan was over. She said she had not been mistreated by her husband or his family, but was tormented by the knowledge that her father committed in protest against her wedding to a Dalit. Her mother had filed a case in court alleging that Dicky was being illegally confined and should be produced in court and granted her freedom. 23-year-old Dicky adopted to marry Ilavarasan in October last year. These villages including the one where he lived survived in caste, nearly 200 years before Dalit families lived were set on fire, allegedly by the upper caste Varanasi community, to which Dicky's belonged. At the time, the political party, **the PMK, headed by S.Ramadas had campaigned to stop weddings between Dalits and non-Dalits.**

Do not remove till 12/07/2013



Farmers' Suicides

Stand UP against THIS PROTRACTED CRIMINAL act OF OUR TIMES

ISRAELI EMBASSY

2 PM

19TH NOVEMBER (Monday)

ASSEMBLE at Ganga Dhaba at 1.30 PM

JNUSU Team to Visit Muzaffarnagar

In the past few weeks, we have seen yet another horrific saga of orchestrated communal violence – this time in Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh. Several lives have been lost in the widespread arson and rioting, several hundreds have been displaced from their homes and life in still in a state of chaos in several villages. Especially after details of the whole incident are emerging, it is very clear that the Muzaffarnagar violence was essentially 'engineered' by communal fascist forces for their narrow interests. Fake videos were made and circulated, despite official 'curfews' and prohibitory orders, large meetings were allowed where blatantly provocative speeches were made.

And most unfortunately, the Akhilesh Yadav led state government proved completely unwilling and incapable of either preventing the violence or even punishing those responsible. After much public pressure, FIRs have been filed against BJP MLAs such as Hukum Singh, Suresh Rana and Sangeet Singh Som and BKU leaders Naresh Tikait and Rakesh Tikait. However, the UP government is refusing to act on the FIRs and arrest these leaders, even as the BJP is openly threatening 'more violence' if any action is taken against them!

As the 2014 elections draw near, Muzaffarnagar shows us that the BJP has planned to literally walk over corpses in its bid for power. As a result of the violence in Muzaffarnagar, several thousands of people are displaced and living in refugee camps, living in fear of their lives and further attacks.

As the situation in Muzaffarnagar continues to be grave, a JNUSU team led by JNUSU President and Vice-president will be visiting Muzaffarnagar, leaving tomorrow (21st September 2013). The team which is already co-ordinating with the local residents will gather information from the ground and assess the support and help that can be provided by JNUSU and JNU students to the violence-affected people in Muzaffarnagar.

JNUSU

Do Not Remove Till 24.9.13

While engaging with international and national events, JNU activists also participate in many campus-centric protests. Two issues rank high when looking at pamphlets. Firstly, the question of student admissions, with a particular emphasis on the representativity of marginalised sections

on campus. The historical material presented in this thesis shows the importance of the various debates at JNU revolving around the quota policy for Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes, women and the implementation of the Mandal recommendations in Higher Education. Hence, many protests, sit-ins, *gheraos*, and marches are made in order to introduce more ‘justice’ in the admission process, avoid biases at the interview level and ensure better representation of every class and caste of the Indian society on campus (Figure 3-5, *pink* class, including words obc, admission, reservation, quota, background, cut, sc, st). The second issue is more specifically focused on student needs, including scholarships and better facilities. In the past years, the main concern became the the shortage of in-campus accommodation seats (Figure 3-5, *green* class, including words facility, hostel, construction, provide, scholarship, increase). The main campus-based demand has therefore been the construction of new hostels, and has led the Students’ Union to go on a hunger strike on that matter (*Scroll.in*, 22 January 2015).

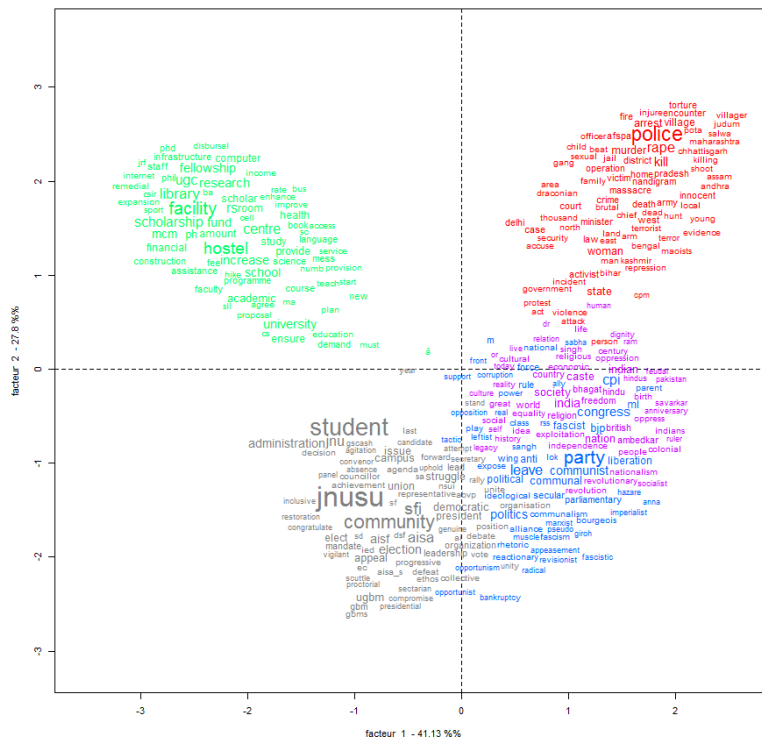
Many of the protests initiated by left activists focus on the condemnation of violence perpetrated by the Indian state and by ruling parties at national and regional level. Many pamphlets are written to denounce laws which give impunity to security forces in conflict areas such as Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland and Manipur (i.e. the Armed Forces Special Powers Act or the Prevention of Terrorism Act) (Patel 2016). Another case put forward by student organisations such as DSU, AISA and SFI is related to the abuses, such as rape, torture, and abduction committed by paramilitary forces in Chhattisgarh and in Jharkhand (in the context of the fight against Maoist guerrillas in tribal areas). This topic is somehow linked to the denunciation of more varied forms of ill-treatments and humiliations, particularly those imposed on women (e.g. sexual ones), peasants and Dalits (Figure 3-5, *red* and *light blue* classes, including words police, murder, Assam, [Salwa] Judum, [Green] Hunt, sexual, AFSPA, rape).

Last but not least, much of the actual activist work is dedicated to the proper functioning of student democracy. Pamphlets are written to announce and report on the many public events organised on campus. Text production reflects organisational aspects of campus politics – electoral preparations and invitations to meetings and discussions. Often, student organisations themselves take the initiative of inviting speakers and guest speakers on campus, which leads to further pamphlet writing.

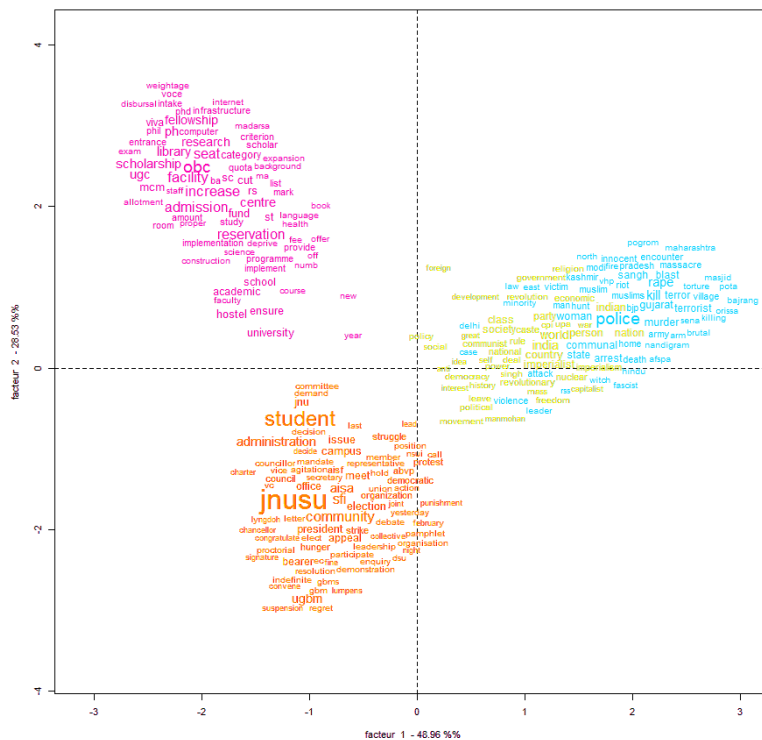
Politically important material is produced when JNUSU and school representatives (councillors) prepare their annual reports which they present in front of students in every school. Pamphlets also invite and announce results of student university meetings organised by student organisations in which students vote when important issues arise (Figure 3-5, *grey* and *orange* classes, including words JNUSU, community, UGBM, democratic, elect, ethos, representative, inclusive, debate, agenda, agitation). Moreover, as explained in Chapter 5, the Students’ Union and key activists are involved in mundane daily interactions with the administration and sometimes report to the students on that matter. They raise issues related to the changes in regulations for exams, library access, registration procedures, submission deadlines, etc. Because all these tasks are usually introduced from a political angle, campus activists use pamphlets to inform, update and “agitate”

the students. Student organisations therefore fuel both the political and administrative life of the campus, and this constitutes a significant part of their daily work.

Figures 3-4 & 3-5. Correspondence Analysis of the PaRChA corpus



Parameters #1
(5 classes)



Parameters #2
(4 classes)

3.4.2 Concluding Remark: JNU Activist Legacy and the 2016 protests

From this account, it appears that most of the JNU student representatives are affiliated to political organisations. Only less than 20 percent of the elected presidents of the JNU Students' Union were elected on independent platforms. This is consistent with the fairly long legacy of political alignment and mentoring on campuses across the country (cf. Chapter 2).

JNU Students' Union has been an "object of desire" of various left organisations, as their parties saw the university as a valuable space for recruiting ideologically sound youth and organise campaigns in the capital. As I have described in the first section, the composition of JNU and the debates it triggered in the early days reflected the dominant economic and political debates led by the Congress and CPI at the core of the state. At the turn of the Emergency, and for nearly 30 years, campus politics was dominated by the CPI(M) student wing SFI. Predating the running out of steam of its party in West Bengal, SFI was replaced in the last decade by AISA, the outfit of the smaller party CPI(ML). With the emergence of AISA, JNU Students' Union did not reflect the dominance of a central or regional political party.

From CPI-Congress to CPI(M)-CPI to CPI(ML); such a political trajectory at JNU must be compared to the overall change in India's political landscape.⁸² While such comparisons are not very useful to analyse the relative strength of these organisations – which forged different local alliances from campus to campus – it is an indication of the representativeness of the kind of politics practiced at JNU. The liberalisation turn of the 1990s and the progressive decline of communism in India – except in the state of Kerala – has transformed Indian society and politics while gradually stemming the political alleys of Indian left activists. As the kind of politics JNU was promoting became progressively alienated from the overall Indian landscape, it appeared for commentators (including former JNU VC) as a pronounced anti-establishment institution (*The Economic Times*, 4 November 2015).

The marginalisation of the ideological underpinnings of JNU activism might be due to a change of Indian society more than to political changes inside the campus premises. The history of JNU politics reflects the formidable continuity of student activism, epitomised by the "JNU-ethos," an Expression that underlines the tendency of students to critically engage with political issues on an everyday basis. Most campus residents attach political meaning to various university spaces where students "have planned revolution as well as found romance" says Sandeep Singh, former Students' Union president (Kumar 2013). Aforementioned Kavita Krishnan, 1995 JNU Students' Union joint-secretary, reflects on her experience at JNU: "for an introverted and intensely private person,

⁸² I draw here a parallel between campus-based "mass organisations" and their respective party considering the specific context of JNU. I am not implying here that national alliances forged by CPI, CPI(M) and CPI(ML) apply to every campus in India in the same way. For instance, the SFI-AISF alliance in Kerala or West Bengal colleges operates differently and – as acknowledged by senior activists from both organisations – deal more with local issues (Divya, interview 2015; Azad, interview 2015). Moreover, the dominance of an organisation in a university campus does not necessarily reflect broader political trends. For example, AISA's dominance at JNU has not significantly translated to electoral gains for its parent party.

it was exhilarating to discover a world of warm solidarity, collectively and comradeship created in the course of late-night debates at the *dhabas* (food stalls), marching in torch-light processions, writing leaflets and organising movements.” (Krishnan 2008). Whether they were former activists or not, alumni tend to reinforce, through their accounts, the strong leftist character of the university.

In summary, and before turning to the empirical analysis of political socialisation *per se*, I would like to emphasise the dual political nature of JNU politics. The campus and its politics qualify both as a competitive space for the left and as a partly distinct cultural and educational space, understood as a “realm of Expressive activities and artefacts contrasted with other institutional realms” (Spillman 2007). As further explored in the subsequent chapters, JNU’s distinctive character is concretely visible when looking at its political posters, wall paintings, murals, songs, the rhythmic nature of slogans, the political geography of the campus and the practice of mess campaigns.

4 Ascetics in a Secular Uniform? The Contested Practice of Declassing and the Building of Activist Credentials

One might expect to meet an Indian ascetic, or *sadhu*, in a spiritual place: in Varanasi's *mathas*⁸³ or on the banks of the holy Ganga. Few are those who expect a middle-aged errant with centimetres-long nails and shredded socks on necrotised toes found on a student campus; even fewer imagine him claiming that with the advent of communism madness in the world is coming to an end (Vidrohi in Bhasin 2015). However, there were very few days during my political ethnography of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in which I was not passing by the 'secular sadhu' of campus politics *par excellence*. Ramashankar Yadav, commonly known as *Vidrohi* (the rebel), attended all the campus protests, not missing any occasion to harangue and recite eccentric Hindi poems. Though his landed and relatively wealthy family (Shah 2012) – from an OBC background – regularly offered support to him (Chitranshu, interview 2015), he had voluntarily stayed as a vagrant in JNU since the 1980s, and he was sleeping in the Students' Union office or out in the open. He was often referred as "comrade" by the majority of JNU campus activists and used to incite students to get involved in political activities (Singh 2015). As Vidrohi refused the assistance of relatives, he subsisted on food (and cigarettes) from the students. It did not take long for me to realise he was the mascot of left activism in the Indian capital, and for that reason I was not surprised to read his eulogy in the mouthpiece of a communist party, a few days after his sudden death, on 8 December 2015: "Vidrohi died as he had lived – surrounded by students out on a protest march" (Krishnan 2016).

As poignant funeral orations were coming from the entire activist community of JNU, I had already started reflecting on the interaction between Indian Marxism and the figure of the ascetic, defined as a person "characterised by or suggesting the practice of severe self-discipline and abstention from all forms of indulgence" (The Oxford Dictionary of English 2016). This thesis refers more to the general sense of the term and its attributes (cf. *infra*) than to its particular Indian conception. As we will see, I am not suggesting that activists are religious specialists (Gupta 1974), either irreversibly contemplative, reclusive, world renouncers (Dumont 1960), sexually abstinent (Van Dyke 2002) or followers of the path of a religious guru, nor am I depicting them as particularly interested in embracing monastic careers – either prior or while pursuing their political activities (Hausner 2007). Furthermore, here the term asceticism does not imply material conditions such as itinerancy or sedentariness in a religious site, which sometimes leads to significant wealth accumulation (Van der Veer 1989:459) and the gain of political leverage – whether opportunist or revolutionary in nature.⁸⁴ Rather, I understand asceticism in a secular

⁸³ I.e. Hindu monastery. For further details, cf. Klostermaier (2007).

⁸⁴ References to the existence of political sadhus can be traced to colonial Bengal in the early 20th century; the British administration used to see them as mentors for Indian "terrorists" as mentioned in a 1911 note of Deputy Inspector General F.C. Daly (Daly and Ghose 1981). It appears that during the freedom movement leading to the independence of India (1947), asceticism as a surrogate for sacrifice was relevant to the study

fashion, as an enduring performance of bodily practices (Freiberger 2006) comprising frugality in public spaces and the display of a set of restrictive moral postures. In this case, such postures include the expression of repugnance for contemporary material culture (Miller 2001) and for signs of caste and class hierarchy while building upon a leftist cult of sacrificial Martyrs and on a Marxist pro-poor aesthetic – in part for political benefits.

Keeping this distinction in mind, this chapter proposes to show how left activists successfully appeal to the student community through adopting a particular set of political practices and selective self-presentations (Goffman 1978) aiming at successfully representing the weakest sections of the population. Basing my argument on ethnographic evidence, my claim is that such discourses and behaviours of *declassing*, understood as trajectories of social downlift, enable activists to acknowledge, embody and represent the deprived sections of the Indian population – living outside campus boundaries – thus creating a political space for a Marxist critique of mainstream politics and society. To ‘declass’ means to eliminate one’s perceived class. I will use various forms of the word interchangeably: to declass, to be declassified, and declassing. As I aim to show, it comprises a form of biographic reconfiguration – temporary or long-lasting – involving a symbolic forfeiting of one’s social status. The gradual changes leading to an identification to a “subaltern identity” (Guha 1982) i.e. the identity of the subordinated sections of the Indian population – can also be described as a “minoritizing process.” That is, a rejection of the identity of the dominant categories of the population (Brun and Galonnier 2016).⁸⁵ It is through claiming successfully this declassified identity that left activists can acquire the legitimacy to successfully represent the entire student population.

In order to make sense of the notion of left self-fashioning, I rely on the concept of *declassifying* developed by Jacques Rancière (1940–). I will show how the practice of declassification tends to be mobilised by left activists as a tool for political representation. In the sociological tradition, the term to *declass* refers to a process, real or perceived, of descending in social mobility (Goblot 2015 [1925]). In this sense, being declassified is either due to the eroding value of academic diplomas in a climate of massification of education, or to the inability of new generations to attain a social status equivalent to their parents (Eckert 2014).

Departing from such approaches, Rancière defines both *declassification* and *disidentification* as processes by which individuals abandon their predetermined social role, enabling them to take up

of radical politics. In certain respects, the path of resistance to British rule, in which many students had participated, looked like a variant of the sadhu’s path (Shils 1968). In the late 19th century, the figure of the “political sadhu” in Bengal was popularised by the writer Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) and his novel *Anandamath* (1982) set during the *Sannyasi rebellion* (monk’s rebellion) against 1770 Bengal famine. The novel popularised the nationalist poem *Vande Mataram* (I praise thee, Mother), which was later declared to be India’s National Song (Lipner 2005).

⁸⁵ The authors discuss the idea of “minoritizing process” in the context of religious conversions of white people to Islam in France and the United States. For many respondents, conversions appear as an attempt to share the condition of the excluded while repudiating the privileges attached to *whiteness*, understood as a majoritarian oppressive condition.

the cause of another (Rancière 1998:212, 219-20, Blechman et al. 2005:288). *Declassification* is the way in which citizens escape the determinism of a social order that he calls the *police*, in which individuals' distribution of places and roles is clearly identified and legitimized (Rancière 1999 [1995]:28). Processes of *disindentification* lead to the formation of political subjects who claim identities at odds with those defined by the social categories they belong to – according to the *police* order (ibid:38).

Rancière theorises a practice of self-fashioning that involves a rejection of one's socially fixed identity. Tassin (2014:158) understands this as an *écart à soi* (deviation from yourself), a transgression that enables individuals to bridge the gap between them and those displaying different pre-identifications based on gender, class, race, etc. (Rancière 2004). This overcoming of historically contingent social configurations (Rancière 2005:56) is for Rancière the definition of both politics and democracy as it produces egalitarian claims in which a universally shared meaning is produced (ibid:49). The practice of *declassification* leads to the inclusion of the “uncounted and the stigmatised” (Rancière 2008:560), not through identity politics and self-representation (Girola et al. 2014:11), but through claiming collectively the impossibility of a particular form of identification.

In the course of this chapter, I will describe how declassing involves the use of practical techniques – aesthetic, somatic, oratory, territorial and intellectual – in order to renegotiate one's status and to erase signs and habits attached to economic and social privileges. Seven elements at the core of this activist practice are introduced: dress-code refashioning, fasting, space segregation, anger against society, martyr identification, non-conformist career aspirations and induced risks of political disengagement. While scholarship on Marxism places stress on the economic sphere, it rarely scrutinises the subjective routine and aspirations of Indian communist politicians and activists. Consequently, I focus on them. I present their demanding commitments as life changing experiences burdened with doubts, material constraints and moral rewards in a transitioning period of their life. I engage with concrete cultural practices of Marxism⁸⁶ rather than conceptual notions of Marxist political economy.

While portraying declassing as an essential socialising tool, the chapter also addresses the socio-cultural and socio-economic tension of this practice.⁸⁷ Mainly, my attempt is to show that declassing is widely adopted by the upper- and middle-classes along with upper- and middle-castes, while such notions are questioned – and sometimes rejected – by those at the bottom of

⁸⁶ At an epistemological level, I accept the idea that culture, and in this case declassing culture, is best understood in the context of social action rather than beliefs. As Pierre Bourdieu, Erving Goffman and Clifford Geertz, among many others demonstrate, meaning and ideational material are brought into play in social action. “Cultural repertoires” (Bonnell 1998) translate into dispositions and practices. My approach to the declassing phenomenon is therefore action-oriented (Shneiderman 2015) and relies on empirical manifestations.

⁸⁷ I keep in mind here a thoughtful written commentary of a retired JNU professor pointing at an earlier draft of this chapter and its then homogenising description of left declassing: “any stereotype or straitjacketing is so untrue to life, is it not?”

the social ladder. These individuals, including sections of the Dalit community and impoverished Muslims, while being part of the same left political organisations prefer to emphasise social assertiveness as a way to achieve social justice. This suggests that the meaning of declassing is not unidimensional and largely depends on one's social background. Accordingly, the first section of the chapter introduces the existing literature on left refashioning and provides data on the middle-class leanings of activists when compared to the broader JNU student population. The second section examines how this "middle-classness" is negotiated in light of the notion of declassing and how such ideas are challenged by certain politically active Dalits and Muslims. In the last section, I explain how declassing practices ultimately serve as a legitimising political device in the eyes of the student community.

4.1 The Middle-class from an Elite Institution Representing the Indian Poor

The few accounts engaging with the leftist language of renunciation in the Indian context underline its paradoxical, yet striking similarities, with Hindu asceticism. Chandra (2013) described how several indigenous rights activists developed what he calls a "radical bourgeois self" in order to disavow privileges of birth and the ordinary temptations of the middle-class life. He notes, "the radical bourgeois self, much like Dumont's renouncer [i.e. the Hindu renouncer described by Louis Dumont (1911-1998)] sacrifices the ordinary householder's existence to pursue a distinctively Indian kind of individualism and freedom." A similar politics of moral purification can be found in the ethnography of Maoism in Jharkhand and Chattisgarh by Alpa Shah. In her Malinowski Memorial Lecture (2012), she argues that the fixed imaginary of Maoist renunciation embraced by veteran guerrillas, based on the concept of semi-feudal and semi-colonial exploitation is no longer in tune with the political economy of mining in Adivasi areas. She gives the example of Gyan, an old-time Maoist leader who was known as a Hindu renouncer, "poring over Vedic texts and sitting on the Ganges' banks for hours," before turning into armed communist militancy. Through the example of Gyan, Shah underlines the ideological importance of the figure of the renouncer for the making of dedicated communist revolutionaries (2012:342).

The figure of the left renouncer sometimes corroborates with the one of the party worker. In his study of the agricultural wing of the CPI(ML) in Bihar, Jaoul (2011) exemplifies how the appropriation of the party by the poor and vice versa is achieved through subjective identification to sacrificial figures such as Manju Devi, a young female activist who was murdered by the landlord militia, the Ranvir Sena, and for whom a statue was commissioned. Such ascetic repertoire strongly inspires party workers to live the frugal life of the rural poor in order to fight landed and wealthy oppressors. Thus, Jaoul gives the example of Sharma, an old party cadre of a dominant caste for which Manju Devi symbolised its "long-term relation with the poor" (2011:369). This reflection strongly indicates that the declassing culture of CPI(ML) might not only be a tool

of salvation for individual party workers, but also an instrument to build a strong connect with “the masses.”

Left asceticism in the literature is often described as a practice of a certain social elite or cultured middle-class, which is traditionally over-represented in the ruling sections of ‘radical’ political organisations.⁸⁸ Dasgupta (2005) shows how Marxism, embraced by the pre-independence Bengali middle-class gentry (*madhyabitta bhadralok*), was inspired by the redeeming praises of intellectuals and poets such as the bohemian Marxist Samar Sen (1916-87). The ecstatic and dark romantic culture of the social group, comprising upper-caste Hindu landed elite, petty landowners, traders and indigent literati, shaped the expression of Marxism in Bengal, making the “rebellion merge with revolution” (2005:87). Dasgupta also indicates that 20th century *Madhyabitta* Marxism embraced the notion of asceticism. This claim was further developed in a more recent contribution (2013) in which he examines how the “body-politics of asceticism” is constitutive of the self-making of Bengali communists – even though most communists “simply cannot stand holy men.” While it cannot see itself as ascetic self-styling, Dasgupta affirms that the declassified practice is a secular reconfiguration of a theological political culture in circulation in South Asia. Albeit patriarchal, memoirs of communist activists (from CPI(M) but not only) reveal a form of conversion to a new kind of ascetic subjectivity, based on severe self-cultivation, physical regimentation, body deprivation and firm control over desires (2013:78-79).

Thus, in the Indian context, practices of self-fashioning appear to be a fixture of various leftist movements. They are often associated with the leftist language of self-renunciation and underline its paradoxical, yet striking similarities, with another form of self-fashioning: Hindu asceticism. Kaviraj (2009), who draws parallels between a class/caste-based cultural production and the deployment of Marxism in South Asia, approaches the issue from a theoretical standpoint. He compares the erudite mastery of Marxist literature and historiography (in English mostly) by communist political leaders to the esoteric Sanskrit scholarship monopolized by Brahmin castes – who had the monopoly over religious exegesis. In her opinion, the assimilation of the abstract language of Western enlightenment, along with the willingness to understand the imported notion of class – and not the India-specific one of caste – as the universal grammar of social inequality gave Indian Marxism “Brahminical” overtones.

Left self-fashioning and secular devotion towards martyrs are often interrelated. Martyrs are iconized figures of specific political outfits that compete against each other (Jaoul 2011). They are “pure” examples of self-sacrifice for a just cause (Lecomte-Tilouine 2006) and involve efforts to

⁸⁸ Until recently, the elite of the Maoist were generally considered as university educated (Balakrishnan 1993; Kennedy and King 2013), from a highly educated middle-class intelligentsia (Omvedt 2004; Harriss 2011; Shah 2010), often high caste Brahmins (Banerjee 1984; Shah and Pettigrew 2012) and more specifically Bhadrak lok gentry in Bengal – mostly from Madyabitta and Sahebi backgrounds (Ray 2002; Dasgupta 2006). Choudhary (2012) reports a high number of ageing secretaries from Andhra Pradesh – often trained in Bastar forests like leaders Kishenji and Azad (Balagopal 2006) – and Singh (2006) points out an over-representation of intellectuals in decisional bodies of the Maoists i.e. the Politburo, Special Area Committees, Special Zonal Committees and State/Regional Committees. This divide between “informed” elite and “instinctual” executant revolutionaries is probably one the most enduring features of the guerrilla movement (Bhatia 2000).

determine historical truth (Verdery 2013). Ram (2016), locating martyrdom (*rakthasakshithvam*) practices among the Kerala youth wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Kerala underlines their inherent non-religious nature and their relevance as socio-cultural institutions. He explains that the notion of martyrdom does not always unfold in conditions of war, internal or external (See also Menon 2016).

Accounts of Maoist-led civil war in Nepal (1996-2006) also emphasize the importance of emulating selfless martyrs in order to become subjectively a dedicated member of the revolutionary community. Lecompte-Tilouine (2006) insists on the thaumaturgic effect of sacrifice in Maobadi guerrilla groups; she shows through her anthropological study how violence and sacrifice for the cause is omnipresent in the accounts produced by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and how such behavior is attached to a privileged modality, either Brahminic or “kingly.” Ramirez (2002) notes that the Nepalese Maoist guerrilla relies on the heroism of martyrdom to develop a sense of personal offering to the high end of revolution. Even in a post-conflict context this sense of internal struggle, battle against selfishness and continuous experience of self-improvement was found in the psyche and recruitment strategies of Nepalese activists of the Young Communist League, i.e. the Maoist youth wing (Hirslund 2012). In a similar fashion, Snellinger (2010) notes that it is the narrative of suffering and sacrifice that underpins the notion of political public service for Nepali student activists (see also Zharkevich 2009).

There is further evidence showing how secular leftist politics can generate ascetic molds of politics, in particular when looking at the fighting practices of a former separatist guerrilla in Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). While many of its ideologues were both Marxist-Leninists and secular Tamil Nationalists, the leadership requested supporters to venerate deceased fighters as *sannyasis* (ascetics) who fought for a common cause, thus renouncing egoistic personal desires (Chandrakanthan 2000). Natali (2004; 2008) indicates that the veneration of *Maavenaar* (Great Heroes) is made through the establishment of graveyards which are compared to Hindu temples and in which “gods are seeded.” Here martyrs are compared to “seeds,” thus emphasizing their monastic virtues but also their *shakti* (“divine power” in Tamil Hindu culture) (Roberts 2005). Significantly, Roberts (2005) suggests the existence of a form of cross-fertilization between religious idioms and LTTE secularism, in which “enchantment” is nestled amidst rational discourses. The *bhakti* (devotional) language proves to be influential among secular Tamil Tigers who use this semantic in their poetry (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2005). A similar process of sacralization of military politics (Shalk 1997) might be found in other South Asian countries, as suggested by Rashid (2016) in her study of funerals of army-men in contemporary Pakistan.

Further indications about the interplay between the existence of social privileges and the practice of left asceticism can be found when looking at the self-narratives of indigenous rights activists in Jharkhand (portrayed by Chandra 2013, op. cit.). He suggests that the activist ascetic renunciation and the Marxian declassing often qualifies as an exchange of capital, in which the Indian bourgeois exchanges economic capital in the form of material privileges for symbolic capital

in the form of status and rank (2013:4). The speaking subaltern in the name of *Adivasis* becomes for the three activists he interviewed a tool for a personal post-materialist quest (2013:41).

From the latter account the conclusion is that in order to declass, one has to trade economic and symbolic capital for ideological purity. Unsurprisingly, it appears that both forms of capital are found in abundance on campus. This is due both to the fact that JNU is an elite institution conferring a high status and that its student population – and in particular its politicised sections – are overwhelmingly from a middle-class background.

Most students, and in particular those with a low socioeconomic status, experience a form of social promotion when integrating into new JNU in-groups.⁸⁹ They gain a form of educational recognition but also a status of consecration. Selection (in the form of an entrance examination) introduces a separation, a “discontinuity of a social boundary” (Bourdieu 1996 [1989]:103) between those enrolled and those rejected. Consequently, like many other elite institutions across the world, this central university elects its members to the noble rank of young elite.

Being a student in such an elite university does not necessarily mean however being from an elite background; it is clear from the introduction of this study that the reservation policy of the university has brought to campus students of a variety of profiles. As discussed earlier, it is possible to affirm that a significant section of the students belong to middle-class sections of the Indian population.⁹⁰

While it is possible to affirm that the section of politically active students at JNU reflects to a certain extent the broader socioeconomic diversity found on campus, such groups have the tendency to over-represent middle-class profiles rather than upper-class ones. Most notably, more male participants and higher proportions of non-elite profiles can be found, proxied by background information of parents such as income, profession, education and place of residence. As indicated in Figures 4-1 and 4-2 (pp.88-89) on average higher proportions of political activists and political participants received their former education in another language other than English when compared to non-activist cohorts, thus indicating humbler educational backgrounds – but not necessarily deprived ones. The income and diploma of guardians of activists and politically active students are also lower than non-activist and non-participant students, but remain high when compared to the broader Indian population. Parents are more likely to live in rural settings and be involved in farming, but again figures are far below those of the “average Indian.” Moreover,

⁸⁹ For a debate on social mobility in the Indian context, ref. Naudet, J. (2008).

⁹⁰ Contemporary academic research is marked by an acrimonious debate over the nature and internal differentiation of the middle-class in post-liberalisation India (Fernandes 2015). Research has insisted on the distinctive lifestyle markers but also on the cultural, political and moral attributes – such as respectability of “middle-classness” (Hasan 1998; Joshi 2001; Sarkar 2001; Mazzarella 2003; Lukose 2009). Others scrutinised trajectories of upward mobility and stratification within the middle-classes and between classes – measured in terms of consumption patterns (Patel 2010; National Council of Applied Economic Research 2011). Keeping the definition of the Indian middle-class as simple as possible I define the middle-class both in terms of income (Sridharan 2004; Mishra and Parmar 2016) and in terms of access to education, in which criteria such as rurality or caste are taken in account (Fernandes 2006).

OBC categories participate more than the average in political activities, thus confirming the middle-caste tendencies of JNU activism, while it appears that women at JNU lag behind in terms of political participation.⁹¹

Through attracting students from every caste and class, JNU confirms the exceptional pattern of Indian democracy in which political absenteeism is positively associated with social and educational elitism (Jaffrelot and Van der Veer 2008). As in other parts of the country, the middle-class youth at JNU are the ones who appreciate the empowering potential of campus democracy, including various daily services offered by activists, the defence of reservations, and the special interactions resulting from an extended time spent *in situ* – contrary to the elite, who can afford living and spending leisurely time in commercialised spaces outside campus.

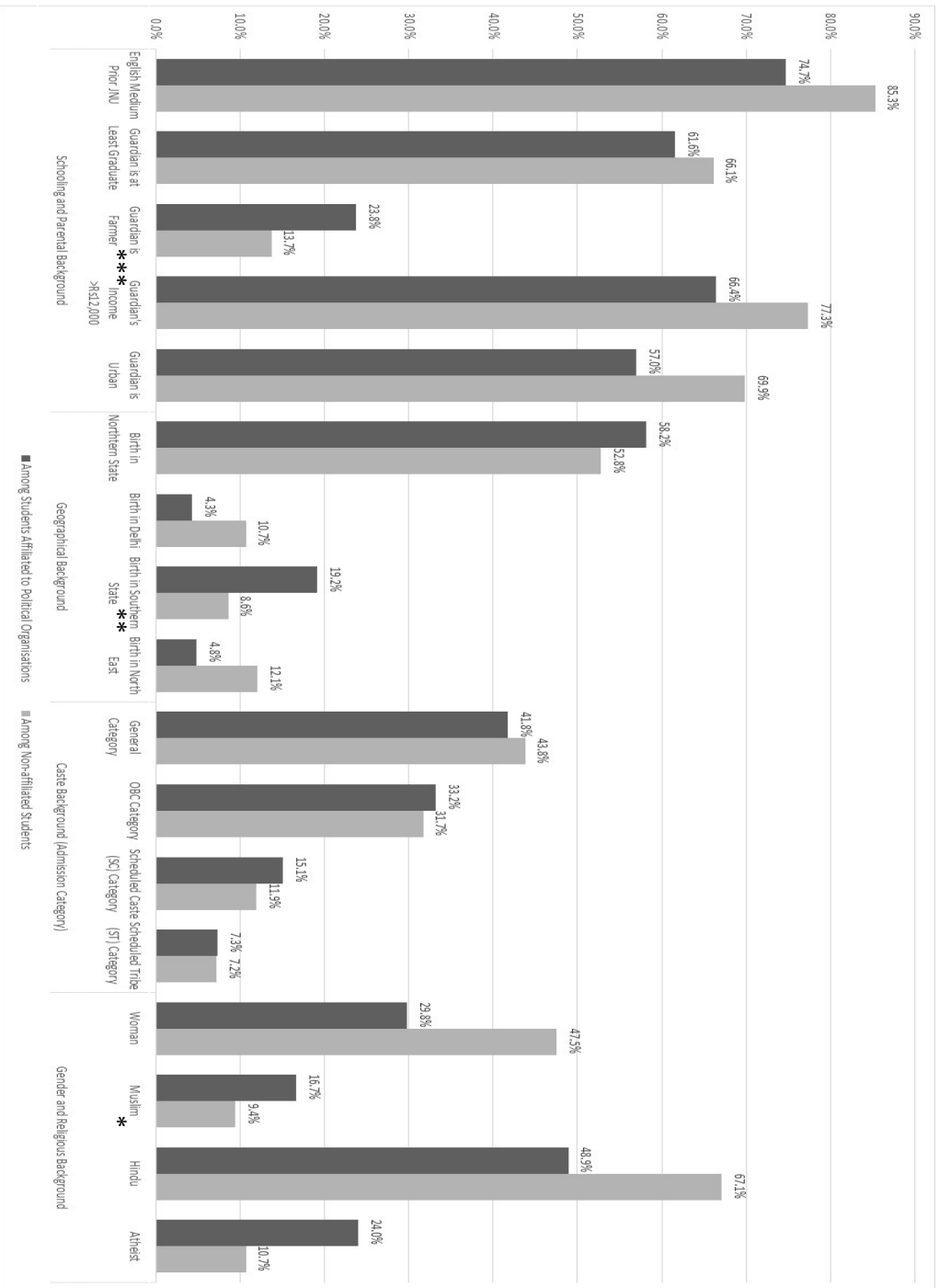
On the other hand, JNU activists claiming a Marxist legacy vocalise a deep sense of anger at the injustice inflicted upon Indian subalterns – Adivasi, Muslims, farmers, daily wagers, urban poor, sex workers, beef sellers, abused females, scavengers, ethnic and language minorities, untouchables and depressed castes. Competing Marxist ideologies of CPI, CPM, CPI(ML), CPI(Maoist) and their student outfits differ in many respects (Bhattacharyya 2016; Lockwood 2016), but they all rely on the idea of an increasing polarisation between two great classes.⁹² In Marxist terminology, a prestigious university in a capitalist regime tends to assimilate its students to the bourgeois class by further alienating them from the working class. Thus, if class conflict is indeed the driving force of history, are you going to accept a position in the ruling class?

In the next section, I will show that for young activists, especially for those from educated middle-classes or privileged families, declassing serves as a *modus operandi*, a language and a grammar to disavow one's pre-existing status and embrace the position and viewpoint of India from below. Becoming a left-leaning campus leader, which involves appealing to the various sections of the campus population, requires to embrace the pro-poor idea of being declassed by voluntarily dismantling one's own former cultural and economic capital in order to identify with the struggles of minorities and excluded sections of the Indian population. Grounding my argument in the notion of "textual affiliation" of E. Said, left declassing – and at times, left decasting – can be seen as a praxis formalising the ascription to a system of values, a "compensatory order" (Said 1983), expressing a new mode of relationship with, and re-presentation of, the subaltern.

⁹¹ Further discussions about the backgrounds of politicised students can be found in Appendices A and B.

⁹² See Chapter 2, section 5 in Marx, Karl (1847).

Figure 4-1. Various Background Information on Students Affiliated with Student Organisations at JNU



(Source: JNU Attitude Survey Conducted by the Author)

Note 1:

*Muslim/Atheist: When asked about their religious community, respondents had to choose between the following options: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, Atheist, Other.

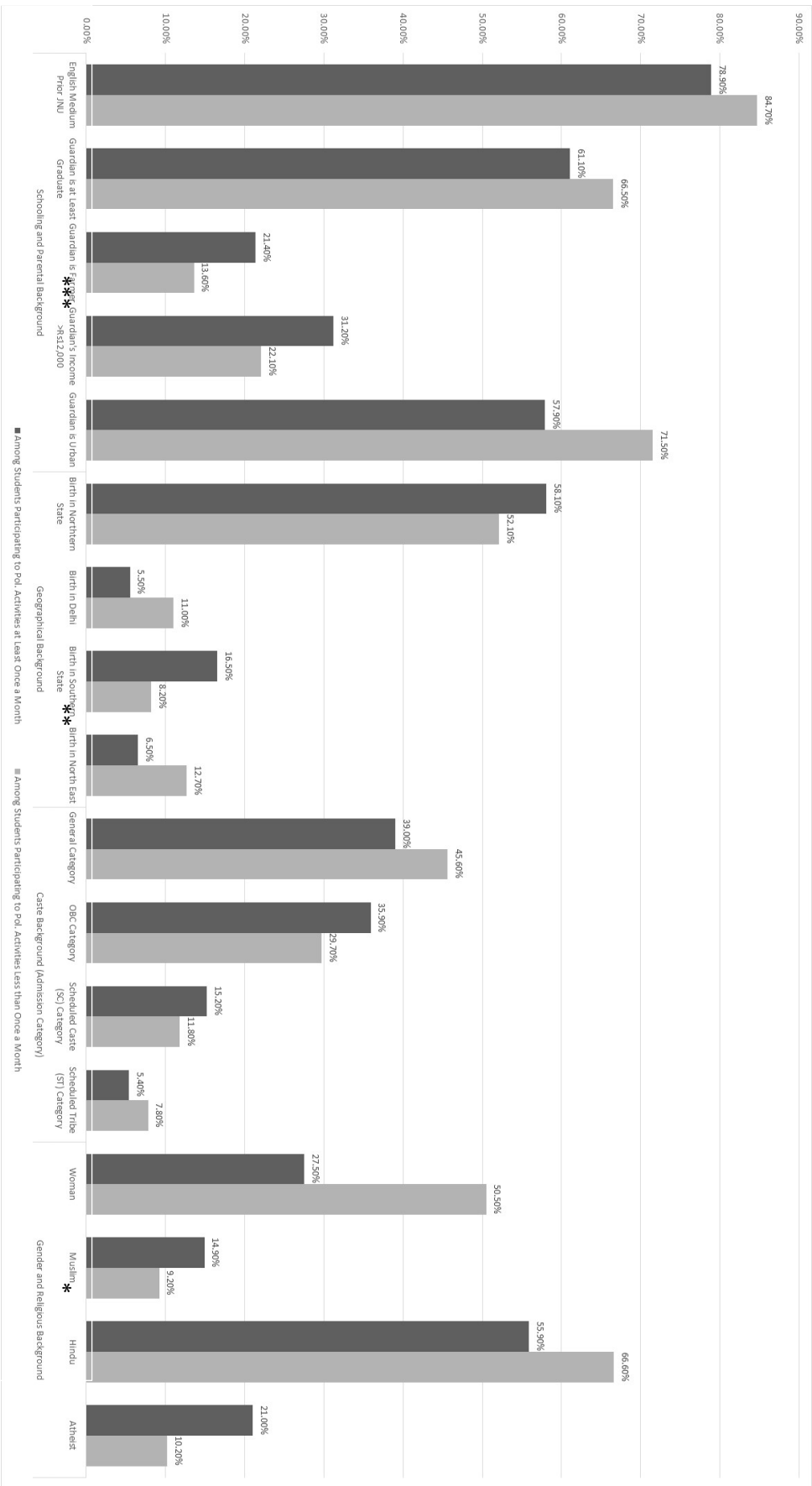
**Birth in a Southern State: This category includes the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Goa, Andaman & Nicobar and Maharashtra. The category 'Birth in a Northern State' includes Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhnad, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Gujarat, Orissa and Jharkhand. Delhi NCR, Jammu & Kashmir and North Eastern states were not included in that category.

***Guardian is a Farmer: When asked about the profession of their guardian, respondents had to choose between the following options: Farmer, Academic, Service, Business, Administration, Retired, Engineer/Technician, Army, Licensed professional, Journalist, Professional activist/politician, Worker, Cleric.

Note 2:

While many students who participate frequently to political activities in campus are also affiliated with a student organisation, these two categories of students do not completely overlap. Therefore, the results shown in tables 4-1 and 4-2 are different but do display similar trends.

Figure 4-2. Various Background Information of Students Participating in Political Activities at JNU Campus



(Source: JNU Attitude Survey Conducted by the Author)

Regarding *, **, ***: See note 1 and note 2 on previous page.

4.2 Squandering the Heritage Through Declassing

4.2.1 Declassing Dress-code

When first visiting the campus in July 2011, I remember being struck by the activists' outfits. The aesthetic panoply of the left leader was impossible to miss. It comprised unshaved beard for men, an unwashed and old drab coloured *kurta* (loose collarless shirt), *chappals* (thongs, flip-flops) even in winter, *gamcha* (thin cotton towel protecting from the sun, see Image 4-1 below) in summer and a *jhola* (shoulder bag). When attending rallies with them, Drumi, a JNU friend used to speak sarcastically about their fashion: "It makes students think that activists are going to work with the masses by bus just after their speech...just as if they were always in movement, busy, so that they have to keep their things always with them."⁹³

Image 4-1. Contact Print of Different Speeches by JNU Activists

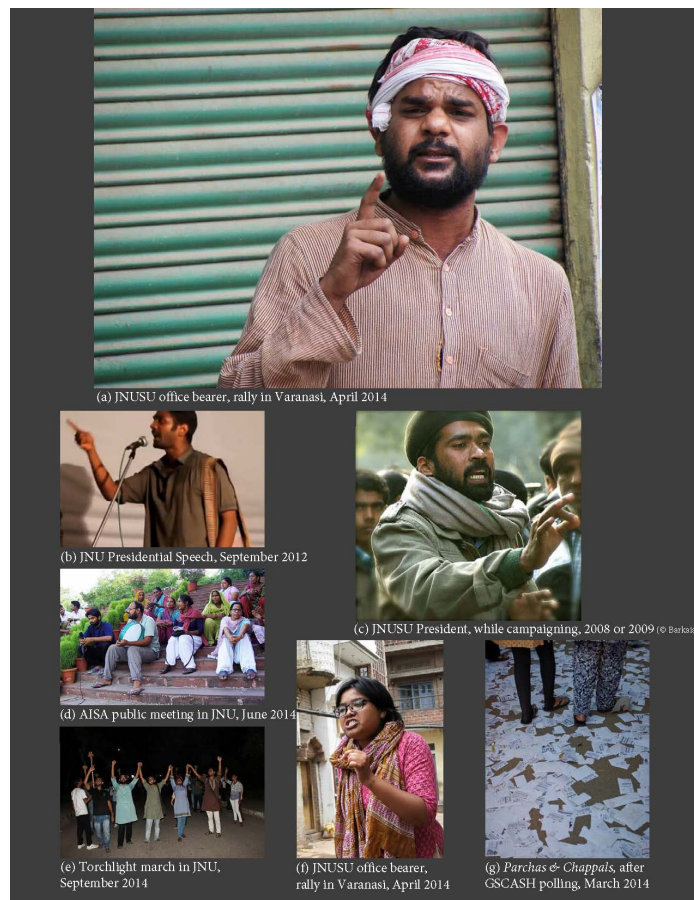


Photo Credit: By author and K. Parkar 2014.

Along with the declassified aesthetic, recurring declassing statements from politically active students came to the fore during my interviews with activists. Madrasa, former JNU Students' Union president (2012-13), was unequivocal about what to ascribe it to: "Is being declassified a relevant

⁹³ Following Sudipta Kaviraj's (2007) terminology, the visual image of declassing can be perceived as a marker of the left identity of JNU as it calls upon the "semiotic register" of party workers who served the cause of the oppressed with meagre possessions.

question? Obviously yes, the problem of party leadership is that they have lost ground; lost touch with people [...] declassing is a very important thing, to communicate with people you need to be humble. My father is a factory worker...I do not need to declass that much, but in a sense we are all middle-class" (Madrassa, interview 2014). The following vignette, referencing several declassing statements, shows that such discourse is not only the one of a single activist. The declassing idioms appear to be pervasive among the left at JNU, while being understood both as a fight against the economic elites and as a challenge to Brahmanical elites.

Leaders also have to fight against their own origin. The most difficult is to fight against yourself"(Dipen, interview 2014).

Without declassing you cannot reach the masses. You get corrupt if you have something to lose or to gain; if you have ambition. But I had only one ambition, the one of setting up and strengthening SFI and DYSF [youth wing of CPI(M)]. If they see an old man at the protest they will not shoot. Declass is the way you should show the path...be exemplary. The personal is very important. You have to be exemplary and throwing yourself into struggles. (Akhil, interview 2014).

[while distributing pamphlets for her candidate at the GSCASH election, Barthi, AISA future candidate for JNUSU presidency tells me] We are all [he points at another AISA comrade, Chandauli] middle-class and we need to declass, we have to follow the model of Chandrasekhar. But to declass is very tough because you have to relate with the working class (Barthi and Chandauli, interview 2014).

Consumerist culture has penetrated the campus [...] and declassing, this is utopian, has to go with deculturing yourself...decolonising the mind. It does not make any sense to raise expensive coffee and continue the fight. We come from a feudal society, we carry our past and have to break from it [...] there is always a mind to mimic someone upper than you...you can be lower caste and being casteist...you can be subaltern and aspire for power. The right thing is the aspiration to be humane (Tausiq, interview 2014).

DSU comrades are deliberately not claiming scholarships, is this part of the declassing process? (Karim, interview 2014).

Unsettling at first, I soon realised that these accounts found echoes among the leadership of left political organisations outside campus. Several biographies of communist figures – E.M.S. Namboodiripad (Bakshi 1993) (CPI(M)), P.C. Joshi (Chakravartty 2007) (CPI), Kanu Sanyal (Paul 2014) (CPI(ML)), Chandramouli (People's March 2007) (CPI(Maoist)) – portrayed their leader as a man of determined frugality. The most radical account of Marxist sacrifice was recounted to me by Jitendra, a former OBC activist (Anjaiah and Kumar 2011a) at JNU, who had lost faith in the ability of current Indian left politicians to uproot their "Brahminical identity." Puchalapalli Sundarayya (1913-85), one of the founder members of the CPI(M) in Telangana, was according to him the exception that proved the rule, as "he renounced his Reddy [upper caste from Andhra Pradesh] name, gave up his 5,000 acres of land and decided to castrate himself in order not to have Brahmin descent" (Jitendra, interview 2015).

As I used to be puzzled about this embodied communication technique, I went to see one of the most senior professors at JNU to get some possible answers. He did not seem at all surprised to

see activists dressed in rags. He told me that Marxism in India had integrated the Gandhian visual of self-denial. “Well, Marxists are in a way sadhus in secular uniforms,” he claimed. If my understanding of the implications of declassing made its inceptive step after my meeting with Prof. Avijit Pathak, it was further substantiated much later when I first encountered Pratap, a former All India Students’ Association (AISA) student and charismatic campus leader. Pratap was elected in 2007 as president of the Students’ Union and has a deep knowledge of the kind of sacrifices that total activist engagement entails. Yet, as an individual who had, in a sudden move, left the organisation in 2013, he was able to reflect critically on the logic and implications of declassing as a social practice. Writing this chapter with Pratap in mind, I would like to quote him in length in order to uncover what he calls the “framework of the revolutionary”:

Youth from middle-class background...urban class...when they start to associate themselves with the poor of the poor, you feel this connection, this need to declass. I use to have this kind of feeling, that I cannot eat costly food. No-one tells you that directly, it is a very unsaid thing. Actually it is a very unconscious dominance of Gandhi. He gave a particular image of politicians you know. It’s culturally loaded. Moral guilt is there...It stays in your mind, where do you belong? To declass...sometimes this theoretical question has been taken at a superficial level. We wear unwashed kurta pyjama and dirty jeans, uncombed hairs, smoking cigarette...this framework of the revolutionary. [...] Gandhi was the one who introduced peasantry in the freedom movement. Before it was elite, ruling-class...Gandhi introduced mass movement with this idea that he is a fakir, that he owns anything and wants anything...that image of him fighting for us. Particularly for the left...this idea of sacrificing everything got in their mind. If you are involved in a movement, automatically the movement gives you a form of living...but supposes he [the activist] is not part of the deprived...suppose he is middle-class. [...] In Indian left movement, they are a lot of mass leaders who technically belong to the rich, to the upper crust. But the force, the energy of the movement you are part of...actually it inculcates to you a specific form of lifestyle. Because you are too much into it. You are an agrarian leader, you are not living like a contractor with car, you have to be there with the people. So declass is very necessary.

Pratap’s mention of the *fakir* (Muslim ascetic) was a direct reference to Gandhi’s austere discipline of *brahmachariya*, understood as self-discipline, chastity and sacrifice. As Devji indicates (2010), non-attachment to material possessions is an important routine for Gandhian political missionaries (*satyagrahi*). Gandhi used ascetic and devotional vocabulary (*bhakti*) and practices (e.g. celibacy, spinning, fasting, silence) inspired from epics such as the Bhagavad Gita (Chakrabarty and Majumdar 2010) to bring the common man and woman into the fold of public life (Mehta 2010).⁹⁴

To be clear, I do not wish to suggest that Gandhi directly inspired the “political technology” of Marxist declassing. The cultural legacy of the mahatma in Indian left declassing is more at an implicit or unconscious level. Leftists, in particular in Communists and Dalit politics, accuse

⁹⁴ Indubitably, Gandhi is the Indian political figure who has brought most political attention to everyday life in order to mobilise the Indian masses. Consequently, Gandhi is the figure who transformed ascetic disciplines of simplicity and self-sacrifice into techniques of activism (Howard 2013). Howard argues that with Gandhi the figure of the *sadhu* enters the national political arena; it can no longer be bound to the realm of worldly disengagement.

Gandhi of casteism and relying on alternative iconic figures such as B.R. Ambedkar. As a pro-Maoist political pamphlet states: “From Golwalkar to Gandhi the very fabric of Indian state is woven with fascist and brahminical ideology” (DSU pamphlet 2013). I want to suggest, however, that Gandhi popularised the idea that intimate practices, especially body practices, expressed sincere association with the masses. Gandhi welded ascetic language and popular politics together, and this connection was soon reinterpreted by Indian Marxist practitioners.

4.2.2 Asserting Dress-code: A Critique of the Practice of Declassing

Biographical stories of young men and women prior to activism help shape the personal narratives they develop in the course of their activist career. Interviews conducted with activists from Dalits and Muslim backgrounds usually showed more ambiguous feelings about the idea of declassing. Because these left leaders perceive themselves as low-caste, the idea of declassing was seen by them as a reinforcement of their downgraded social status. In such cases, declassing discourses are complemented – and at times replaced – by assertive claims.

I am not supposed to go down, I am supposed to go up. Because of my unprivileged background I find this all idea to declass ridiculous, though it was not the case when I was active in DSU [Maoist Organisation] [...] you have to take my activist commitment in an historical perspective, I wore *jhole* because I was imitating my peers, I was emulating. Now that I have stepped out I wear the *jhole* in particular occasions, at least I am aware of its symbol. You know, I still have 20 kurtas in my room, I have them but I don't wear them. (Karim, interview 2014)

This was in 2007. That Dalit fellow went on stage for his speech with an impeccable shirt, the Ambedkarite jacket and glasses. He tried to look smart. Still ABVP goons tried to destabilise him, use abuse words like ‘chocolate’ [in reference to his skin colour]” (Lino, interview 2014).

Class struggle is my class interest...my father is handicapped and we have only three acres of land. I would say I am lower-middle-class so I do not need to declass...rather I need to improve my standards of living. But I also need to decaste, you can see these things in the way you are eating...it is a difficult process because it's subconscious. Then I can become a *shahid* [a martyr], where you eliminate yourself, eliminate your values (Madrasi, interview 2014).

For activists from deprived sections, it is tautological to transform one's identification to that with a humbler social background; the idea of squandering one's heritage thus becomes a narrative difficult to defend. In such cases, left activism can become a way to affirm one's identity and avenge perceived forms of degradation. For example, Sumbul, a female candidate at the student elections in 2014 would claim on stage to be part of the *pasmanda* (marginalised) section of the Muslim community before shouting “long live revolution [...] long live social justice.” Other examples involve more personal experiences; for instance, a former JNUSU (Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union) president would discretely relate part of his activism to a reaction against an experience of perceived humiliation. A Tamil activist from the OBC category recalls being stopped by a supervisor at an entrance examination of an IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) because of his inability to afford a proper shirt (Madrasi, interview 2014).

“The assertion by the individual of his own opinions and beliefs, his own independence and interest – over and against group standards, group authority, and group interests – is the beginning of all reform” (Ambedkar 1936:§2.1). Bearing in mind the emancipatory motto of the Dalit reformist Ambedkar (1891-1956), most Dalit activists did claim that political assertiveness implies breaking the association between untouchability and the stigma of inherited pollution (Webster 1999), and for this reason many reject the idea of declassing altogether. For instance, Hilsari, a Dalit involved in the CPI(M) affiliated student organisation (SFI), is very clear about the inappropriateness of declassing: “After my MPhil submission I will have to work and send back some money home. I cannot afford to declass; I need to look assertive. Malls and Café Coffee Days [i.e. a popular Indian coffee chain] are around you, why should you avoid them? See, when you want to look poor is that you are actually from a privileged background. I think it is quite irresponsible, I cannot afford that. Look at Ambedkar, he tried to dress up smartly, assert his own [Dalit identity] while people wanted him to remain dirty.” This statement underlines the contingent and situated nature of the concept of declassing for left activists, the relevance of it depending on the social origin of its upholders.

Assertiveness instead of declassing is, in the words of many Dalits, a choice rooted into their personal experiences of social humiliation. I was troubled by the high number of examples provided by respondents. Tulasi, an office bearer of the United Dalit Students’ Forum (UDSF), a Dalit cultural organisation mentioned to me an event in which his professor prevented him – and not his other adolescent classmates – from entering his home after being asked to pluck garden flowers. Another instance of such humiliation is given by Patani, member of the Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students Association (BAPSA), a Dalit political group. He tells the story of the conflict with his flatmates who refused to drink water from the same glass as him, thus trying to avoid caste-based pollution. From these accounts, it appears that within the major student organisations at JNU, and on this aspect at least the Dalit discourse on self-fashioning is very different from the one developed by other politically dominant sections among left activists.

4.2.3 Additional Declassing Practices

4.2.3.1 Space Segregation

If the declassing practice and its critique are inherently visual, they also have a strong spatial component. During my fieldwork, I observed that campus-based JNU Marxists, and in particular those from the middle-class tended to avoid certain areas, those who are seen by them as “dirty” living spaces. Indeed, I found that the grand majority of left activists on campus boycotted commercialised settings, malls, food chains and branded coffee shop associated with the consumerism of the Indian middle-class. Left activists tried their best to frequent places where bourgeois luxury and excessive comfort are absent and where the ownership of costly objects (e.g. a smartphone, a motorbike) “have to be reflected upon” (Berhampuri, interview 2014).

Among left activists a high degree of moralism was attached to spaces, operating a clear distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ ones, as they superimpose an ideological layer to the actual map of the

city, redrawing a territorial hierarchy on their own. Some *dhabas* (food-stalls) within the campus are, for instance, seen as compatible with a declassed way of life. One called Ganga Dhaba will invite the visitor to sit directly on cement cobblestones arranged randomly on a dusty field, with no lighting and no tables. Food available will be cheap snacks, bun omelettes, fresh juices, parathas (stuffed flatbread) and milk tea with no branded products except glucose biscuits and sodas. Pratap was one of the JNU activists readily acknowledging the influence of Ganga Dhaba as a refuge to the areas polluted by consumerism (interview 2015), a statement he expressed clearly to a journalist of the Indian Express:

With its thorny babools, rocks for chairs and tables, and deep pits and mounds, Ganga dhaba is ‘a critique of today’s glittering commercialised times’ [...]. It is a symbol of free thought and open exchange of ideas, with its uncontrolled space where any number of people can huddle anyhow around any stone. Here, students have planned revolution as well as found romance. But now, it is not the locus of life on the campus that it used to be. If you walk a little ahead, you will find another eatery, the 24/7 dhaba, which seems to be what the Ganga dhaba is a critique of. Here, you will find tables and chairs, a well-ordered space, a bigger menu and fewer people in JNU chic — jeans and kurta. Ganga dhaba and the 24/7 dhaba spatialise the slow shift from Marx to market which has become visible on the campus. (Kumar 2013)

Malls and food chains appear to be the least reputable spaces for left activists concerned about their public reputation. I vividly recall a revealing anecdote that manifested the taboo attached to glittering spaces. The 2015 April heat was at its peak and I had promised Arpita, an active member of AISF, to take her to a pizza place as she had craved one during her last ten-days-long hunger strike. One evening, I finally convinced her and her comrade-friend Azad to go to a restaurant chain in Priya, the fashionable market next to JNU campus. Their curiosity towards the fast-food environment was a powerful sign of them being not accustomed to such settings; they claimed they had never been there and accordingly much discussion focussed on what they saw from the dining table. They concentrated their indignant comments on overweight customers and on waiters who expressed condescension towards customers ordering too little. As we were finishing our meal, the unexpected happened: three activists from a rival Marxist organisation entered Pizza Hut to eat. After a short moment of astonishment and awkward salutations, Hariti, Jitendra and Priya disappeared from sight and went to eat on the lower floor. Making sure he could not be heard, Azad started laughing, “You know how they call me?” he asked me, but before I could say anything he was already answering to himself, “A revisionist. They are supposed to be real revolutionaries, radical ones. But what I find crazy is that their personal life goes against the principles they claim in public. Their private life is going against their political principles.” The meeting of five Marxist leaders from two rival organisations at Pizza Hut was a truly incongruous moment; they were witness to each other’s political sacrilege.

4.2.3.2 Anger Against Society

Activists’ avoidance of commercialised spaces illuminates their reluctance to abide by the consumerist conduct of the ‘bourgeois middle-class’ which contrasts with the poverty of the

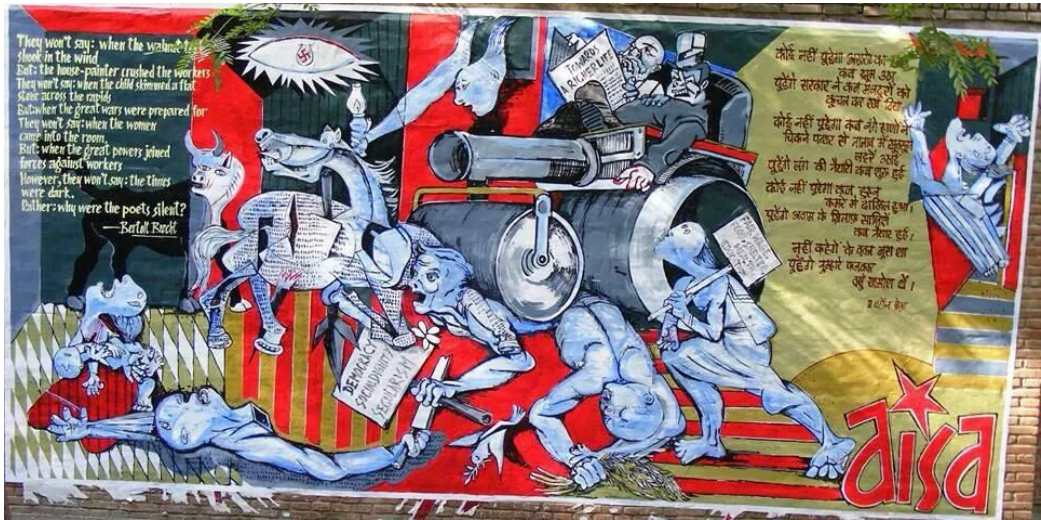
majority of the Indian population. In outlining the inequality between the rich and the poor, activists regularly found ways to trigger affects, in particular those associated to social conflict. I found this notion of conflict to be connected to social anger existing among activists, as further explained in Chapter 6 (e.g. for instance, Figure 6-4 p.146). Recurring words in political pamphlets produced by student organisations – as contained in the PaRChA archive – reflect the political focus on emotive expressions of intense tensions in society: struggle (35,582 occurrences), people (27,567), fight (14,780), communal (13,319), violence (13,213), attack (10,843), class (9,652), worker (9,165), and caste (8,997) are among the most used words used on campus.

I suggest that an embodied emotionality of left activists is visible in the visual culture of JNU. Every year in the summer, each student organisation mobilises local artists in their ranks to draw metres-long posters and paste them on administrative and academic buildings. This follows a once-a-year rush of organisations to capture the best locations. The result of this process is the saturation of political messages everywhere a student looks. Most of the 392 posters pasted on JNU walls in 2014 are pictorial representations of the social oppression against workers, labourers, Dalits, etc.

The embedded aesthetic (Ginsburg 1994) of pain in JNU poster culture is exemplified by the four-meters-large acrylic copy of 1937 Picasso's *Guernica* on the next page (Image 4-2), displayed next to the School of Social Sciences main building.⁹⁵ Many elements representing class oppression can be found. The dominance of the rich is symbolised by the enormous steamroller/tank. It is mounted by capitalists holding a newspaper with the headline "Towards a richer life." Different categories of oppressed individuals are crushed under the weight of the oppressing class. The man holding the ear of wheat is the Indian peasant, and the slender but muscled bodies lying on the floor represent workers' corpses, in contrast with the fat capitalist. The grievances of the peasant-worker class are written on the sign held by a woman: "Fair wages, food, health, education." The blue colour of smashed individuals is an indication of their low caste identity. In India, symbols and colours have an acute political meaning, and blue connotes Dalit identity (Jaoul 2006). The overall interpretation of the picture is given by the Brecht poem *Dark Times* (1937) in the corners of the poster: "When the great powers joined forces against workers [...] why were the poets silent?" The sense of this can be translated in more concrete terms: if Indian society is so unfair and violent, why are you not doing anything against it?

⁹⁵ The mural was painted by AISA artist Anupam Roy.

Image 4-2. AISA Poster at JNU: the Rich Roll Coating the Poor, the Peasant, and a Placard Epitomising Values of “Democracy, Solidarity and Secularism”



Arguably, emotions play an important role in the emergence and decline of political movements in India and in the rest of Asia (Tawa Lama-Rewal 2016). Although rational-actor models tend to minimise the role of hope, despair, compassion, sacrifice, love and devotion in collective action, academics acknowledge that social movements and political groupings are successful only when they become emotionally resonant (Gould 2004). This emotional sensitivity can be found in the poster I have just described. Embedding an argument that comprises indictment and plea, pamphleteer and graphic discourses use pathos to denounce, accuse, and incriminate the “bad people,” identified with the capitalists, the *zamindars* (big landowners), imperial forces and the corrupt Indian state. A pro-Maoist senior supporter will never miss an opportunity to recall the state of affairs in the country: “Don’t you see the unbearable exploitation of the masses... see among them there is despair; people have the choice between dying alone or dying fighting” (Kollami, interview 2015). Through calling upon mimetic grief, the activist allegorically becomes the deprived: he is therefore capable of *Einfühlung* (empathy).

In this context, declassing, that is here the attempt to side with those suffering, is a practice that enables the activist to unleash a universe of negative feelings that command indignation and call for action. In chapter 6, I show that these “topoi of emotionality” (for a definition of the term, cf. Wodak and Meyer 2015:56) can be sourced in the pamphlets produced by JNU activists. Topoi “can be described as parts of argumentation which belong to the obligatory, either explicit or inferable premises” (Wodak 2006:74).

4.2.3.3 Martyr Identification

Until now, we have described how several shared subjectivities could qualify as declassing. Here I am interested in describing how such subjectivities – embodying the Marxist culture – are further fuelled through social appropriation of pro-people rationales and martyrs’ identifications (Vaidik 2013). Because Martyrs are exemplary beings, they might – in the case of Indian communism – be ‘good to think with’ as symbols of declassed individuals who commit to their cause until death

and show to comrades the way forward. Martyrs at JNU might have a similar symbolic purpose, and in order to verify this, I went to attend several celebrations of left icons during my fieldwork. For instance, once a year in February, Naxalite (i.e. a Maoist guerrilla) sympathisers from DSU organise a memorial lecture in remembrance of the killing of Maoist fighter and JNU student Naveen Babu, a former PhD student at JNU who joined the Naxalite movement and was killed in 2000 by the Andhra Pradesh Police (DSU pamphlet 2012, 2014). Similarly, SFI organised several similar events and was in 2015 in the process of collecting biographies of the 136 comrades who gave their life for the cause (SFIEC 2016). AISA held an annual celebration of the martyrdom of Comrade Chandrashekhar (JNUSU president 1994-1996) and screened an homage documentary called *Ek Minute Ka Maun* (A Minute of Silence) in an open-air JNU lawn.

Chandrashekhar started his activist career as a CPI member in Bihar, becoming vice-president of AISF at the end of the 1980s. Soon after his arrival at JNU as a student, he joined the student outfit of CPI(ML), AISA, at a moment when the guerrilla Maoist party was going “overground” by adopting parliamentary and legal means (Jaoul 2011). After returning to his hometown Siwan in 1997, he was shot dead by a henchman of the Parliamentary Member of the constituency at a street-corner meeting (Collective pamphlet 1997), which triggered numerous JNU-led protests in Delhi (Friends of Chandrashekhar 1997a, 1997b; JNU Students Coordination Committee 1997; Janhangir et al. 1997). Every last week of March, during the commemoration of his death at JNU, Chandrashekhar (nicknamed Chandu) is presented as a declassified communist sacrificing his life for the fight against injustice and caste oppression in India.

Chandrashekhar started his activist journey at JNU and then engaged politically at a pan-Indian level. Martyrs like him enable leftist students to substitute the limited political imaginary of campus with one of broader society in which these figures committed and sacrificed their lives. Chandrashekhar’s biographical trajectory supports local activism in its attempt to project itself onto the national scene. As displayed in JNU pamphlets (see infra.), Chandu’s sacrifice might encapsulate the universe of social suffering on campus as a microcosm. He could be perceived as a means of recruitment, a way to enlarge the political imaginary. The Table 4-1 next page presents the text found in the immediate vicinity (just before and just after) the word Chandrashekhar (or Chandu) in six JNU pamphlets – one per line.

Taking the example of the celebration of Chandrashekhar’s martyrdom, it appears that these kinds of figures serve as “standard bearers” to galvanise and recruit new cadres. By its own admission of a political rival, AISA organisation – through constantly reclaiming the legacy of Chandu – manages to appear to new students as the sincerest, most committed and most radical student organisation on campus (Gowda, interview 2015). Additionally, martyrs are here to help activists envisage high-risk activism outside the university setting.

Table 4-1. Six Concordances⁹⁶ of Words Associated with Martyr Chandrashekhar in JNU Pamphlets

Theme One: Call For Action ^a		
Left Context ⁹⁷	Pivot Word	Right Context
Remembering Bhagat Singh and	Chandrashekhar	cannot be reduced to hollow ritual; it must be an occasion to redefine the contours of our politics, in a way that brings to the fore those “revolutionary armies in the fields and the factories – peasants and workers.” (De and Raghiv 2008a)
Don't waste any time in mourning	Chandrashekhar	. Organize. (De and Raghiv 2008b)
When we see communalism, corruption and injustice around us, must we just become indifferent, cynical or angry?	AISA appeals to you [in a poster dedicated to Chandu]	– Don't just get angry: GET ACTIVE (Menon 2007)
Theme Two: Overcoming Campus Boundaries ^b		
Left Context	Pivot Word	Right Context
Inspired by Bhagat Singh as well as from the student martyrs of the Naxalbari, who left prestigious colleges to join the revolutionary struggles of poor peasantry,	Chandu	, in his life, as well as his death, broke the barriers between academics, student activism and peoples' struggles beyond the campus. (Ranjan and Awadhesh 2005)
For	Chandrashekhar	this campus was not an island. He always asserted, in word and deed, that the student movement must ally itself with democratic and progressive struggles across the country and the world. (Basu and De 2007)
With his life, his struggles and his martyrdom,	Chadrashkekhar	reminded us that our campus cannot simply be and academic enclave; it is bound by thousand links to the heartbeat on India's struggling people. (Kumar and De 2009)

4.2.3.4 Non-conformist Career Aspirations (but access to 'establishment' positions)

It should be clear at this point that the prolonged act of declassing cannot be reduced, neither uniquely to political instrumentalism nor to a mere electoral ceremonial i.e. an idea fairly common among JNU students. A critique of declassing could consider declassing as a performance crafted for non-activist spectators and not, as it is analysed here, as an embodied practice transforming the *Weltanschauungen* of its practitioners. I would like to partly refute this critique by looking at the diachronic effects of activist commitment.⁹⁸

In the context of JNU left activism, many current and former student activists from AISA, SFI, AISF and other left organisations declared rejecting “job opportunism.” As a founder of SFI at JNU recalls: “I remember at the time preparing UPSC [civil service examination for administrative positions at the central level] exams for a comrade was just unthinkable. It was a shame” (Suneet,

⁹⁶ A concordance is the context of a given word or set of words in a text.

⁹⁷ The left/right context is a set of words placed on the left/right of a given word in a text.

⁹⁸ To put it differently, I suggest that an account of declassing in left-leaning campuses need to look at the sequence of personal adjustments that this long-lasting activity occasions.

interview 2014). When asked in an interview (1998) if the aspirations of JNU activists were similar to those of the youth of their generation, JNU Professor C.P. Bhambri provided a negative answer: “The communists men on campus are deviant from the dominant socio-political system and will remain that way. In fact, these qualities make them stand out in the crowd” (*Times of India*, 1 November 1998).

Individuals becoming full-timers in their parent’s party (i.e. after their time on campus), told me they abandoned the comfort zone of a stable and correctly paid job promised to them as JNU graduates. By following several of them in rural areas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, I realised the degree of dedication that total commitment to an Indian communist organisation involves. Some of them remained unmarried and rely on meagre allowances that their party puts at their disposal.

In March 2014, at an SC/ST (government designation for Adivasi and Dalit communities) student residence in Ara (Bihar), Arathi confessed the difficulty of being a full-timer. As national vice-president of AISA, he had embraced the ascetic activist framework. “I live out of the donations of fellow comrades [...] of course my parents did not want me to join *Maley* [other name for CPI(ML)], they said that there is no career. [...] Building the left movement requires a lot of efforts...it requires a lot of space. Finding a partner is not necessarily incompatible but the person needs to give you that space. Some have succeeded to find somebody out [outside] of the Party but it not necessarily easy.”

Such comment denotes to some extent a deviant career aspiration (Becker 1963), at least in respect of professional alleys in the corporate sector. Indeed, as Arathi admits, the declassing Marxist student leader has few prospects; political careers at a national level are nearly impossible, s/he cannot join capitalist-based office jobs or exploitative businesses, and work in the public administration is regarded as political treason. Deviant careers, in the sociological interpretation of Howard Becker, are the sequence of movements that lead individuals to be perceived (and perceive themselves) as rule-breakers. Erving Goffman (1961) and Becker (1963) both emphasise that deviance is a learning process involving identity development and individual adaptations. As shown in the case of Arathi, I would like to emphasise that many left activists find their professional aspiration appear to be in conflict with the expectations of family and the broader Indian society.

Not only employment in private companies and government is demonised among left JNU activists, but also involvement in mainstream politics. When discussing with former or current senior activists, I often heard them making the following semantic distinction: the selfless political activist is different from the politician who seeks a career in a national apparatus such as the Indian National Congress or the Bharatiya Janata Party. Ronald De Souza, a former JNUSU office bearer differentiates the bad public figure who seeks “self-gain” and “personal aggrandisement” and the good public figure who acquires “heightened or radical consciousness through ideological engagement and praxis in order to transform aspects of society through the political process” (De Souza 2004). In this ambivalent approach, the mundane failings of dirty

politics embodied by politicians without values are rejected while the qualities of principled activists are sublimed (Spencer 2007:142).

I found that youth members of more mainstream parties could be more ambitious with their personal aspirations and prepare public service exams and look for highly-paid careers that come with hierarchical positions of power (Bharat, interview 2014; Gyan, interview 2014; Saharsi, interview 2015; Kashif, interview 2015). This requires espousing mainstream values recognised by the family and the wider socio-professional environment. Conversely, being a radical left activist necessitates committing to non-conforming acts that are seen by Indian society as unconventional and marginal. In effect, jobs available for former campus leaders need to be activist-compatible.

Activists' declared willingness to embrace deviant careers was however not always concretised among left activists. Most of the 105 former office bearers (1971-2014) of JNU Students' Union who are not currently students – who are almost all Marxist in credo – ended up working in academia (48.6 percent), professional politics (19 percent) or journalism (11.4 percent) (cf. Table 5-1 p.127). Clearly, the reluctance to take up certain positions does not necessarily mean professional disqualification as teaching positions do qualify as 'establishment' occupations. Fundamentally, this might suggest a form of professional bargaining on the part of many activists. They will not engage in 'corrupting professions' but will not renounce the opportunity to secure job security and a stable income (cf. pp.125-127). As I further develop in the next chapter, such phenomenon is due to the fact that for many, taking up a teaching job is one of the only alleys that enable activists to sustain their political commitment after graduation.

The discrepancy between the declassing declarations of activists and the privileges that they have in terms of access to certain teaching positions – which are granted by their intellectual status and their ties with activist-academics – need to be stressed. The paradox is deepened by the fact that while on campus, active student activists are required to prioritise politics rather than studies. The self-development of the activist profile involves regular participation in protests and decreased opportunities for diligent academic research. This situation appears to be on one hand a form of sacrifice, while on the other it becomes a professional advantage, as such behaviour gives them a privileged access to sections of Indian academia in which left faculty members are still influential (more on this pp.122-127).

4.2.3.5 Induced risks of political disengagement

As I have shown, declassed activism and its paradoxes require a degree of commitment that goes beyond mild political participation; it is a discipline of self that applies at an intimate level. I could barely make sense of the deep nature of declassing before I actually met activists who, in the course of my fieldwork, were "turning passive." While I shall not discuss the reasons of personal disengagement here, I witnessed a certain loosening of their declassing praxis among left individuals abandoning activism. Among them was Chitranshu, a young activist of AISA who had been elected joint-secretary of the Students' Union. Early that year, after confessing his disarray

to me, he had stopped working for the organisation and acknowledged he was compromising with certain ideals he had professed before. Below are displayed quotes from two interviews conducted eight months apart.

[Thursday 13th of May 2014] I am so addicted to this ideology [...] I can work, bring change for a small population. I already declassified myself, used to go to mall, now I just want to cover my body. I have shoes but I barely never wear them. I go to Pizza Hut with my *gamcha*. At one level it's a stand against consumerism, at another level it's about working with the people.

[Thursday 22nd of January 2015] I want to make white money, contribute to socialism...not going on the streets but doing monetary contributions [...] I will maybe turn out as a Bourgeois.

As Chitranshu had expressed his will to make money on his own, he broke with the imaginary of the full-time party worker but kept an attachment to the idea of benevolence. He wanted wealth not for itself but in order to redistribute it among progressive activists. An interpretation of this could be that, for Chitranshu, ascetic duties had been partly replaced by the desire of generosity and largesse.

His physical appearance contrasted greatly with the one he displayed during his activist days. He had replaced a *kurta* full of holes with a shirt and a *khadi* jacket bought in a branded shop in Connaught Place. *Slippers* (which are in fact flip-flops) were replaced with branded shoes (Numero Uno shop), and instead of his *gamcha* from Jharkhand he had put on a brand-new shawl. He had gone with me to a mall in town. He was relieved because he had shaved his beard and looked clean, so that he would not feel looked upon when going through the security gate. He bought for the first time a blazer and complained about the fact that discount sales came exactly when he has no money left. On the way back to campus in the *auto* (three-wheeled passenger cart) he would chat on the new iPhone his brother had sent him from abroad.

Chitranshu's case illustrates that the intensity of declassing behaviours might be evolving over time but still impact the long-standing aspirations of activists. Since declassing practices involve a significant amount of personal sacrifice, some of these sacrifices appear as difficult to sustain when quitting activism. It can be hypothesised that declassing processes raise the cost of Marxist high-level participation for students at JNU and beyond, and therefore create obstacles to prolonged political commitments. When asked about their intention to move to full-time political activism after graduation, several senior leftist campus leaders expressed doubts. The common answer was "I don't know" and might have reflected their hesitation towards devotional forms of political commitment.

This incessant indecision regarding their commitment might be best exemplified by Gowda Kishore, former JNUSU president (1998-99) and now joint-secretary of the CPM-led All India Kisan Sabha (peasant association). After a decade of teaching in Bangalore, he decided to go back into full-time communist politics. After mentioning salary issues and problems related to organising a decent wedding ceremony for himself, he admitted that the implications of declassing are always in his mind: "Yes it requires a lot of sacrifices [...] nobody wants your offspring to follow

the path of Bhagat Singh [...] even when you become an all-timer...it is a continuous questioning. But on the other hand, you are convinced you are not doing anything wrong.” Here it could be suggested that to declass is a double-edged commitment; it is a material cost but a moral reward (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011).

4.2.3.6 Fasting as a Declassed Practice?

JNU-based asceticism as a mean to feel like the poor might in part be expressed through the practice of hunger strikes. Obviously, such instruments belong to the broader polity of South Asian politics (Reddy 2009; Lahiri 2014) and many of such hunger strikes might have little to do with do with expressing empathy for the poor.

However, tied to a pro-communist political agenda, fasts can become full-fledged means of declassing. Along with being an instrument to satisfy student demands and gain leverage in negotiation with the JNU administration, fasting could also qualify as a declassified political technique, as it allows activists to put pressure on the government and administration in the name of distressed people – e.g. poor students without on-campus accommodation, students unable to afford living costs. Through suffering with the individuals they defend, campus activists become politically visible figures acknowledged by the wider student community. As a matter of fact, political organisations usually ask future candidates at the Students’ Union elections to participate in the hunger strikes organised on campus. The most recent fast to death (as per August 2016) at JNU was in response to the administration’s decision to expel the activists responsible for organising an “anti-national” event, an accusation which led to the filing of a sedition case against six activists and the jailing of three of them for several weeks.

No less than 4,101 among the 72,424 documents of the PaRChA archive mention a hunger strike. On these frequent occasions activists sit on mats under a covered courtyard in front of the administration building and start their fast to death. They only ingest non-carbohydrate liquids in order to demand improvements of student conditions, such as restarting interrupted construction work for new hostels, or the increase small research scholarships from Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 5,000 (around 35 to 70 pounds). After a couple of days, doctors from JNU health centre come to check the blood pressure and other vital indicators of the fasters. The fasting ground becomes the centre of political life. Sympathisers and friends come to give company to participants, pamphlets and negotiation committees with the university administration are organised from there. The hunger strike becomes an extremely social activity (see Image 4-3 and 4-4 next page). Supporters join in hunger-relays (e.g. a one-day fast from morning to evening), and students pass by on their way to their classes. Nightly bonfires are made, movies are watched on laptops or projected on white boards, and many discussions buzz around a single topic: what will be the first meal after they break the fast.

Image 4-3. Hunger Strike Site



Captions: (left) Water Dispenser for Hunger Striker at JNU Administration Bloc, December 2014. (right) Placard Listing the Names of Hunger Strikers and the Number of Days of Fast. (Photos by author)

Image 4-4. Facebook Picture-post of Pallavi, April 29 2016



Subtext: “Hunger strike in JNU day 2. Comrades sitting in hunger strike getting massage by fellow comrades.”

It is relevant to relate this display of corporal sacrifice to Gandhi’s practice of fasting, understood as part of his political repertoire for Indian independence. In the words of Alter, Gandhi’s idea of *Satyagraha* (search for truth) manifested in the public through the expression of somatic self-disciplines such as diet. This “biomoral politics” (Alter 2000) made his body both political and moral; such are the bodies of JNU left activists. For instance, advertising weight loss, especially during political campaigns, would be an indubitable sign of devotion to activism. After declaring having lost five kilograms in the past month, Muzaffar, an AISA activist would restate the committed nature of JNU activism: “JNU activists are the most hard working in India, both physically and mentally.” I would like to reiterate here the fact that activists do not directly reclaim the legacy on Gandhi. In fact, other corporal privations favoured by Gandhi, such as gastronomic parsimony, alcohol and sexual abstinence, and vegetarianism, are not very popular among JNU politically active left students. Challenging traditional Hindu morality, many of them indeed drink and eat beef in the secretive space of their hostel room. Rather, I am suggesting that a high-level left activist endeavour is expressed though the re-appropriation of a language of somatic constraints popularised by Gandhi.

4.3 Conclusion: Asceticism, Sincerity and Access

From this account, it seems that declassing practices qualify more as a set of moral postures and the expression of sincere engagement – a “commitment towards a particular dream, in which you learn to distinguish between your needs and your desires” (Berhampuri, interview 2014) – rather than a fully-fledged political strategy. However, the ethnographic material presented in the above section also indicates how these postures, though contested, might serve as a tool to appear distinguishable from the common student and politically legitimate to all and sundry. For instance, it has been described how a declassified dress-code serves as a tool for middle-class and elite activists to embody the cause of popular sections of the JNU population, how the praise of Martyrs translates into call for actions, and how the fasting ground become a centre of gravity campus political life.

Moreover, declassing might be important as an enabling tool to appear as a ‘truthful activist’, thus granting access to campus students beyond inner circles of supporters. Such confined in-groups can be seen by politically active students as a mere “fan club,” a term that Kollami, one of the main Maoist organisers at JNU, used frequently in our late-night discussions. As indicated in the following quote, declassing is for him a way to avoid the danger of being both elitist – which is an obstacle for mass party building – and individualist – which is a danger for the cohesiveness of the organisation. When asked how to overcome these obstacles, Kollami gave me the example of a comrade of his, who went empty handed to settle in an Adivasi village and accepted the idea of starving to death in front of a family’s house in order to gain the owner’s trust. He affirmed that the house lady had refused to give him food for two days, and though he had a gun, he would refuse to force her to feed him, accepting the possibility of death by hunger. Kollami concluded the story saying that through setting these standards of commitment he ultimately won the trust of the household, who even in the face of “white terror,” ultimately decided to feed the comrade. The outcome of such story – whether authentic or romanticised – illustrated for him the importance of declassing as a tool to gain access and promote your politics: “You have to be part of the suffering of people, withstanding humiliation, and in that process, you show how humane you are. That is how you win over confidence.”

You are talking to yourself, you have study circles, naturally, when you end up meeting with yourself...then there is room for stagnation [...] Some way down the line you tend to develop a form of cynicism. Slowly you also start getting disinterested. You are more interested in getting PhD, tutorials, and naturally after some time you are not able to expand. [...] It is a certain form of elitism, that makes you aloof, you are not organising the students, you are not at all accessible.

More and more students can join your organisation, provided you are accessible, you are legible enough...you are less pedantic in your ways, also you develop a way of communication that is more accessible to the general students. [...] One important aspect is the elitism in the campus, it is visible, not only among the students of a certain organisation, also UDSEF, this defines JNU. The elitism gets into your politics as well. Along with this elitism comes the kind of

socialisation that happen in the campus...they are influences of bourgeois sense of joy, freedom and individuality. What I am saying...the individual becomes important, too important. The individual self becomes the organisation, instead of serving the organisational interests.

From this account, it is understood how some activists imagine their declassing practices as enabling practices to have access to students from various stratum of the student population while appealing to potential new recruits. Berhampuri, one of the AISA organisers told me once: “When you live with humble people, you have to live like them.”

Obviously, these are not the only strategies put in place by certain sections of activists in order to gain political ground. When asked about what makes JNU activists’ successful, Madrasi, a former JNUSU president mentioned hard work, oratory skills and “connection; the ability to relate with people and a [Students’] Union that can reach the majority of students.” This ability to build on a sustained interaction with the students will be explored at length in Chapter 5.

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that Indian Marxism on an Indian campus cannot be reduced to a simple analysis of socio-economic factors such as class or caste; activist motivations rely also on the re-appropriation of cultural dimensions that inform daily political practices. The case of JNU left activism is an open window on the Indian political culture of declassing. A sense of the relation between Indian communism and ascetic practices has been exposed here. My ethnographic account indicates that campus Marxists are drawing from aesthetic traditions of selflessness and sacrifice in order to express connectedness with a universe of deprivation.

By diverting the practice of asceticism its meaning has changed, JNU declassing has become a way to claim association with the Indian underbelly. It developed as a way to imagine them, represent them and speak in their name. In order to be the voice of the “wretched of the earth” (Fanon 1961), Indian communists have to *become* like them, hence the relevance of declassing: to be a peasant, to be a Dalit, to be a poor Muslim, to be an assaulted woman, to be a mining worker in Odisha or a Maruti worker in Gurgaon. Declassed performativity is visual, corporal and spatial. It is a highly demanding activity, emotionally intense, and it leads to professional deviance, but not necessarily to non-establishment positions. Because the task of declassing is arduous, it is often renegotiated when activists demobilise or withdraw from their organisation. Taking as evidence the case of Jawaharlal Nehru University politics, these criteria serve as an operational definition of youth Marxist ascetic praxis in India.

I would like to stress once again that the chapter refers to the notion of asceticism in general terms; thus, the activist’s ascetic discourse is dissimilar to the one of *sadhus* or *sannyasis*. Indeed, the Hindu renunciate (in the pursuit of religious truth) is required to abandon society – by living at its margins – and therefore can be considered as an “outclass” rather than a “declassed.” Moreover, declassified activists and sadhus might share in common abandoning part of their previous life. However, reasons for this appear to be very different. Indeed, the sadhu apprentice, with the help of a guru, pursue self-salvation while the middle-class left activist, with the support of comrades defends the salvation of the oppressed classes, advocating for their collective liberation.

From this account, it appears that the ‘ascetic modality’ used for political reasons by sections of left activism is devoid of religious feelings, and in that sense, differs greatly from another tradition calling on renunciation, the one of the *pracharaks* or saints of the extreme Hindu right-wing Sangh Parivar. The figure of the left declassed is correctly understood as a strong reaction to the pervasiveness of hierarchy in Indian society and not at all as an enactment of strictly religious ideas. Because the practice is firmly grounded in the sentiment of class-awareness, it is undoubtedly Marxist in character, but also finds inspiration in the revolutionary repertoire of secular figures such as the freedom fighter Bhagat Singh (Jaffrelot 2011:151-155),⁹⁹ which is by far the most referred to political figure in AISA pamphlets (mentioned 664 times out of 1,582 in the pamphlet archive). While Bhagat Singh and Ambedkar appear to be role-models, Gandhi and the ideology he represents, are an enemy for communist student activists. However, through constituting the ‘tip of the iceberg’ of the practice of political asceticism in South Asia, part of the bodily protest repertoire Gandhi advocated for found itself unintentionally reinterpreted by young left leaders at JNU. They indirectly inherited his practice of frugality as an activist technique for the sake of representing the poor and challenging the hierarchical stratification of Indian society. I therefore suggest that the asceticism described in this chapter corresponds to a form of “subalternism,”¹⁰⁰ in which various political traditions such as workerism, the cult of Martyrs, and the selfless generosity of a few fellow comrades (Bankuri, interview 2015; Arathi, interview 2014) take a crucial role.

While declassing traditions are located in the political history of Marxism in South Asia, they are also, at the grassroots level, the expression of varied sociological trajectories. The declassing practice is preferably embraced by non-deprived sections of the Indian population, who use it as a device to join the social condition of those who are originally lower in status and wealth. In somewhat opposite fashion, those who actually belonged to this Indian underbelly in their pre-campus life are far more sceptic, and even sometimes frankly hostile to the idea of declassing as a real tool of social empowerment. Consequently, declassing does not have the exact same meaning for all the respondents, and that references attached to this practice vary significantly. Declassing can be considered as a broad conceptual framework containing various specific competing interpretations, depending on individual subjectivities and specific traditions of political organisations. Put succinctly, declassing practices can appeal to different activists in different ways.

To summarise the argument, it is possible to say that JNU declassing practice cannot be understood without linking it to the issue of ‘political proselytism’ on campus. Declassed public behaviour is in part aimed as a language to express ‘total commitment’ to the student community

⁹⁹ Other freedom fighters mentioned by activists in campus pamphlets are Sukhdev Thapar (100 mentions), Shivaram Rajguru (103 mentions) and Chandra Shekhar Azad (586 mentions).

¹⁰⁰ The Subaltern Studies literature (i.e. Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj, Dipesh Chakrabarty) is taught at JNU and is on occasion mentioned by activists on campus.

in its entirety, while drawing a visual, ideological and emotional connection with the conditions of the poorer sections of the Indian population. Though contested – protean in its expression and paradoxical in many ways – declassing practices give to left activists a relative access to all the strata of the student community and enable them to pass down a certain political knowledge to the largest number of students. In the next chapter, which is devoted to the concrete study of political interactions on campus, I give particular attention to the way activists act as service providers in order to create and sustain loyalties among their fellow students.

5 The Broker and the Revolutionary: Sheltering, Assisting and Mentoring for Political Returns

“Where do correct ideas come from? Do they drop from the skies? No. Are they innate in the mind? No. They come from social practice and from it alone.” Mao Zedong (1963) (1971:502) and other leaders of the communist world insisted on the link between revolutionary knowledge and individual praxis. Similarly, I show in this chapter that the readiness to solve individual student issues on the JNU campus is an essential tool for building trust between students, activists and the organisation they represent. At university, left student organisations could be distinguished from other organisations by their ability to successfully associate the process of socialisation with the transmission of ideological references – which are in many ways at odds with the broader political landscape outside of campus. Fundamentally, it is the sustained ability to combine interpersonal bonds and politics in an ideologically-compatible academic environment that makes the JNU left more successful than rival student organisations.

I am interested in describing how the learning of activist values, such as the interest for politics, an anti-establishment ethos and the proclamation of egalitarian ideals (operationalised through the practice of declassing) by cohorts of students coincides with the practical conduct of service-based student politics. I provide ethnographic evidence of how the revolutionary discourse of left activists is grounded in day-to-day activities for students facing various kinds of hardships, administrative conundrums and personal adversities. I conclude by describing how ‘the broker’ and ‘the revolutionary’ activist in practice appear to be the same person, two sides of the activist coin serving as complementary strategies that embody organisational interests.

I identify two forms of overlapping brokerage practices at JNU. Informal *campus-level bureaucrats* use privileged social connections with the university administration, as they know the academic procedures and, more importantly, the administrative people well enough to acquire hostel rooms, unlock university funding, and complete lengthy procedures. Campus-level bureaucrats not only help students to navigate a highly dysfunctional and procedure-heavy administration, but also at times do the students’ administrative work on their behalf. The other form of service-based student politics is more personal and intimate, and consists of daily *counselling* practices that often involve sentimental, health, academic or economic issues. Through some of these brokerage activities, activists appear more clearly as authoritative figures who micro-manage students’ crises. Political representation at JNU involves developing personal qualities such as receptivity, benevolence, generosity and devotion. These aptitudes are, however, instrumental in the pursuit of organisational dominance on campus. The interpersonal contact between activists and students is not spontaneous, it is initiated by cadres and campus leaders who seek to expand their personal network for the benefit of their organisation. This process is most visible at the beginning of the academic year, when the competition to get the attention of new students is at its highest.

After briefly introducing the notion of brokerage in the literature on grassroots Indian politics, I begin by examining the inceptive interaction between activists and new students joining the

campus for the first time. The chapter then turns to the description of how activists serve as campus-level bureaucrats through which they assume a semi-institutional role in the university. In the last sections I broaden my focus by looking at how political learning is acquired as a by-product of mentoring activities led by student activists (for common students) and politicised professors (for activists and sympathisers). Through concentrating on the political activities of partisan teachers, who were often themselves activists during their student years, the chapter underlines the inter-generational character of JNU politics.

5.1 Brokerage, an Essential Component of Indian Democracy

Evidence from the literature shows that student politics can at times be understood within the framework of patronage politics in South Asia, where intermediaries use their influence, networks and political contacts to provide access to services and goods that would otherwise remain out of reach (Briquet et Sawicki 1998). Opportunities for getting things done (De Wit 1997) are evidence of effective leadership (Wyatt 2012) and strong individuality within an institutional setting (Mines and Gourishankar 1990). The notion of charisma needs to be taken seriously as a tool for student mobilisation (Robnett 1996), enforcing guru-disciple forms of hierarchy (Arora 1967) within a political organisation.

In a student environment, the desirable goods to be obtained through patronage networks are many, for instance a seat in a student hall (Price and Ruud 2012) or cumulative private networks for local business opportunities (Harriss-White 2003; Fernandes and Heller 2006). Craig Jeffrey and Stephen Young (2014) underline how young student leaders from the Jat community in Western Uttar Pradesh invest their brokerage skills between university officials and common students, in order to establish themselves as private educational entrepreneurs (cf. introduction). In a long footnote, Satendra Kumar (2012) explains the importance of student residences (*hostels*) of Chaudhary Charan Singh University in Meerut (Uttar Pradesh) as a privileged space where student brokers articulate their economic and political goals. In a similar vein, Andersen (2016) shows that it is time invested by politicised Bangladeshi students in Dhaka university in order to accumulate useful relations for individual advantage. As a result, Snellinger (2005, 2012) explained how such personal aspirations of former student leaders – and in particular their ambition to move up in their respective parties – led to a furthering of the gap between political and non-political youth, in particular after the euphoric momentum of the two *andolan* (movements) initiated in 1990 and 2006 (see also O’Neill 2016).

The importance of fixers in student life resonates with the larger literature on political intermediaries in the subcontinent. Especially among the lower- and middle-class, accessing goods such as municipal water (Björkman 2014), state-subsidised food (in the Public Distribution System) (Kumar and Landy 2009) and a job as a policeman (Jauregui 2014), often require mediation by someone who can provide the necessary information and technical assistance.

Securing a channel to access these resources is useful in order to build exclusive loyalties (Berenschot and Piliavsky 2014) based on personal closeness (Alm 2006), and to secure votes from class and caste communities to whom one may be traditionally opposed (Berenschot 2011).¹⁰¹

The art of the ‘fixer’ and the work of party activists are inseparable. As James Manor (2000) illustrates, small-time independent fixers are less in demand when strong penetrative party organisations such as the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPI(M)) in West Bengal are in place. In this chapter, I show the significance of brokerage activities by activists who often have a party affiliation, explaining their role in the promotion of organisational ideology and the recruitment of new cadres.

5.2 Pre-brokerage Moments: Registration Assistance and Room Sheltering

Before being in a position to assist students, activists need to introduce themselves. The more closely a student knows an activist, the better the chances of them sympathising with the activist’s organisation. During my stay at JNU, I identified two critical moments in the academic year in which processes of socialisation and politicisation were extremely entangled and almost inseparable. These two cases were those of registration assistance and the sheltering of activists in students’ rooms.

5.2.1 Registration Assistance

During the ten-day registration period when new students officially sign up for their programs of study, activist-students make their initial contact with the incoming batch. At that time, I observed that activists welcomed newcomers by offering help to get acquainted with the JNU campus, as well as by providing assistance for the red-tape necessary for registration. Competing cohorts of activists camped in front of the administrative offices and offered “registration assistance.” Moving one’s desk closer to one of the registration offices enabled activists of a particular party to secure a better position than their rivals and so do a better job as registration assistant. Thiruvanan, an AISA activist who spent his time between Kerala and Delhi, declared to me on registration day: “You see, I have been promoted, I do the administrative work better than them [the administration].” In order to speed up the registration process and meet the Kafkaesque procedures of the administration, in 2014 AISA brought a notary on campus in order to sign affidavits and anti-ragging certificates required to finalise registration. Later that year, the same organisation arranged a two-day office to cross-check that the provisional funds of campus

¹⁰¹ The roles of middlemen (*dalals*) (Parry 2000) are not only crucial in the everyday functioning of democracy, but also in the emergence of guerrillas on Indian soil. For instance, Alpa Shah (2010) argues that the success of the underground left wing Marxist-Leninist-Maoist insurrection in Jharkhand is intimately related to the ability to access the informal economy of public resources.

workers were transferred to their bank account by the administration. An activist asked me: “Have you seen any other university where students have to take up this kind of issue?” (Rai, interview 2015). If the official rationale behind this was to facilitate the bureaucratic work for registration, it also gave activists the opportunity to establish privileged ties with new students.

I remember one day joining a party of current and former SFI activists who had gathered in a small hostel room in order to welcome Sulochana and her partner Sachin. Sachin was a former cadre of the organisation who was undergoing heavy treatment after a declared case of tuberculosis. The festive mood over beer was an occasion of recollecting performances of recruitment during admission, sharing jokes about sexy students, and recalling the awkwardness of meeting with accompanying parents. Atul, another SFI activist, commented, “You know what was the worst... It was doing admission assistance with girls and their mother. Then they will force me into taking lunch, after many questions the mother would do allusions about a wedding. I swear, so weird... It happened to me twice.” Atul summarised the rule of the game regarding the admission procedure by reducing it to a point-scoring activity: “At the end of the day you count the number of freshers you snatched from the other side.” The next half-an-hour was devoted to explaining the strategies that worked to “steal students” from rival organisations. Sachin intervened in the conversation by mapping the activists on campus on that particular day: “You see, the space when you come to pick up freshers is called the ‘catchment area’. It is important you have your people at every stage of the registration process so you don’t lose your prey on the way.” Lino, a senior student who has a lot of friends among SFI activists, reminds the audience of the flirtatious character of the registration process. This time SFI “sent the cute ones [for admission assistance], Joyi and Karima, it worked quite well. [...] I saw them in a squad of three people in front of the school area; they came to me and asked for my lighter. Damn cute.” In order to play the game well, it is important to create a connection with the student that will last. Lino continues by referring to the organisational efficiency of AISA: “After approximately four days, the freshers caught by AISA will receive a phone call. Do you want to come down for *chai* (tea)? You know when I joined back in 2007 I was made to hang around with AISA people, just that I didn’t notice it at the time.”

Playing the “catcher” required not only presence, but good listening skills and an excellent memory, as activists had to remember details of the personal condition of every student encountered. Divya, a former student activist notes: “In the process [of assistance-recruitment] memory is a very important skill. I still remember the activist who took me in charge when I came first... She remembered everything about the encounter. Much later she asked me how my grandfather is doing, he was sick at the time and somehow I came to talk about that.”

Most of the discussion however was related to the “tricks” one had to invent in order to draw the attention of newcomers. Sachin claimed to be the most skilled in the group and was roaring with laughter while recalling details of his past registration achievements. An acclaimed cricketer in his teenage years, Sachin considered this activity to be a game worth playing. The game involved strategy: his organisations would make sure to send “fake new students” from outside to keep the

rival team busy. Another more common technique was to target new students from the same region or language pool, as indicated in the vignette below.

Then I would ask the freshers on the bus... who is from Bombay? Using the linguistic and regional cards was always efficient, all these AISAs are from Bihar, they would not know anything beyond Hindi [...] It is true that when you come on campus you feel quite lost, you need to feel that somebody understands you. [...] Haha, I remember two years back we had elaborated a very fun strategy [...] we would send fake freshers from outside, comrades from other universities, so that AISA people get busy with them for half-an-hour, and by the time they realise we have registered a couple of freshers more than them.

If strategy was a must, performance was equally necessary. Not every activist felt equally competent in gaining first-hand access to new students, and some did not feel as competent as Sachin. The jubilant account of his agile ability to access students was quite entertaining, quoted in full here:

You know, there is no harm in helping people. My girlfriend accuses me of having doubtful morality because I want to recruit new members in SFI. It is true that in order to have a good database [list of sympathisers that will cast votes for the organisation and form a pool of potential recruits] you need to be the first to approach freshers. Usually, newcomers arrive with the 615 [bus] and at the T-point, AISA and SFI are waiting for them. But I was more astute, I would go to main gate and wait for the bus to come, then I will jump in it and while it will go up to the registration area I would gather everyone and get them there [...] I am also good at jumping in autos [three-wheeler auto-rickshaws]. I am proud of that... The auto would come and I would jump in it at full speed, so that I could introduce myself and manage their documents before reaching ad-block [the area for academic registration before 2014].

What is striking in these accounts is the instrumental power that activists attribute to socialisation. The appropriate means that can give you first access to the new student is a premium to secure a potential future affiliation to the organisation. In other interviews, activists mentioned the qualities required in the art of finding new recruits. Some emphasised age differences, complaining for instance that “youngsters” (junior activists) would come to campaign in their room and shout empty slogans, impeding meaningful interaction and interactive debate. More often, the attribute of sympathy was emphasised: “Depending on who is using the word comrade to call me up... it will impact... how much I believe in his stand. Berhampuri is sympathetic, I will trust him if he calls me comrade... not Chandauli [another member of the same organisation]” admitted Lino on a different occasion. In a more recent interview in 2016, Sachin notes that the lack of sympathy of a specific leader is detrimental in gathering new recruits:

One SFI senior was sheltering two freshers in his room. They were becoming sympathisers slowly, slowly. But he was not setting an example. He was ordering pizza every day instead of going to the mess and meeting common students, interacting... So, in addition to being elitist he was not relating to students in his own hostel... And then he wanted the unit to win student elections! [...] If you want to be a serious activist in JNU, you need to know at least 2000 people, not only their name, but everything about their life... Being an activist in JNU entails personal sacrifices, abandoning one’s private life in order to be available for students all the time. As I told you, the classic strategy is to offer a room to

freshers... and this is what I did, four people for so many months, it was horrible. [These sacrifices] show your sincerity to politics, and this is what people vote for. All these things are linked... When you are not visible, you connect less... and ultimately you are less comfortable with public speaking. Because AISA was more hard-working, dedicated... because of that they were more prepared for public speaking.

5.2.2 Room Sheltering

The last quote from Sachin's interviews exemplifies the second stream of pro-social micro-politics called "room sheltering." Because of the rapid expansion of student numbers in the past decade, the amount of free space available in the 17 hostels of the campus became increasingly insufficient to host all newcomers. Many freshers therefore ended up in the rooms of activists who generously offered them some space where they could stay until they were allotted a hostel room. At the beginning of the academic year, an activist could shelter up to four new students. This situation usually lasted for months, and provided an influential space for personal discussion, often turning to political matters. Student leaders were in the position to introduce their value system to the new arrivals and encourage them to participate in public events.

Only after his first week at JNU, Akhil, a newcomer staying in the room of a senior activist, declared to the ethnographer that "we are having a protest at bloc this afternoon." Akhil's choice of the pronoun *we* shows how he had already identified himself as a member of a politically active group. Later in the month, I met the fresher Akhil near Godawari tea stall. Sunil confessed that it was his first time ever putting a political poster of AISA up on a wall. Later, I met him several times in the hostel room of a dynamic cadre of the same organisation, where he stayed with three other new students. The case of Akhil was not isolated, and sometimes activists were able to retain some of their most promising cadres by making them official roommates of senior activists. AISA cadre Niraj told me once: "I did not know politics before coming to the campus, last year I stayed in Barthi's [then AISA president of students' union] room and then I became his official roommate." Socialisation, once again, seemed to act as a vehicle of politics and vice-versa. Another AISA cadre, Khasim, admitted:

For sure I have been chosen in AISA because I am a Muslim, they do selective targeting since Sheohari [another Muslim activist] is not in the game anymore [for family reasons]. I am convinced they want me to contest for the post of joint-secretary and I am fine with it, actually I feel obliged to cooperate and make them happy. I owe them... I need to say yes, I stayed in 11B [room serving as party office for AISA] for five months, then with Muzaffar [another AISA activist], I cannot say no. I am in AISA because they helped me a lot.

From these accounts, politicised groups at JNU appear successful in recruiting new committed members through creating ties of solidarity and friendship with the younger generation. The enlarged cohort campaign together, enjoy free time together, and even get 'high' together on the day of *Holi*.¹⁰² Freshers are invited to share personal stories in isolated spaces, which enables

¹⁰² Hindu festival of colours. In the morning of this national holiday, students, usually joined by friends from outside JNU, celebrate *Holi* in the lawns of the hostel Jhelum. They dance, throw colours, water and mud at each other, play drums, hug, remove t-shirts of male peers (sometimes ripping them apart) and throw

individuals to Express their personality and learn the political line of the organisation through loosely structured face-to-face discussions with affiliated seniors. The setting is non-hierarchical, but the political authority of the senior prevails, so that the junior learns quickly the specific knowledge legitimising the political credos of a specific organisation. The aforementioned Tausiq notes: “I got involved in JNU politics for petty reasons, I wanted to shift to Narmada [hostel] and leave the cranky room in Mahi Mandavi. The AISA activist helped me to do that, and through prolonged discussion I got into politics.”

Shared intimacy between activists is not only visible in interviews; it could also be deduced when looking at the regional homogeneity of each organisation. As stated by many activists, having an intense interaction with a student often meant sharing the same language, either Bengali, Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, etc. Numbers reflect this tendency. Out of 69 activists from AISA who responded to my survey, 51 (75 percent) were born in North India (i.e. 20 from Bihar and 16 from Uttar Pradesh). In contrast, nearly half (15 out of 33) SFI activists originated from South India, with a prevalence for Kerala (11 individuals in the survey). Every organisation displayed a form of regional tropism. AISA had a core of activists from Bihar and – to some extent – Uttar Pradesh, and NSUI counted many members from Rajasthan (6 in the survey). The majority of AISA activists were also from North India. Consequently, as indicated in Figures 5-1 and 5-2 on the next page, certain regional profiles (Bihar, Kerala and Tamil Nadu) are over-represented in JNU politics in the mid-2010s.

them in trees. Customarily, students come for breakfast in the morning with empty plastic bottles to fill *bhang*; a milk and sugar-based beverage mixed with cannabis. The drink is provided to residents and guests indiscriminately by the hostel mess and is added for a small fee on the monthly food bill of each *hosteller*. Holi is the only occasion during the year, along with counting day during student elections, in which I witnessed drunk and ‘high’ activists in the public space. Usually gathering together in one specific area of the partying lawns, they subsequently move to an activist room to continue the celebration. The psychotropic effects of the *bhang* usually peak at around midday, creating a deep sense of lethargy, which ultimately drives the crowd of students to their private quarters.

Figure 5-1. Regional Background of Affiliated and Non-affiliated Students at JNU

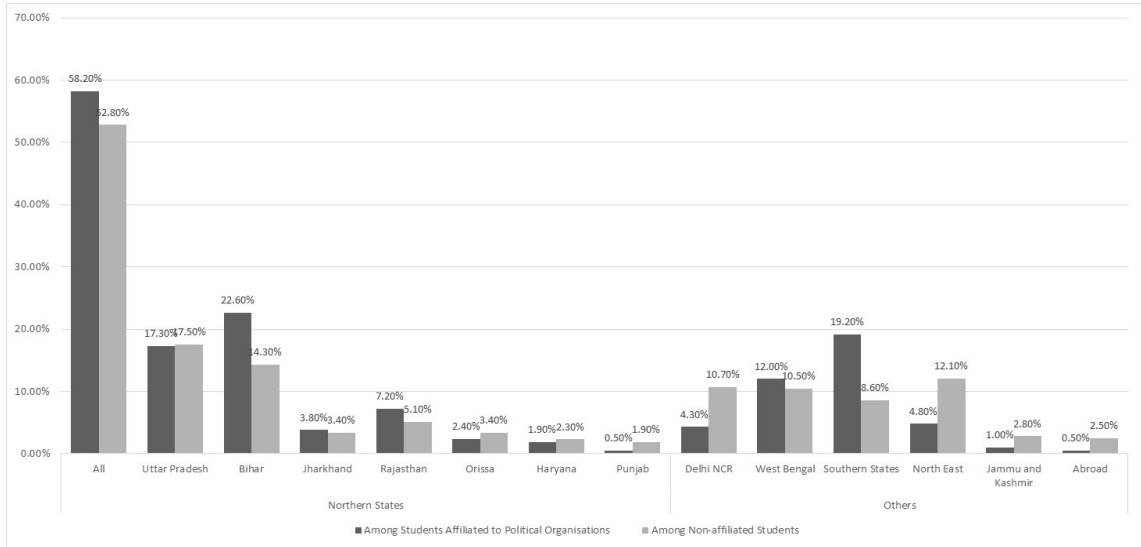
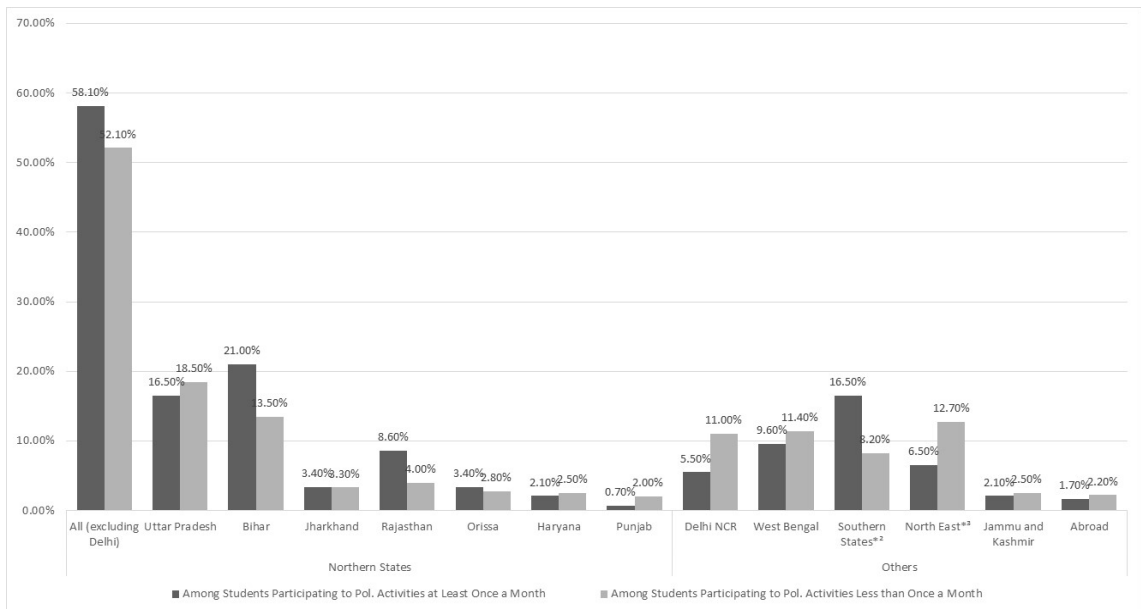


Figure 5-2. Regional Background of Students Participating to Political Activities at JNU



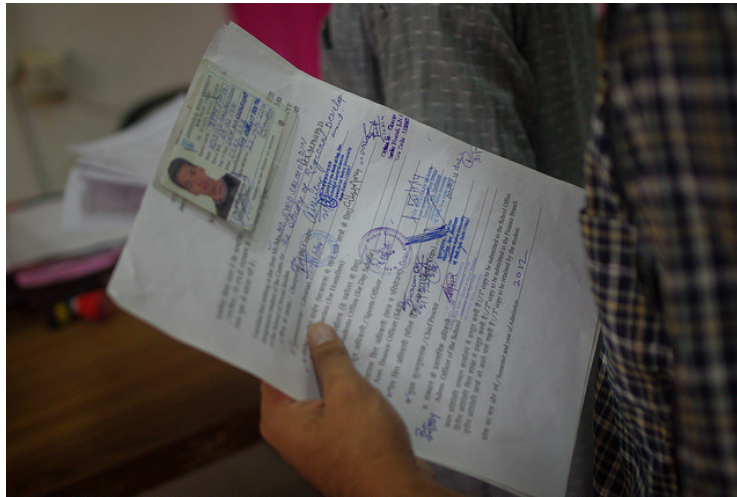
Several reasons can explain this phenomenon. Firstly, some activists came to JNU while already being sympathisers of an organisation back in their previous state of residence. Some have relatives involved in politics; others already started participating in political activities in their former university campus and came to JNU with pre-existent political ambitions. Others were incited by their then affiliated seniors to apply for JNU entrance examinations in order to strengthen the organisation *in situ*. Many individuals therefore joined the student organisation that they are more familiar with; this gives a premium to frontal structures of parties which have strong organisational presence back home. CPI(M) is historically well-established in Kerala. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the CPI(ML) stronghold is in Bihar and Jharkhand, from where the majority of its activists at JNU originate.

There is also a possible second interpretation for regional clustering. The regional articulation of campus activism might appear to be tied to the sociological situation in which the incoming student is from. The fresher is an “outsider” and seeks new relations with peers, and these are facilitated by speaking the same language and sharing similar cultural values. Activists looking for new recruits will find it easier to approach students to whom they can relate more easily. Small groups of friends with readily-formed bonds can also be politicised together. In DSU, for example, eight members I interviewed in 2014 were from North India and four belonged to the north-eastern area and Darjeeling region. Out of these four activists, three happened to have studied in the same high school (St. Anthony’s School) in Kurseong district, a hill city not far from Nepal. They also happened to start their activism approximately at the same time. It is therefore safe to claim that former exposure to activist settings and the reference to a common language and culture serves as a lubricant for further political socialisation in JNU campus.

5.3 Intermediaries Between Students and Administration: Activists as Campus-level Bureaucrats

When walking around the teaching and administrative areas, it is not rare to encounter people walking around with various forms or documents with stamps like the one in Image 5-1. Amidst recent attempts to introduce online forms in the working of the campus bureaucracy, paper was still at the time of the fieldwork the main medium of communication between students and the various administrative authorities. Student complaints about the inefficiency of this administration were not only legitimate but often understated. Newcomers could end up running around the vast campus for a missing signature, scholarship holders almost never got their payment on time, transcripts and diplomas were systematically delayed for months, time lapse between thesis submission and defence often exceed a year, fines imposed on students were often abusive, seat hostel allocation chaotic and unintelligible, malfunctions of hostel facilities such as running water were ever-present. Apart from the library service, not a single administrative body functioned correctly, and the willingness of the administration to cooperate was hazardous, depending on criteria such as the mood of the office worker and the personal connect the student had with the officer.

Image 5-1. Various Administrative Stamps and Signatures on a Student's Registration form in Dean's Office, School of Social Science



Just as one could observe hundreds of instances of administrative dysfunction, one could also witness hundreds of interventions by activists attempting to solve these conundrums. Once, while drinking *chai* in an outdoor canteen next to the School of Social Science, I started discussing the matter of bureaucratic efficiency with Drumi, a PhD scholar.

Once, out of sheer despair I asked Thrissuri [SFI activist and SSS counsellor] to come with me and we went to the dean's office to convince the finance department to change numbers in the form [they were inaccurate, so she was unable to receive a University Grant Commission funding for a conference in the UK]. The dean said jokingly, why don't you organise a protest? So I got Thrissuri to run around... It was very complicated. Then when I got the paper I needed... I went to the office, and they would throw it away to the back of his desk as if it was a piece of shit."

Stories such as Drumi's are commonplace, and activists have to approach the administration when research scholars do not receive their scholarship, or when an administrative imbroglio prevents a student from getting an official's signature. Both current and former JNUSU office bearers can book rooms in hostel and lecture rooms for student seminars and public events, help residents to shift their hostel accommodation, and put students in touch with the appropriate officers. They can also speed up a range of administrative queries. Former Students' Union president Pratap, introduced at length in earlier chapters, was an incredibly efficient broker. Even though he was no longer active in politics, he regularly received emergency calls, and was found advising students, friends, and former "comrades." Brokerage was for him a fine-grained learning process, involving the development of links with officials otherwise described in public speeches as "corrupt and anti-student." Discourses on the administration are acrimonious but inter-personal relations with administrative personnel needed to be harmonious in order to "fix" student demands.

At first my relationship with the administration was tense, I was shouting a lot. Once I broke... with others... the door of the VC [Vice Chancellor] by kicking into it with my feet... All this is recorded [he smiles]. But then I got calmer and the administration knew I will be around for some time so they thought [they] better compromise [...] A lot of administrative problems can arise, unexpected situations, shorter deadlines, hostel allotment, conflict with guides. Sometimes

you need to shift to a post-doc and you need a certificate of completion, so they call me so that you can talk to officers... Usually they know you... There is sympathy for each other so you can get things done easily.

Like Pratap, other activists enjoyed displaying their knowledge of the administration and its psychology, in order to impose an effective ‘rapport de force’ and get things done. When in office between 2007 and 2010, Pratap recounted how he was able to negotiate with an influential Dalit professor working at the University Grant Commission and secure Rajiv Gandhi fellowships¹⁰³ for the ten names he had suggested. As a representative sitting in decision panels, he used to distribute working hours as an assistant librarian to needy students, and make decisions on campus shop-allotment. His fixing talents were so well-known that one day in 2009, while on a hunger strike, he was called by students and the administration to convince a Muslim student not to commit suicide, by jumping from the last floor of the central library.¹⁰⁴ I witnessed his brokerage ‘powers’ myself as he arranged for me (through an intermediary) an interview with the then Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, even though he had been part of a rival political party for more than a decade.

On a daily-basis, activists were perpetuating willingly a system of brokerage for no cost in which they served the interest of individuals in the hope of securing student’s gratitude in part for future political returns. While at JNU I realised that activists were not only respondents and friends, but also useful intermediaries, when I requested documents from the administration. For instance, I could not access data (e.g. admission rolls) on JNU directly from high officials such as the dean or the rector; instead, these were given to me by small-scale office employees at the school level, with the necessary mediation of student activists. Providing services was in many cases taken for granted as an expectation of students who asked for petty things over the phone. They would demand to know from student leaders which classroom they were supposed to go for their classes, whether water was running in their hostel dormitory, or even if the price of certain goods was cheaper in the campus market as compared to the one in Munirka (the urban village in front of campus).

This is ridiculous, I receive a call of a SL [School of Language] student who asks me where the class is happening. Why should I know? People come to complain to me when they are supposed to have a meeting with a professor and he is not in his office. Other kind of insane requests I get. One day a PhD student calls to tell me that the fruit seller in KC [space within campus] sells apples for Rs.62 per Kg. In Munirka [market outside campus] it is 60 rupees... So you represent us... You should go there and make a monthly price list, so that we can force KC fruit seller to lower prices [...] Students come to me and ask why there is no

¹⁰³ The RGNF (Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship) is a scholarship for research (MPhil. and PhD) for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (STs) students in the fields of engineering, social sciences and humanities. There are only 2000 RGNF scholarships for SCs and 667 slots for STs every year.

¹⁰⁴ “The ongoing impasse has created a volatile situation in the university, a glaring reflection of which was the incidence of 3rd March, where a student threatened to commit suicide by jumping from the Library building, if the administration did not accept all the demands being made by the JNUSU.” (Anand and Kishore 2009).

water in hostels... When it is not too absurd we do something... but often they can do by themselves. On the matter of hostel water... I say there is a hostel president for these issues” (Muzaffar, interview 2014).

5.4 Two-tier Political Mentoring

5.4.1 Problem-solvers: Activists as Student Counsellors

To my initial surprise, many activists did not only help in processing administrative queries, they also assisted students on a more private level. Because of their seniority and their charismatic aura, many young individuals appealed to them as *private coaches* to solve personal problems involving various kinds of intimate conflicts. Issues might be related to a difficult transition from a rural to urban setting, the academic use of English, family pressures, grades, deceptions in love, money problems, couple and friendship disputes, physical and psychological harm, etc. I came to believe that the process of becoming an activist at JNU was not only about learning how to lead a protest, but also about incorporating human skills that enable him or her to be both a mentor and a counsellor for students.

Campus leaders were doing more than mobilising the mass of students for political mobilisation. In fact, activists were compelled to politically represent the collective of students, but they also had to behave like elder brothers and sisters, and secure round-the-clock assistance for emotional needs of individuals. Pratap could recall many of these “desperate situations” – in which a boy was “shivering” and a girl “bleeding” following a dispute. As he put it, “often, the personal is mixed with the political.” During my fieldwork, informal counselling and formal politics were closely associated, as they were both forms of representation in which interests of students and political organisations converged. Heba, president of the Union (2001-2), provided the most compelling example of the importance of ‘social work’ in her leftist political endeavours.

Once a young boy came from Allahabad with his parents for a MSc in Physics in JNU. You know, they leave their child to the unknown world of Delhi. The father asked to talk to the JNUSU president. He says that his son has got admission here but also found a job in Allahabad. What should he do, he asks me. [Heba answers] Maybe with a MSc he can go to NASA, if he goes to NASA he will earn a lot of money. [...] Then last week the boy mailed after so many years. He told me that he got to NASA and that he will never forget how she convinced his father and gave him new aspirations. [...] Young students, they are confused, you help them. Even the smaller battles give you satisfaction. [...] JNUSU student leaders have their own strength in terms of what they do better, someone will be a good speech maker, someone will be good with students on one-to-one basis, some will be good in terms of political sharpness. [...] in JNU a lot of people come from small villages, from tribal areas, they live with Rs. 3000 a month and still send back to their parents. They come with so much fear, lack of confidence in themselves. [...] You have to be available for them, counsel them, you have to care about people’s sensibilities, the whole range of sensibilities... if you want to say “I will represent you.” [...] SL kids [i.e. School of Language has many undergraduate programmes] are the sweetest, because they are like ‘didi’, ‘bhayya’, you become elder sister, elder brother, you take care of them.

The customary counselling function of student activists appeared to be so embedded in the JNU political culture that student representatives were sometimes obliged to break administrative rules and go against their own academic interests in order to help distressed individuals. The most revealing example of this is given by Kotaya, a former (2014-2015) GSCASH representative from SFI. While I was interviewing her jointly with another researcher, she asked to pick up the phone, “Allo, Sadhna no don’t yell at me... Calm down... Sadhna listen to me... No... I am busy now, come to my room... Yes... Half-an hour.” Sensing our confusion after such a vociferous call, Kotaya explained that Sadhna needed assistance as she was wondering whether or not to file a complaint against her former boyfriend. Kotaya admitted that such situations were routine for her, and that she was constantly exposed to cases where she had to advise female students on whether to file complaints of harassment. Kotaya herself grumbled that she was too busy, not being able to complete her own assignments, and had to explain to needy students that she could not always be available to them.¹⁰⁵ However, a few seconds later, Sadhna called back and Kotaya had to reassure her again. After the call, Kotaya told us that she felt obliged to give more time to the complainant and advise her on whether or not to start the GSCASH procedure. She compared her situation to that of a police officer, “It’s like you go to the police and tell them that you know there has been a theft in my house – should I complain, should I not complain? So what will the police say? If you think you should complain, complain, if you don’t think you should, then don’t.” Kotaya informed us that counselling is not a prerogative of GSCASH, but one imposed upon her by the status of an activist. Kotaya *had* to help because she had to maintain a positive ‘public figure’; the image would be tarnished if she was found reluctant to help a student.

[after receiving Swetha’s call] This is my public face not GSCASH public face you know, this is two sides of me, where on one hand I have to deal with an enquiry and on one hand I have to deal with the people. [...] There are no conflicts ok, but there is a sharp distinction between the kind of work... The side of the administrative [bureaucratic tasks] and the public face side [the activist] are not conflicting with each other, but it’s so qualitatively different, that it takes a while to get a hang of how to manage both together... Sometimes I won’t say whether or not a person should complain because I am nobody to judge...if they feel harassed and they want to complain they have the right to complain, but they themselves are not sure whether they should complain, and in such a situation it gets very difficult: whether you should coach them.

So if she has to complain to GSCASH on one hand I would have to tell her ok 36 hours [minimum legal delay for filing a complaint], you have to get your deposition, you have to get your witnesses etc etc. and to be impartial in the process of inquiry...where I am giving her as much as time as the person she accused...but there is this side, that because I am a GSCASH representative she will want to call me and talk to me, and so many times for hours I have sat with the person to just you know...’ya, ya don’t worry we will work it out, don’t worry, it all happen, don’t worry all will be in your favor’ [she raises her voice in sign of irritation]. When I can’t actually say it will be in your favor I am

¹⁰⁵ “Sometimes it really very difficult because you cannot explain to them that you are an MA student and you have assignment to right, they want to meet you, they just want to meet you...”

supposed to be impartial in the process of enquiry. So it's really thought to juggle these two sides of it, you know.

In this respect, the task of assisting individuals at a personal level and the mass mobilisation of students become complementary activities, if not intertwined. Reflections of a former activist highlight this notion: "After some time, you have internalised that the rule of the game is to keep contact with people until it reaches an amazing level. It is not like a last minute tactical plan to talk to people and get them to vote. If you want to ensure participation you need to keep contact with students all the time" (Divya, interview 2015). In these situations, leftist campus leaders often wonder whether they may be drifting from their initial ambitions to mobilise the mass of students for radical protests. Most activists, however, acknowledge the fact that brokerage is a learned activity and requires a lot of skill, acquired over time to become an efficient "service provider." Tausiq, former general-secretary of the Union (2012-13) and now inactive, recognises the practice of brokerage as part of a political art in decline.¹⁰⁶

You call JNUSU a lobby but I call it a service provider. Even now we have become a bad lobby, because we do not know the psychology of the administration [he refers to the new student election regulations that do not allow the central panel to stay longer in office in order to know the administrative personnel more closely]. JNUSU has no executive power, it is a body of representation with lobbyist attributes, the one to negotiate with administration. Now you see what happened at the GBM [General Body Meeting] of SL [some scuffles with a window broken], it's about capturing votes... But politics is not maths, it's art.

5.4.2 The Other Mentors: The Role of Seniors in Inter-generational Politics

I develop in this thesis the claim that the interaction between already politicised individuals and junior students best explains politicisation, which in turns fuels self-perceived radicalisation (see also Martelli and Ari 2017). Such analysis focuses on the processual connections between micro-cohorts, which are shaped by the way younger students seek assistance from elder activists, who complete administrative tasks for them and help resolving their personal problems. Student activists, while struggling to maintain and develop the organisational presence of their organisation, spend their time mentoring common students, often younger ones.

However, such analysis is yet incomplete, as no mention is made of the mentoring of activists themselves. I have observed during my fieldwork the interlocking processes of mentoring and being mentored, in which politically active students reached out to general students, but also learned and got political assistance from professors and senior ideologues in the various JNU student organisations.

¹⁰⁶ When asked explicitly about brokerage, Pratap used to shrug his shoulders, indicating how commonplace such activities were for him: "I can recall 50-60 cases like that. For them I am their informal counsellor."

5.4.2.1 *Untangling the Seniors-Activists Nexus*

In the introduction to this thesis, it was mentioned that the politically active section of the JNU faculty strengthened the culture of participation in evening public meetings in which they disseminated materials – academic and journalistic – in line with specific political claims. The participation of teachers in JNU politics was described as multifaceted, including activities such as taking ideological positions during classes and evening public meetings (see for example p.61-63) and providing financial support to organisations for their campaigns (see Image 5-2 below). In addition to that, I want to underline now how essential the coaching of student leaders on ideological and strategic matters by politicised seniors is in the passing down of political knowledge from one generation to the next via the intermediary of campus activists. Such seniors are a limited circle of JNU professors and a select few outsiders who bridge party interests with the politics of their affiliated student organisation.

Image 5-2. Receipt of a Political Donation to AISF by the CPI JNU Teachers Branch



One morning in February 2015, Azad, an AISF political activist and future president of the Students' Union (2015-16), came to me worried as he needed a friend to read his PhD proposal on post-apartheid liberalisation in South Africa. In his habitual warmth, he took my hand and we headed to his supervisor's office – a very swift task as Azad had a copy of the keys so that he could work there anytime. I knew already that Azad and his *guide* (supervisor) had a close

relationship. Azad had told me once that coming from a mud-walled town in Bihar, he had first heard about JNU thanks to “Sir.” Azad had met his supervisor at a seminar in New Delhi a few years earlier. Impressed by his paper on population problems in India, Azad was advised by him to seek admission to the university and was present the day he gave his interview for MPhil admission.

As I was proofreading Azad’s draft in the professor’s office, the latter unexpectedly entered the room and struck up an informal discussion. He was not only a communist from Bihar – a dark skinned ageing man with red gums indicating an enjoyment for pan chewing – he was also an activist-professor who had participated in countless public meetings on campus¹⁰⁷ and presided over the teacher association. Unsurprisingly, he strongly supported the idea of political mentoring by professors. He had contested JNU student elections for AISF in 1984 and lost by a margin of 24 votes. He told me that studying and doing politics “go together,” as both are involved in “social change,” which involves a “correct analysis of society.” Like other former or current activists, he acknowledged the transformative power of JNU presence. “When you come to JNU, in 6 months you are changed. It is not a linguistic transformation, it is a social transformation.”

Azad’s supervisor saw little difference between activism and teaching, and in order to situate his revolutionary contribution he drew on the Gramscian figure of the organic intellectual. However, when asked why he did not commit to the party as a full-timer, he answered, “it is true that before you could seek full-time work in the party... but this is over. There are some important people, they can make a living with that minimal survival allowance... but this is over now, teaching is a good alternative.” Because of the difficulties of assuming the consequences of sacrificial left imperatives, several former JNU student activists like Azad’s professor found in professorship a good compromise to continue politics without having to abandon the comfort of a middle-class life. The concerted action of politicised students and professors in a semi-closed residential environment therefore provides a compelling explanation of why time spent on campus is such a strong indicator of self-perceived radicalisation, participation and politicisation.

I can remember this encounter as a striking moment in my fieldwork in which the reproductive nature of student activism appeared at its clearest, providing further light on the inter-generational nature of politics on campus. I vividly recall interviewing JNU professors when I would see activists interrupting the meeting, entering the office, seeking advice and mentorship. Several political leaders had PhD or MPhil supervisors waiving them off any kind of academic work for months at a time, in order to enable them to campaign for their political organisation. This was the case of Gautam, a former AISF student activist who had soon joined NSUI in the hope to build a national career and not to “limit himself to JNU island.” He admitted that as a MPhil student he was “very lucky,” as his professor in Science Policy, who himself contested

¹⁰⁷ Innumerable pamphlets take the form of public meeting announcements in which one or more invited speakers are JNU professors. Several of them are featuring Professor Lakhi Munger (JNUSU pamphlet 2012; JNUSU pamphlet 2011; Joint Struggle Committee pamphlet 2009; JNUTA pamphlet 2008).

JNUSU student elections 20 years' prior, had given him the possibility of contesting both GSCASH and JNUSU election without having to hand in any academic work. "My guide said I could postpone all my assignments for after the elections, without that I would have died." In many cases, it appeared that student activists could sustain their level of commitment only because their activity was supported, openly or tacitly by supervisors and other faculty members.

I deliberately used the term 'senior' in this subsection, as actually not every mentor of the elder generation appeared to be a JNU professor. Based on interviews I identified at least three party ideologues coming from the outside – i.e. not being from JNU. One of them is a lawyer, the second a Professor in Delhi University, and the third a political activist and a former CPI(M) full-timer. The last two are former JNU students. These three accounts provide a picture of how affiliated students rely on external figures who make sure that political stands taken on campus fall in line with the official ideology of their parental organisations. This does not mean, however, that JNU organisations are only the transmission belt of political parties. Student organisations have their own managers who run the organisation autonomously on a daily basis. In that sense, major student organisations at JNU are neither completely independent, nor completely subservient, which enables them to import political knowledge on campus and simultaneously reinterpret it the light of the campus context.

5.4.2.2 Ideological Reproduction: The Activist Background of Politicised Professors

Looking at the history of political participation at JNU, it is possible to consider many professors as activists, and many of them have themselves an activist past in organisations such as SFI, AISF, Free Thinkers, etc. Almost all my interviews with politically active professors at JNU stressed the continuum between their activist days and teaching.

Professor Samuel Divekar, former CPI all-timer and JNUSU vice-president office bearer (1978-9), describes the transition between student activism and teaching activism as natural: "Those of us who wore jeans as students, wear them as professors." A figure of JNU activism, former Students' Union president (1974-5) and *Aam Aadmi Party* (Common Man's Party) Lok Sabha candidate in 2014, Professor J.P. Kashi, told me that the consequence of his time on campus was to remain politically active throughout his life (interview 2015). Another former president (twice, 2002-4), Professor Amarendra Mishra, tried to be a full-timer for three years before becoming a JNU professor in economics. However, he did not see this shift as a renunciation of activism, "that doesn't mean the politics has disappeared... the kind of things I teach, the kind of things I write... are all political." Even as they wear two hats, some scholars such as Zach Murti (JNUSU general-secretary 2001-02 and former Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library) still distinguish between the roles of politician and academic: "Before I was 50 percent politician, 50 percent academic... but it is impossible to keep both when you are campaigning on campus." In contrast with Zach's account, many professors and senior activists did not see any epistemological difference between the field of politics and the field of academia. For them, one informed the other, and apart from time constraints the two went hand-in-hand.

Aside from pursuing politics by academic means, former JNU activists who became professors (see Table 5-1 on the next page) may have done it for two reasons. Firstly, many JNU proactive activists benefitted from the co-optation of influential leftist professors. Many senior activists such as Atul, PhD student in economics and former JNUSU presidential candidate were aware of this co-optation system. Atul explained to me that activist-professors made sure that newly hired faculty members in their centre aligned with their own politically-oriented academic underpinnings:

[discussion about the possibility of my respondent to return to JNU as a Lecturer] I have missed my turn kind'of. Before the arrival of the new VC [February 2016], faculty filled up new positions with former JNU graduates...they rushed like crazy. They hired so many of them, it was huge...mainly because, you know they were scared...that the new VC would put economic rightists and other Modi fans in every centre. They [JNU faculty] should try to hire people from the outside too, because those kids all speak the same language, it's not refreshing. In the economic department, they're all boys of Patnaik [Emeritus Professor and eminent Marxist Economist] from SFI. So when we invite him for public speeches there is nobody to contradict him, and it becomes utterly difficult to improve our analytical skills.

Second, as explained in Chapter 4, the ideology of the left, in particular in CPI(M), CPI(ML) and CPI(Maoist), made it inappropriate for their activists to work for private capital or the 'corrupt' Indian state. Indeed, being a left activist involves various forms of 'anti-state' discourses (see Chapter 6). The state is criticised for being anti-people, profit-oriented, allied with big capital, "snatching" the land of peasants and being caste-riddled.

Sustained left-wing activism at JNU helped to develop moral taboos against opportunistic political behaviours and careers in national parties. Pratap, another former president (2007-10), acknowledged that refusing to study for the civil service exam is part of the process of developing a radical ethnos, since "when you decide not to go for UPSC, you need a strong justification for it." Contrary to communist student activists, ABVP and NSUI leaders made no secret of their ambition to join the prestigious rank of high public administration even if that meant sacrificing time usually meant for political activities on campus. They are like many other students of JNU who join the institution to benefit from hostel and library facilities in order to try clear the examination for the UPSC. It is because of this readiness to accept dominant cultural and professional curricula that I call NSUI and ABVP activists 'potential conformists' and communist students 'likely heretics', consecrated in the campus space, but rejected outside as they refuse dominant narratives and embrace the gamble of deviation from the mainstream idea of success.

Through surveying the current professional activities of all elected office bearers of the JNUSU since its creation (cf. Table 5-1 next page), I show that nearly half of them (48.6 percent) joined academia after graduation. As Riju, former AIFS student leader and general secretary (1998-9) at JNU and now professor, said: "There are only two fields where an activist at JNU can go without compromising his ideals: One is journalism, the other is academia."

Table 5-1. Occupation of Former JNUSU Office Bearers (1971-2015)

Politician	Academic	Journalist	Social Worker	Other	Total
20 (19%)	51 (48.6%)	12 (11.4%)	6 (5.7%)	16 (15.2%)	105 (100%)

Post-office occupations of students who have held one of the following positions: President, Vice-President (post created in 1978 only), General Secretary and Joint Secretary (also created in 1978). No elections were held between 2008 and 2012. Individuals elected several times and to different posts are counted once. Most journalists also occupied teaching positions but were not in the category “Academic.” The “Other” category comprises mostly licensed professionals, public officers and a few entrepreneurs. Were excluded from the count those who are still registered as students as per 2017 (23 of them) and those whose profession could not be identified (12). The Table does not add up to 100% as a result of rounding.

Source: fieldwork

As I argue in this thesis, this passage of politically active students to professorship contributes to the reproduction of an environment that values political discussions, both in classes and in evening canteen meetings. Such phenomenon is summarised by Prof. Divekar (introduced earlier) reflecting on his own experiences, “so for me, having been a student activist, it was a natural transition to being a teachers’ activist.” The political record of some active academics at JNU partly explains why the campus has been able to retain strong ideological undercurrents at odds with those of many other educational institutions in the country (Pattnaik 1982; Jha 1998); fuelling the sentiment of distinctiveness prevailing among JNU residents.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to recall that activist work is not only restricted to fixing issues for individual students. In addition to brokerage activities, the archetypal activist activity also consists of taking up causes in the interests of the student community at large. Student leaders use their negotiation skills to convince the administration to provide on-campus bus facilities, speed-up the allotment of new hostel rooms, obtain new research facilities, increase the cap of scholarships, allow personal books to be taken inside the main hall of the library, provide free access to sanitary pads, ensure the renovation of space for art performances, and so on.

Along with collective initiatives for student welfare, the importance of brokerage practices should not be undermined, as these structure the relationship between activists and students. Campus activists are not only promoting ideals in line with their ideology, they also behave as a ‘middle-man’ or ‘street level bureaucrat’ (Dubois 2012) ready to assist students – though sometimes reluctantly – in their mundane personal queries. During my fieldwork, campus activists at JNU gave their time and energy in the hope of generating political loyalties. They did not solely carry out patronage-dispensing acts out of genuine concern and empathy for student problems. They were also conscious that if they did not deliver, the individual would seek assistance from

rival activists. In that sense, it was possible to locate similar variants of the JNU-based brokerage strategies in the larger Indian polity. By behaving as intermediaries, campus activists created ties of solidarity, friendship and mutual dependence with the younger generation. Intense phases of instrumental socialisation, as exemplified by the cases of “registration assistance” and “room sheltering,” played a crucial role in the formation of a collective identity – bringing about the progressive inclusion of the newcomer into activist groups. Freshers’ loyalties were thus set into networks of obligation early on, ensuring that the newcomer was not only familiarised, but assured to remain part of the group.

The chapter also concentrated on the fact that a section of professors with activist backgrounds encouraged political commitments on campus by mentoring their leaders, and rescheduling or waiving politicised students under their supervision from many academic requirements. Through providing ideological inputs to students during classes, giving speeches at evening political events and financing their campaigns, active faculty supported student organisations in many ways; and additionally received further mentoring by a few seniors coming from the outside.

The next chapter will turn to look at how activists diffuse ideology through the distribution of pamphlets which is a complement of their brokerage activities. Chapter 6 will show that local student-based demands are an important component of the JNU pamphleteer discourse, but how to a large extent such pragmatic elements are overpowered by ideological content. The dialectic between discourses on student welfare¹⁰⁸ and social warfare – embodied respectively by SFI and AISA and nurtured by the political philosophy of their party – appear to be a strong intellectual outcome of political socialisation on campus.

¹⁰⁸ Gorakh, AISA general secretary of the Union (2012), summarises this dialectic between campus-related grievances and broader social issues: “We thought Israeli fascism would be the centre of this year’s election [2014]... But actually the obsession became the one of hostels [accommodation shortages], I am really disappointed [...] Now campus politics is not about mass mobilisation for the revolution, it is mere welfarism.”

6 Language of Welfare or Warfare? Socio-political and Ideological Consequences of Pamphleteering

This chapter examines the broader ideological context in which political socialisation develops on campus. It aims to look at how JNU pamphleteering articulates political rivalries, and serves as an alley for politicisation – in which students are invited to adopt activist-like consciousness and participate in anti-establishment movements. In Chapter 3, I used pamphlets as an historical primary-source and as an indication of changes in discourse. Here, the chapter presents the contents of the PaRChA archive in order to differentiate the kind of politics professed by the various student organisations active on campus. It also discusses the social use of pamphlets.

The argument is divided into two distinct sections. After briefly introducing the content of the pamphlet archive and how it operationalises a vituperative discourse based on competitive-argumentation, slanders and truth-claiming, I provide an account of how activists use pamphleteering as a tool to keep permanent contact with the student community. I then expose how the language used by pamphlet authors is a strong indication of various ideological affiliations, thus showing how JNU’s written discourses are expressions of existing political cleavages in India, as they build on pre-existing ideologies embedded in the political culture of the party they belong to. This includes, among others, the caste-based assertion of Dalit-based organisations, the Hindu pride of pro-RSS ABVP, and the various anti-establishment rhetoric of left organisations. This serves as evidence of how political socialisation involves the adoption by students of specific ideological idioms that compete against each other.

More specifically, through concentrating on the transition of power between two communist student organisations on campus, I show how the public expression of Marxism differs in the way political emotions are played out. While SFI gives a premium to concrete welfare and student-based issues, the emphasis of AISA is on cases of social oppression. Along with its relative lack of emphasis on the betterment of daily amenities, AISA has brought about the re-enactment of ideological idioms inspired by its past as a Naxalite guerrilla organisation in Bihar. I suggest that the variability of the emotional language of the left on campus, and the establishment of a divide between SFI’s “Marxism of reason” and AISA’s “Marxism of heart” is an important marker of differentiation between various left movements in India; which is just as meaningful as ideological cleavages and personal rivalries.

6.1 Political Pamphlets as Socialising Objects

Prior to an analysis of the material at hand, it is important to first understand what makes a pamphlet different from other documents. Some forms of discourse, such as European institutional communication (Hermand 2014) and reporting in international organisations – e.g. the World Trade Organisation annual report (Siroux 2008) – are keen to neutralise polemical effects and de-problematise social phenomena. According to Passard (2015), the French pamphlet in the late

19th century was the exact opposite of this, as its main function was to “de-pacify” the political game. Usually understood as a brief document (Jonge and Nicolas 2009), the purpose of the pamphlet is to “react” to a specific political situation (Saenen 2010). It can be understood as an ambition of the media to politicise passive individuals in order to make them witness and feel – often through the use of pathos – a particular injustice. This attempt to reject an existing imposture leads pamphleteers to claim a monopoly over honesty (cf. Foucault and his concept of *parrêsia*) and truth-enunciation (Avril 1978).

Drawing on the work of Angenot (1995 [1982]), three more functions can be identified. The pamphlet can be perceived as a “performative” document (see also Danblon 2006) calling its readers towards immediate action against political prejudice. The pamphlet is also targeted at a clearly identifiable enemy (rival, specific class, politician, ethnicity, etc.) that has to be decried. This Manichaean cosmology of conflict sometimes involves oratory violence in the pursuit of having the “last word” (Rosanvallon 1992). Lastly, the pamphlet articulates particular rhetorical features, at the intersection of satirical and polemist repertoire. In this genre, micro-narratives such as the anecdote, parabola, and testimony (Angenot 1978) are embedded in a form of argumentation that involves both indictment and plea. Such a specialist discourse necessarily involves a form of professionalisation of the actors who write pamphlets (Passard 2013).

6.1.1 Political Socialisation through Pamphleteering

In addition to the above-mentioned usages, a pamphlet can also be considered a social object. According to Bourdieu and Chartier (1985:270), a social critique of the status of any document has to be made prior to any content analysis. Bourdieu, while commenting on a conference in Saint-Maximin (France) on the topic of reading, expressed the view that a pamphlet was not only a container of text, but also a social ritual (in Reeser and Spalding 2002). In this line of thought, I argue that a sound analysis of JNU pamphleteer discourse cannot be made from the sole point of view of textual analysis.

In a context of political competition, in which activists defend identifiable political positions, pamphlets can be seen as markers for argumentative differentiation. Nihar Burdwani, the ideologue of AISA, notes: “All kinds of debates happened and we defeated them... Not with money or muscle power like in DU [Delhi University]... We just used arguments, logic.” In the JNU environment, these argumentative jousts between organisations contributed to the saturation of the campus with political messages structured around a “pamphlet culture” (Kshetrimayum, alumni 2003). Several accounts attesting to the longevity of such a culture can be found in the souvenir books released by the Alumni Association of JNU (AJJ) (2008, 2009, 2010). The following are two examples:

JNU provided me a platform to meet students from diverse backgrounds and socio-political orientations. Bunches of pamphlets distributed by student organisations along with dinner and breakfast, and public meetings in hostel organized regularly attracted me towards student politics. (N.S. Rao, alumni 1987)

Therefore, I did not actively participate in any political activities during 1978-80, but enjoyed its election meetings, posters and pamphlet making, the Students' Union elections and the nights of counting of election result. (S.N. Singh, alumni 1980)

While some pamphlet traditions are meant to be chanted or recited (Jouhaud 1985), the one in JNU residences relies first on individual reading. However, this does not mean that no social practice is attached to it. For instance, activists conduct room campaigns, class campaigns, mess campaigns, signature campaigns, *chanda* campaigns (money contribution campaigns, cf. the Rs. 50 contribution of Comrade Rajim in Image 5-2, p.123) and in the same vein distribute pamphlets mostly at dinner time and later at night. During electoral campaigns, distribution happens even at breakfast times in the mess hall. *Parchas* (pamphlets) are for instance heavily associated with meal eating in refectories. "Ordinary meals turned into gourmet meals thanks to the stack of pamphlets on various national and international issues kept in the hostel dining hall" (D. Sahu, alumni 2010). Pamphlets are debated during meal times, so that politics framed by activists irremediably becomes a collective matter.

As part of JNU community dining, pamphlets not only serve as a tool of communication, they are also a tool for connecting regular students to political activists. For instance, during class hours (usually between 10am and 4pm, Monday to Thursday), affiliated students will stand in front of student residences or hostels and distribute material to them, often inviting them to events, protests, campaigns, cultural or political events organised the same day or the day after. Not only do pamphlets serve as a pretext for activists to get in contact with students, they are also used as proof to the broader community that their organisation keeps working for them while pursuing broader political interests. In that sense, pamphleteering is the written component of an activist's performance in a climate of political contention.

From my fieldwork experience, pamphlets at JNU served five main purposes, some of which are detailed further in the course of this chapter. Firstly, they were used to take positions in light of fresh political events and differentiate politically from other organisations. Second, they helped to keep constant contact with the student body and were useful for making calls for the mobilisation of students. Third, because pamphlets were meant as a remedy against the passivity of students in the face of flagrant injustices (cf. Chapter 4), they were written with the objective of producing strong emotional reactions. For that matter, JNU pamphlets can be considered "sensitising devices" (Traïni and Terry 2010),¹⁰⁹ that is, linguistic tools that predispose the readers to be receptive to a particular political cause. Fourth, pamphlets were also used to provide a constant account of recent actions taken and ongoing "struggles." Lastly, they were useful to inform the

¹⁰⁹ Sensitising devices are defined by Traïni and Terry (2010:233) as "the material support, the arrangement of objects, and the staging that activists deploy in order to inspire the affective reactions that predispose those who experience them to support the proposed cause."

students about the activist legacy of the organisation and provide evidence in case of controversies over positions taken on a particular subject.

By constantly reaching out to students with new pamphlets, the JNU community is exposed to a form of language performance that can be called “vituperative” (Hastings 2009), which stresses criticism and the need for change. Evidence of these written *calls for action* against mainstream politics are clear when looking at the most recurrent words¹¹⁰ in the pamphlet corpus (cf. *infra* for details). Pamphleteers in the PaRChA corpus strike the reader as fighting for a better world, word by word, pamphlet after pamphlet. Words like struggle and fight fill up the columns. Against is the single most popular word, when excluding references to places and people. The frequency of against mirrors the exigencies of JNU campus politics. It is accompanied by a pamphleteer literary tradition of anger against injustice (Hastings *et al.* 2009). Most co-occurring lemmas¹¹¹ along with the term against emphasise the wrongdoings of society, its unfairness, its violence, and the infuriating lies it propagates. A vituperative discourse seems to apply both to local issues (campus, 32,969 occurrences; administration, 28,902) and broader ones (India, 25,138; government, 21,622). Irrespective of the authoring organisation, most JNU pamphlets offer comments on current political events and inevitably call for appropriate reactions. This is the reason why JNU pamphlet discourses predominantly use the present tense; with the most common words is (170,715 occurrences), has (100,336), be (96,333), are (79,553) and have (74,139). As a JNU activist admits: “You open the newspaper in the morning, it tells you what you are going to protest against in the afternoon” (Jitendra, interview 2014).

The 100 words displaying the highest association with the word against are presented in Figure 6-1 (see next page).¹¹² This intertextual proximity shows the high level of attraction of lexical forms such as injustice, discriminated and baseless. The significant association between the pivot and co-occurents helps us to understand the nature of JNU political discourse. The words in Figure 6-1 refer to broad social justice issues (caste discrimination, neo-liberal inequalities) rather than educational aspects (fee hikes, infrastructure shortages, administrative delays). Thus, the

¹¹⁰ Lexical forms indicating oppositional stands are numerous. Examples among the 50 most commonly used words in the PaRChA corpus are the following: against (frequency: 55,298; rank 4 in the archive), struggle (35,582; 5), issue (31,238; 8), demand (27,970; 11), should (23,719; 15), more (22,546; 19), movement (21,526; 22), give (19,134; 25), ensure (19,042; 26), must (18,634; 27), protest (15,608; 33), fight (14,780; 37), need (13,978; 43), increase (12,515; 48), hold (12,396; 49).

¹¹¹ A lemma is a word defined in a dictionary or entered in a word list (The Oxford Dictionary of English 2016). In lexicography, the term is used to design a ‘headword’ including all the words belonging to the same dictionary entry (Hartmann 1998:83). For example, the lemma fight includes the forms such as fights, fought and fighting.

¹¹² A positive score means a word is over-represented in a section of the text (in this case more associated with the group of lemmas surrounding the lemma against) and a negative one indicates a word under-represented. The minimum frequency and co-frequency threshold is set at 2 occurrences. The distance of co-occurents from the pivot word is bound to 10 lexical units on both the left and right side. Apart from the conjunction and, preposition of, and article the, the distance between against and its co-occurents rarely exceeds 4 units.

occasions, he sends it to the printing agency (in JNU or *Ber Sarai*, a neighbouring market) directly from his email address (Chiran, interview 2015). Although no study has analysed the specific rhetoric of pamphleteering in the Indian context, it is safe to say that it has a longstanding tradition of radicalism that can be traced back to the early “swadeshi” (i.e. Indian independence) movement and the 1905 partition of Bengal (Sanyal 2014). In a context in which scholarship on the subject is fragmentary, it is important to rely on ethnographic evidence in order to understand the way pamphleteering is practiced at JNU.

6.1.2 Competing Political Socialisations: Applying Textual Analysis to JNU Pamphlets

In many respects, JNU campus politics is not too different from other political arenas; it has its contenders, its formal party structures and even a residential public opinion. Therefore, student politics can be seen as an autonomous political field “which increases with the development of permanent organisations of professionals, [which] means that the positions adopted by the agents are primarily determined in relation to the universe of competing political positions” (Bourdieu 1981:3). It is partly because of this competitive environment that various political actors spend more time and energy socialising with students in the hope of mobilising them under their banner. Chapters 4 and 5 described the mechanisms structuring this political competition, but little attention has been paid to the various ideas defended by each political organisation. While the next section explores the ideological outcomes of political socialisation, below I briefly introduce textual analysis as a tool to make sense of the diversity of political discourses on campus, which in turn is an indication of how students are socialised into a variety of understandings of society.

Indeed, textual analysis can help the researcher to profile political affiliation according to identifiable features contained in pamphleteers’ political discourses. Identifiable language elements and *topoi* (i.e. recurring themes) in pamphlets can be specifically associated with the organisations that write them. Lexical characteristics can be many; including the choice of contentious themes, the tenses used, the syntax, composition of sentences, etc. By looking at the lexicon over-represented in pamphlets of a specific organisation, it is possible to make sense of their ideological positioning – within the spectrum of Indian politics – and compare their discourse strategies on campus with other competitive structures. This is the rationale behind the expansion of textual analysis in the next section.

The mere existence of such a large archive of JNU pamphlets is evidence of the vibrant tradition of pamphlet-writing on campus. The PaRChA repository comprises 72,424 documents covering the period 1973-2015. They were mainly drawn together from six different sources.¹¹³ After removing documents that were not strictly relevant (posters, manifestos, reports, press releases,

¹¹³ The material was collected from private holdings of Lenin Kumar (DSF and SFI), Tapas Ranjan (AISA), Ashutosh Kumar (AISA), Kunwar Sudhanshu Lal (AISF), Subin Dennis (SFI), MD Naushad (ABVP and DSU). I would like to thank them for their support and cooperation. Caroline Fortunato and Sanjay Dharia kindly assisted me in the scanning process. I am also particularly indebted to Guillaume Loret, who helped design the PaRChA online database.

letters to administration, statements of the Teachers' Association) and those written in years where little material is found (i.e. making the statistical analysis irrelevant), 37,430 pamphlets were retained, ranging from 1994 to 2014 and authored by 13 different student organisations. These were sometimes grouped together in clusters when they were too small in number. English is the medium of education at JNU, consequently ~95% of the text in the corpus is written in this language. The sparse material in Hindi (Devanagari script) and other languages (mainly Urdu and Bengali) was not included in the analysis. It is assumed that the proportion of pamphlets in Hindi is stable over time and that all the organisations use them in minimal proportions. The same scanning material was used for the entire pamphlet corpus, so errors generated during the optical character recognition (OCR) text extraction are spread evenly across the various sub-corpus. This is important in order to ensure that various results of the text analysis grasp political differences and not only stylistic differences between sub-corpus. Here I look at how text-analysis makes sense of these alternative discourses. In text-analysis, the use of OCR permits the extraction of words from the printed material and makes a huge body of text suitable for statistical analysis through the use of TXM (an abbreviation of the word "Textometry") (Heiden *et al.* 2010), Iramuteq¹¹⁴ (Ratinaud and Déjean 2009) and Mallet (McCallum 2002; 2003) computer tools.

Beyond necessary ideological and strategic cleavages, it is possible to consider pamphlets as a type of discourse *en soi* (Le Bart 2009); existing at the intersection of satirical and polemic repertoire. Hence, in the Indian context, I give preliminary evidence for a typology of pamphleteer discourses based on the word specificities of each authoring political organisation. Lexical frames are outlined, making sense of the "Hindu-nationalist" dialectic as well as the "democratic-struggle" of communist-inspired organisations. Each one embodies a specific worldview in which righteous voices unmask conspiracies, slander and oppression, proposing new understandings of notions such as gender-based violence and caste discrimination. The final goal of this textometric approach is to identify the language-identity of political organisations and their student base.

The argument presented in the next section is partly based on the interpretation of word occurrences. By using this method, the chapter identifies the lexicon over-represented in a particular sub-section of the pamphlet corpus. Additionally, an identification of "topics," "clusters" and "classes" – understood as sets of words frequently occurring together – is also solicited. Topic modelling and cluster analysis are used here as statistical techniques to categorise individual texts in order to outline a typology of the aforementioned university-based pamphlets. Such identification of macroscopic patterns are useful to identify what is specific in the language of a group of speakers, and such specificity can be called using various terms, including "lexical profile" in the field of education (Milton 2007:50), "semantic cohort" in historical research (Heuser and Le-Khac 2012:9-10), and "lexical world" in statistical data analysis (Reinert 1993:11-12, 2007), which can be applied to various disciplines. Because the latter term appears to be interdisciplinary in

¹¹⁴ The acronym stands for "R INTERFACE for multidimensional analysis of texts and questionnaires."

scope, and also because Reinert's statistical method is the algorithmic basis for some of the computerised tools I used for the analysis, I will use the term "lexical world" in preference to others.

6.2 Two Political Choices: The Marxism of Heart vs The Marxism of Reason

This section explores the ideological consequences of political socialisation on campus. Although many student organisations from different ideological backgrounds are found at JNU, the greatest influence on the political learning of the student community is exerted by Marxist-inspired groups. Considering the relative activist dominance of two communist organisations at JNU in the years 2015-16, political socialisation on campus appears to be partly led and structured by their activity and the kind of discourses they produce. Hence arises the question of understanding the main political differences in the discourses of SFI and AISA, and the kinds of ideological divides that can be found in their respective pamphleteer discourses. In order to answer this question, I first present an overview of the various lexical worlds developed by the main student organisations at JNU before turning to the more specific analysis of the key semantic differences between the two main representatives of Marxism on campus.

6.2.1 Political Organisations at JNU: A Language Identity of Their Own

Probably the most prominent feature of JNU politics is the wide range of available discourses, representing a broad spectrum of political cultures in India. This feature is summarised in Figure 6-2, in which I present some of the most commonly occurring lemmas (i.e. dictionary forms of words) for each student organisation (i.e. with specificity scores higher than three, presented in brackets with their lemma at the tip of the tree map). Figure 6-2 presented is therefore a parsimonious illustration of democratic life on campus, involving a variety of voices representing various intellectual standpoints.

I subsequently organised these lemmas into broader semantic categories – labels on the branches are mine – in order to give emphasis to the specific ideological repertoire of each organisation. While all the lemmas in Figure 6-2 are over-represented in their sub-corpus (each sub-corpus represents a student organisation), they actually appear in the word-tree only if they are relevant to their semantic category. The final selection of lemmas is informed by my ethnography in the JNU campus and extensive reading of the pamphlets contained in the PaRChA archive.

Both Dalit-based UDSF and upper caste Youth for Equality emphasise the topic of positive discrimination, though for opposite reasons. While UDSF defends the enforcement of quotas for students, administrators and teaching staff of deprived sections, Youth For Equality (emerging as a new campus-based political outfit in 2006) has as its main ambition to oppose various forms of reservation in the name of "merit" (Youth For Equality pamphlet 2012; Youth For Equality pamphlet 2007) – proposing instead the enforcement of positive discrimination based exclusively on

economic and gender criteria (Youth For Equality pamphlet 2006a, 2006b). This followed the Congress-led government's decision to extend reservations for OBCs to educational institutions funded by central authorities – a point which was introduced in the historical chapter.

Other confirmations come from a first reading of the figure. NSUI emphasises the figure of Gandhi, the Congress party and its leading role in the independence movement, as well as secular figures such as A.P.J. Abdul Kalam.¹¹⁵ DSF, the splinter group of SFI associated with Left Collective, orients its contents on Bengal, mostly to offer a critique of CPI(M) rule in the region. Maoist sympathiser DSU pays a great deal of attention on the precarious life of Adivasis, and on state actions in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, including state sponsoring of the illegal paramilitary force Salwa Judum and the killing/arrests of some alleged Naxals – including Hem Mishra, a JNU student placed behind bars in August 2013 on charges of being a Maoist courier (DSU pamphlet 2013).

Pamphlets headed by the acronym of the Students' Union (JNUSU), though written by members of different organisations, also display encompassing features. JNUSU pamphlets are more often about arranging meetings (tomorrow, meet) but most importantly, their main purpose is to keep the student community updated about actions taken on issues of concern, and on-going protests (protest, withdraw, assure etc.). In a similar fashion, GSCASH is engaged both with the reporting of its administrative functioning (complaint, enquiry, clause) and its public campaigning for gender equality (justice, patriarchal). While the role of GSCASH in conducting gender-related inquiries is the most visible feature in its pamphlets (several pamphlets have a score of specificity over 100), its sensitisation mission (score of specificity 70) is also on display. However, it can be claimed that more emphasis is given to the question of women's safety than to the issue of women's empowerment.

A plurality of interpretations of the role of women in India can be found in JNU pamphlets. On this matter, I looked at co-occurents of the lemma woman (12,674 occurrences) for each organisation in the PaRChA archive. ABVP tries to portray the woman as an object of worship (score of specificity 14) and as a group in need of protection (8). The overall tendency in JNU pamphlets is to map the different sources of oppression that Indian women face in society. SFI and AISA are prone to denouncing the moral policing of women's behaviour in the public space, related to what a woman wears (24 for AISA), (see also jeans 15 and clothes 12) and her fashion (7 for SFI). Surprisingly, except for DSF pamphlets, there is little emphasis on women's emancipation (11 for DSF) and a lot more on the various range of abuses she is likely to experience. Overall, by looking at the most co-occurring words for the lemma woman, (irrespective of the authoring organisation) it appears that most discussions revolve around issues such as rape (score

¹¹⁵ A.P.J. Abdul Kalam (1931-2015) was the President of India (2002-2007). As a head of various ballistic research programmes, he was known to have raised India to the level of a missile power (Kalam and Tiwari 1999).

of specificity 60), female infanticide (i.e. womb, score of specificity 49), honour killing (honour 47) especially in the context of Haryana's Khap panchayat traditions,¹¹⁶ the legacy of sati (42), various violences imposed on married women by the husband (46), and in particular murder in the case of AISA (42 for AISA sub-corpus). Hindu, Muslim, young and tribal are the adjectives most often used before the lemma woman; but the emphasis on the harshness of Adivasi womanhood is given by DSU (score of specificity 33 for the DSU sub-corpus). DSU, as a pro-Maoist organisation which currently concentrates its activity in the Adivasi areas of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, is inclined to discussing cases of loot (10) and abductions (24) of Adivasi women by military and paramilitary forces in those areas.

Textual expressions of nationalism are also very different from one organisation to another. ABVP approaches India from the point of view of its cultural past and the perceived threats to its Hindu identity. The co-occurents of the word India in this organisation are not only politically charged synonyms such as Bharat (score of specificity 150) or Hindu (50) but names of several rival nations. Unsurprisingly, perceived enemies of India are China (89) and its rising regional competitors, Pakistan (86) and the country's reckoned Islamist terrorism (50), the Assamese migrant crisis triggered by Bangladesh (99) and danger of mass invasion (15) by Muslims (59). In addition, when looking at the words that are most specific to ABVP, the RSS-sponsored organisation makes constant references to Hindu gods (Hanuman etc.), epics (Ramayana) and scriptures (Sanskrit etc.).¹¹⁷

If the main characteristic of the "India" imagined by ABVP is ancient, that of NSUI (31) and SFI (18) is secular. Similarly, if for the right-wing organisations the political enemy of India is regional, the enemy of the leftist imagination is global, imperialist and capitalist. For instance, India is strongly associated with the US (United States of America) for AISA (163) and SFI (97). Israel and the UK are very frequently mentioned. For left and Dalit organisations, the discourses on India are more strongly associated with India's internal problems. UDSF emphasises the cruel (15) treatment perpetrated on bahujans (178) and by rulers (10), while DSU considers, along the line of Naxalites, that the country is at war (66), burdened by imperialists (25), and more generally rigged by semi-feudalism (33) and semi-colonialism (12). While AISA gives emphasis to rural India, it labels the country as a whole as being poor (79) and saffronised (72). "Saffron" refers here to Hindu religiosity and nationalism, and is perceived by JNU communism as a synonym for intolerance and communalism.

¹¹⁶ Khap panchayats are caste councils in Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. Khaps have been responsible for chastising youth who are perceived to have contravened local caste taboos such as inter-caste romance. These individuals have been punished, outcast, and even murdered by panchayats that act in the name of "justice," with kangaroo courts being common in such areas.

¹¹⁷ Sanskrit is considered to be the primary liturgical and sacred language of Hinduism.

In fact, themes articulated around radical vocabulary are dominant at JNU. Pair of words like radical politics, radical transformations, radical movement, radical posturing and radical struggles¹¹⁸ saturate the political space of the campus and have, as previously explained, a significant impact on student politicisation. However, not all student organisations attach the same meaning to the word “radicalism,” even if it is used in high proportions by AISA, DSU, DSF and SFI. Semantic polyphony is attached to struggle, the second most signifying word used by JNU pamphleteers (35,582 occurrences). It is over-represented in discourses of left organisations such as DSU (score 49),¹¹⁹AISA (10), SFI (10) and DSF (7) but struggles and fighters do not refer to the same political ideologies. The following table (6-1) displays the words most commonly associated with struggles. DSU and AISA use a lexical field which makes references to Naxal armed struggles (see Chapter 2), peasant upsurges, Palestinian and Sri Lanka’s Tamil conflicts. As explained in the next sub-section, SFI and DSF however focus largely on campus demands and the improvement of student’s life.¹²⁰ This is further diversified by Dalit groups like UDSF, the Bahujan Students’ Front and the Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students Association who also use the vocabulary of struggle in the context of say, caste emancipation.

Table 6-1. High Associations of Co-occurring Words with the Word Struggle by Organisation

DSU ^a	[Naxalbari struggle] anti-Lyngdoh, assertive, collective, decisive, delegitimize, democratization, Eelam, feudalism, goodwill, heroic, imposition, injustice, integral, intensify, Kashmiri, legal, Liberation, long, martyr, mass, meaningful, midway, Naxalbari, onslaught, organ, outcome, patriarchy, peasant, phase, reclaim, reduction, reinstate, resolutely, restore, sabotage, self-determination, sharpen, stay, Telangana, transformation, uncompromising, uncompromisingly, undermine, uphold, valiant, weapon
AISA	[Peasant struggle] actively, AISA-led, aloof, AMU, anti-imperialist, arena, betrayal, Bhul, broaden, clinch, collective, custodial, democratisation, dissociate, divert, enjoy, expand, fabricate, fine, hurdle, inspire, intensified, JNUSU, JNUSU-Ied, Khalid, launch, legal, Lucknow, martyr, Naxalbari, participate, peasant, protracted, Rajkumar, rebuff, reluctant, restructuring, robust, salute, self-reliant, site, spearhead, spirited, tough, truly, unitedly, unrelenting, uphold, weapon
SFI	[Campus struggle #1] office-bearer, carry, position, advance, valiant, Reduce, onslaught, PH, anti-imperialist, JNUSUs, arduous, glorious, pledge, betterment, Restore, AISA-led, rebuff, sharp, fledge, victorious, vigilant, weakening, revitalize, double, forefront, achievement, restore, abandon, extend, salute, betray, uncompromising, Nestle, steadfast
DSF	[Campus struggle #2] abandon, achieve, achievement, advance, arrears, associate, broad, clinch, conclusion, duration, emancipation, enhancement, expand, forge, GSCASH, JNUSUs, launch, Liberation, mass, meaningful, office-bearer, participate, Position, rebuild, reduction, relentless, require, resolutely, resolve, restore, revitalize, steadfast, viva-voce, weaken
UDSF	[Emancipation struggle] blend, emancipation, understanding

¹¹⁸ I have mentioned here the words that are most likely to occur along with against in the PaRChA corpus.

¹¹⁹ This number is an indicator of the likelihood of the over-representation of words in specific parts of the corpus. A score equal or superior to 3 means 99.9 percent chances that the target word is used more frequently in the selected part of the corpus (in our case it corresponds to the text issued by a specific student organisation).

¹²⁰ “Soft” and “hard” interpretations of radicalism and choices of issues at JNU (as reflected in the pamphlets) are the result of the opposition between the parliamentary left symbolised by the CPI(M) and the various shades of more Maoist-inspired movements such as CPI(ML) (which was an underground party leading guerrilla actions in rural Bihar and present-day Jharkhand until the 1990s).

All Pamphlets	[Protracted struggle] achieve, achievement, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, anti-Lyngdoh, arduous, betrayal, betrayed, carrying, conclusion, decisive, delegitimize, democratization, drawn, egalitarian, enhancement, entrusted, extend, forefront, glorious, GSCASH-first, heroic, instrument, Intensify, Intensifying, landmark, launch, legalistic, liberation, logical, martyr, milestone, Office-Bearers, Palestinian, patriarchy, phase, pledges, prolonged, protracted, reaffirms reclaim, reduce, reduction, reinstate, relentless, requires, resolute, restored, restoring, sabotage, self-determination, sharpen, spirited, stayed, Uncompromising, unified, unrelenting, upholding, valiant, viva-voce, waging, weaken
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^a Words contained in each section are those having a high chance (equivalent to a specificity score S^2) to be overrepresented in specific sub-corpus of the various organisations.

Left radicalism has many interpretations but one of common ground to all those is the rejection of Hinduism, as indicated by the semantic category ‘Anti-sangh’ of AISA and SFI in Figure 6-2. Such a stand is very much explicit when looking at figures regarding religious beliefs, as expressed by respondents of my survey on JNU political attitudes. When students politicise and embrace leftism many of them choose atheism. This official rejection of one’s religious community is a tangible sign of the rejection of descriptive or prescriptive categories of conformism. For instance, rejection of Hinduism entails rejection of the values attached to it: the caste system and relegation of Muslims and Christians as second class citizens. Atheism is also perceived as the expression of an attachment to a secular liberal outlook. Atheism is therefore a form of political labelling – it goes against the practice of India’s democracy which relies mostly on religious identities to construct majorities (Khilnani 2012 [1999]). The highest levels of “atheistic politicisation” can be found in the School of Social Sciences, known for hosting many left-inspired scholars. Atheist respondents are leftist and radical for the most part as only 9.5 percent (26 observations) of those self-perceiving themselves as centrists label themselves as atheists. Among the 50 respondents who declared participating in JNU politics every day, 27 (54.0 percent) marked themselves as atheist. Unsurprisingly, of the 132 respondents who declared themselves as atheists, only 11 (8.4 percent of total respondents) self-reported on the right side of the political spectrum.

6.2.2 From One Marxism to the Other: AISA and the Emotional Resonance for the Declasse

The display of competing political discourses by student activists fuels political socialisation on campus. I argue that both the differentiation and polarisation of activist rhetoric is conducive to student politicisation because it leads students to position themselves politically, in particular when leaders and pamphleteers draw successfully on an emotionally charged language. After outlining the main differences between various organisations in terms of the content of their pamphleteer discourse, let us focus more specifically on the divide between the lexical worlds of AISA and SFI. I started forging a sense of this division early in my fieldwork as I noticed that, in many instances, activists nourished an emotional resentment against each other, which in turn legitimated their joining of one or the other organisation. In the following paragraphs, I show that while having a Marxist framework in common, socialisation in one of these organisations implies the production of a significantly different language.

6.2.2.1 Two Organisations Similar in Appearance...

Here, I show that AISA's lexical world relies on an emotional language that concentrates on the question of social warfare while SFI is more interested in speaking out on more material questions related to students' welfare. I would like to recount below the process of uncovering such semantic dichotomy between two student organisations that appear to have many similar political references.

While mentioning his outrage at injustices in India as a reason for joining AISA, John, a one-time AISA JNUSU office bearer (2006-07) remembered jokingly that when announcing his decision to formally join the ranks of the organisation (and not the SFI), he was told by his friend-activist Pratap: "John, I am very happy to know that you have a heart." When I first heard the statement, it seemed to me a supercilious one, and I had no doubt all senior activists across different organisations were equally committed to a political cause. I later realised that one of the main claims of AISA politics relied on its emotional sincerity towards the cause of the oppressed; and for that matter the organisation needed to prove that its members could not be mistaken for SFI activists.

Such attempts by the young AISA to differentiate itself from the older SFI is not surprising as the two share at first sight many similar ideological idioms. While inheriting historically and geographically contrasted legacies of CPI(M) and CPI(ML), the two leading campus organisations share indeed obvious common references but also a tremendous distrust for each other.¹²¹ On a daily basis, many slogans are the same and members of rival communist organisations call each other "comrades" in public. In 2016, for the first time in the history of JNU campus politics, SFI, AISA and AISF even campaigned together under the banner of the "United Left" at the last JNUSU elections (9-10 September 2016).¹²² To add to the confusion, both topmost party members claim they follow the "better way" (Divya, interview 2015) or the "most coherent approach on Marxism" (Burdwani, interview 2014), with their approaches often based on facts or anecdotes that remain contested. An interview of Nihar Burdwani, an old-timer of AISA and ideologue of the JNU unit of the organisation, showed that he was always willing to emphasise the unique "DNA" of his organisation (see next page).

¹²¹ I have described in Chapter 3 how different communist outfits came to the point of killing one another; this includes more specifically the repression of various Maoist-led guerrillas (among them CPI(ML) which later founded AISA) by the communist government of West Bengal and its student wing, SFI.

¹²² Several platforms also share common inspirational leaders sharing revolutionary and secular ideals, such as Charu Mazumdar (DSU, AISA), Safdar Hashmi (SFI, DSF), Lenin (AISA, SFI, DSU, AISF), Bolivar and Chavez (DSF, AISA, SFI, AISF), Che Guevara (all except NSUI and ABVP), Bhagat Singh (all), Ambedkar (all) and Dr. Dabholkar. Narendra Dabholkar was a social worker committed to eliminating superstitious practices such as ghost exorcism and black magic before he was murdered by an unknown assailant in August 2013 (AISA pamphlet 2013b, 2013c).

These moments¹²³ bring out the difference between the opportunist left and the radical left, and the evidence becomes much sharper [...] which in normal terms you would not be able to locate. AISA coming up in the 1990s breaks the experiment¹²⁴ in a certain way. The powerful [the government, the administration etc.] did not know what to do with us... We changed the script because nobody could negotiate with us. [...] I understand that you want to put AISA in the democratic tradition of JNU, but it's wrong. In order to analyse AISA you need a new grammar.

It is precisely because so many political actors claim to possess a “grammar” of their own that I turned to their written material in order to identify whether variations in understandings of Marxism resulted in different political formulations in public. Thus, I am turning to textual analysis in order to assess whether organisational pamphlets at JNU inherit the know-how and tradition of their parent party and in which way their discourses differ. For instance, did the underground ideology of CPI(ML) until the 1990s (leading Maoist-type guerrilla actions in Bihar and present-day Jharkhand), which aimed at fuelling a revolutionary struggle led by the rural proletariat (Bhatia 2005; Louis 2002), impact the content of written discourses within campus premises?

6.2.2.2 ...But Different in Practice: SFI's Student-based Welfare vs. AISA's Emotional Warfare

“If you push an AISA comrade into the emotional mode, he will tell you he wants revolution from the bottom of his heart. If you push an SFI member, he will know it is not happening” (Pratap, interview 2015). This quote echoes the words of Nihar and John mentioned earlier in this section, suggesting that AISA adopts a language of emotional commitment against the “hated elites” such as capitalists, industrialists and military apparatuses – described as the oppressors of deprived sections of the Indian population.

The result of the textual analysis is that the lexical characteristics of AISA, which are based on a rhetoric of emotional social conflict are very different from the one of SFI which prefers to stress campus-specific issues (such as scholarship shortages or the lack of student accommodation). As shown in Figure 6-2, the SFI pamphlet discusses the question of agreements – proxying the discussions between the administrative branch and student representatives – more than all the other organisations.¹²⁵ SFI is more keen to focus on student scholarships (including the Rs. 3,000 Merit-cum-Means MCM Scholarship meant for graduate students) than pamphlets signed by JNUSU, who are supposed to be more focused on “on-going” demands.

These results can be linked to the ‘welfarist’ tradition of its parent party (the CPI(M)) who governed Kerala, Tripura and West Bengal for many decades, ensuring pro-poor governmental spending on various welfare programmes, in particular in late-1970s and early-1980s

¹²³ Referring to: “They stood with Nestle, then they stood with Manmohan Singh. Not only did they stand with Manmohan Singh they tried to impeach the JNUSU president for showing a black flag.”

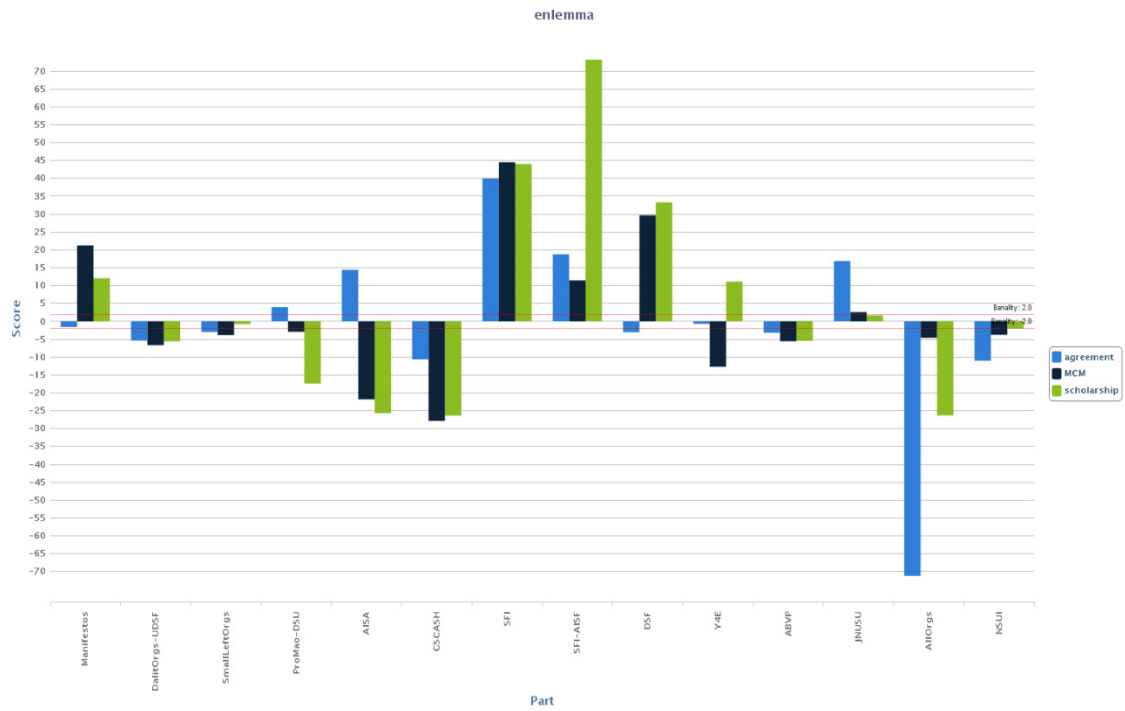
¹²⁴ Nihar was describing earlier in the interview the dominance of SFI at JNU as a control lab experiment.

¹²⁵ In Figure 6-3, positive scores indicate that the lemma is over-represented in the text of a particular organisation, while a negative score indicates under-representation.

(Bhattacharyya 2016:36,124-125). Gowda Kishore, former JNUSU president (1998-99) now loosely in charge of the JNU unit summarises in the vignette below the ambition of the organisation to address concrete struggles. It is therefore not surprising to see that contrary to AISA, the discourse of SFI gives preference to the subject of negotiations with the administration or to the question of scholarships.

“While linking our struggle with national and international issues and peoples’ movements outside campus, there was an urgent need to raise the genuine problems faced by the students in a consistent organised manner and find solutions to them, thereby maintaining a clear balance between campus and other issues. Students’ problems cannot be dismissed as indulging in ‘mere campusism’... as was the refrain of certain organisations [he refers to AISA].”

Figure 6-3. Scores of specificity of words *Agreement*, *MCM* and *Scholarship* per Organisation

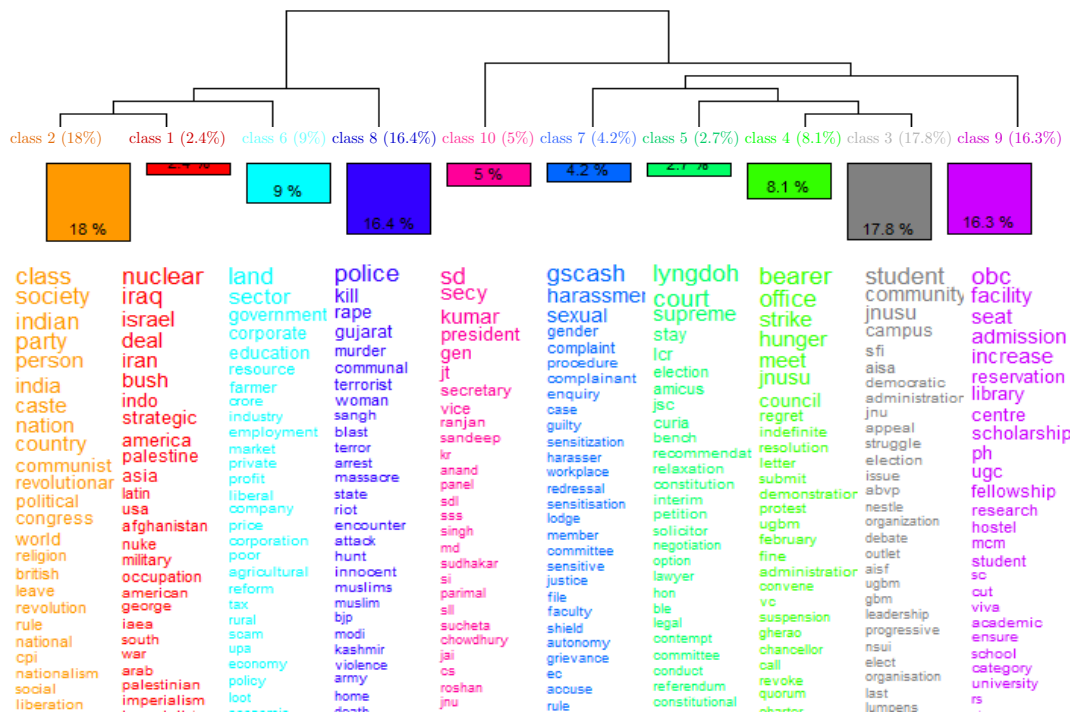


Contrary to the SFI, which is reportedly more interested in having better “technical expertise” to tackle issues (Suneet, interview 2014; John, interview 2015), the textual evidence suggests that AISA is interested in commenting on episodes of violence experienced by India’s marginalised sections. Chapter 4 explained at length how the politics of declassing entails a practice of emotional resonance for the suffering classes and castes (Aden 2013). I affirm here that the expression of emotions attached to the practice of “declassing” is best articulated by AISA. The organisation is thus more likely than others to discuss cases of atrocities against various oppressed groups,

including Dalits under threat of upper caste militias, the landless under feudal landlords, Kashmiri citizens under AFSPA rule, etc.¹²⁶

Now that the ‘welfarist’ approach of SFI has been uncovered, let us turn to the ‘warfarist’ one of AISA. By ‘warfarist’, I mean here the propensity of AISA to describe Indian society from the point of view of the inherent social violence it produces. By examining the ten topics dominating the JNU pamphlet discourse, it appears that reporting on social violence is one of them, as shown in Figure 6-4. The dendrogram below displays the ten classes of words (i.e. topics) most representative of the PaRChA corpus (99.3 percent of the pamphlet segments were classified). Cluster number eight (termed “class 8” in Figure 6-4, displayed in a dark-blue color) includes words such as terror (2,861 occurrences), massacre (2,217), innocent (2,145), victim (3,403), torture (1,328), genocide (1,442), brutal (2,090), fake (1,411), hate (1,333), goon (2,560), rapist (425). The common feature of the words contained in cluster eight is the expression of morbidity. The segments of these texts are about physical violence, including murder, but also rape and torture. The most cited victims are women, Muslims, Kashmiris and all those subsumed by the term innocent (2,154 occurrences). “Class 8” is the lexical expression of the emphasis on social violence.

Figure 6-4. Top-Down Hierarchical Classification of the PaRChA Corpus (Pamphlet Only, 1994-2014)



¹²⁶ The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) is an act of the Parliament inspired from a colonial ordinance that aims at maintaining internal security in so-called “disturbed areas” such as Manipur, Nagaland, Jammu and Kashmir. The discretionary powers given to the army by AFSPA and other anti-terrorism laws, such as the Prevention of Terrorist Activities Act (POTA) and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) (these powers include making preventive arrests, to search premises without warrant and to shoot and kill civilians) has led to numerous cases of human rights violations reported by various international organisations (Baruah 2014).

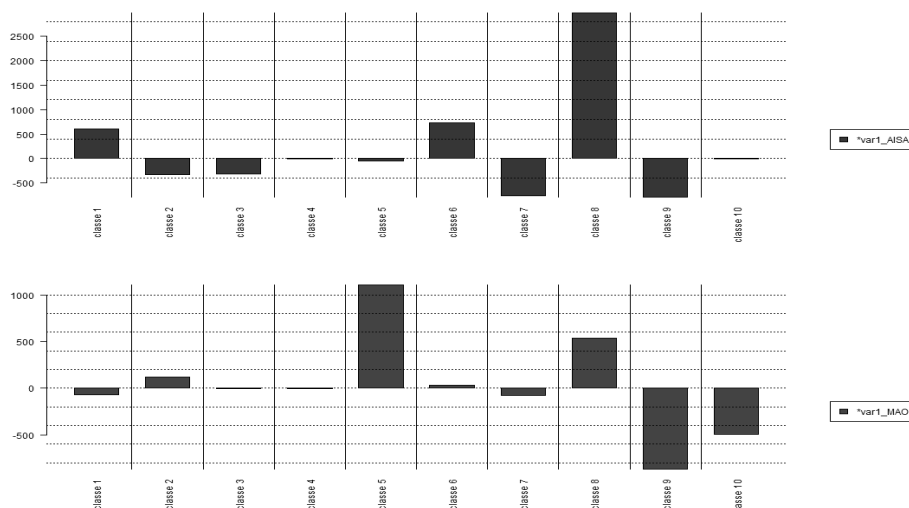
The morbidity expressed in pamphlet discourse is not gratuitous; it is based on a selective covering of news that reports evidence of the ignominy of Indian society. In this sense, it appears that JNU pamphlet discourse, and in particular that of AISA, serves as a critique of the optimist governmental voices on the subject of economic development and caste annihilation.

Several illustrated examples are worth mentioning. Firstly, while India was busy celebrating its golden jubilee in August 1997, an AISA pamphlet was issued to undermine the general celebratory mood, and instead stir a sentiment of grief and pain over the fate of Dalits, workers, artists and activists in independent India (see quote below). Second, the frequent reference to the 1996 case of killing by Hindu militia, the Ranvir Sena, of 21 Dalit labourers in Bathani Tola (in Bhojpur, Bihar), is an excellent example of how political emotions are articulated around the notion of murder. Third, in March 1997, AISA linked the events of Bathani Tola with a similar one in Arrah (Bihar), accusing the “blood-thirsty” Ranvir Sena militia of further killings of Dalits (Krishnan and Fazal 1997, cf. quote below). Fourth, in October 2013, AISA again referred to the Bathani Tola incident to denounce the acquittal by Patna high court of the “butchers of 58 Dalits” in Laxmanpur, 15 years prior to the final verdict (Kumari and Raj 2013).

Can we allow them to talk about democracy after Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar [1996 killing of Dalits in Bombay] and Bathani Tola [1996 killing of Dalits in Bhojpur]? After they have murdered Shankar Guha Niyogi [trade-unionist killed in 1991] and Safdar Hashmi [political playwright killed in 1989] and Chandrashekar [JNUSU president killed in 1997]? Shall we still allow them to ‘celebrate’ the loot, murder, rape and arson going on uninterruptedly for the past 50 years under the aegis of these same people? After displacing millions of people in the name of ‘development’, murdering thousands in the name of religion, shooting down hundreds after declaring them ‘terrorists’, do the rulers of this country have the moral authority or right to ‘celebrate’? After Surat and Bombay and the Delhi of 1984 [anti-Sikh riots] if we allow these criminals to celebrate 50 years of independence in the name of this nation, we shall be damned! (Sharma and Krishnan 1997).

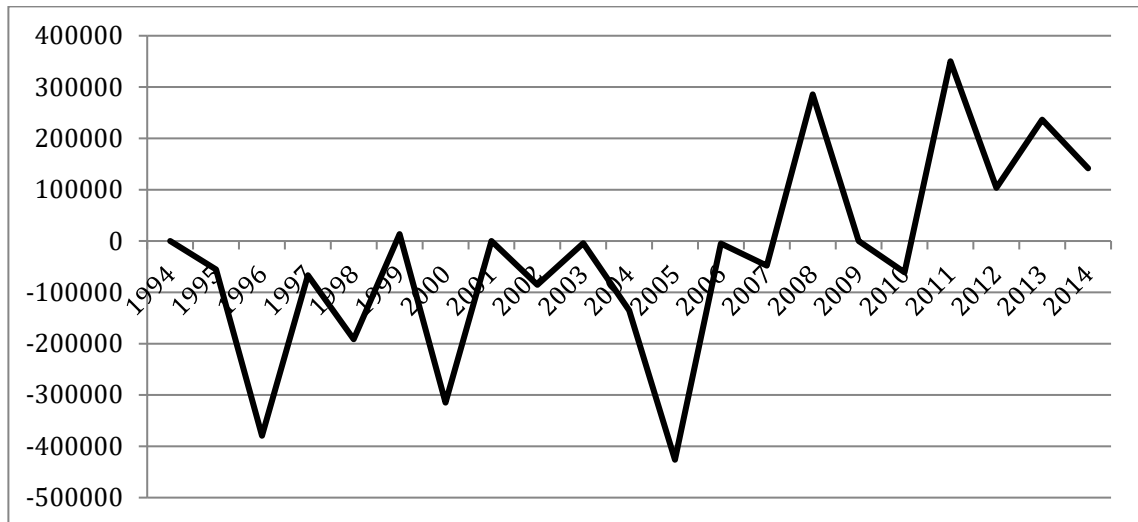
AISA pamphlets are the ones that contribute the most to cluster 8 which, as just mentioned, outlines the emphasis on social violence. In Figure 6-5 we can see that, comparatively speaking, AISA (i.e. *var1_AISA in Figure 6-5) is the organisation relying the most for its pamphlets on this cluster as compared to other clusters. The other organisation also using the vocabulary of cluster 8 is DSU 9 (i.e. *var1_MAO in Figure 6-5), the pro-Naxalite organisation – though to a lesser extent. I claim that this is not a coincidence, since both organisations share a common guerrilla legacy in which state violence serves as a legitimisation for Maoist violence. As in Figure 6-3, positive values indicate over-representation, while negative ones indicate under-representation.

Figure 6-5. Score of Association (χ^2) Between AISA and DSU Pamphlets and the Clusters of the PaRChA Corpus



When looking at the lemmas most representative of the AISA sub-corpus, those reporting on the brutality of Indian society are the most visible. The lemma terror is strongly associated with AISA language (with a score of specificity of 127), but also killer (75), racist (63), genocide (60), massacre (56), crackdown (55), assault (52), kill (47), starvation (40), rape (40), murder (37), scrap (32), hate (30), shoot (28), shame (26), witch-hunt (24), bomb (20), suicide (20), anger (18), martyr (18) and blood (18). It appears here clearly that AISA discourse imports the vocabulary of warfare into civil society. The Marxist understanding of society by AISA results in the primary articulation of pathos. Instead, SFI prefers putting forward its more concrete achievements captured in more professional terms, proxied by lemmas such as increase (64), agreement (50), deal (48), ensure (47), restoration (42), appeal (39), accommodation (28) and seat (19). I would like to also suggest that SFI, which has a closer relationship with the professorial sections of the university, has the tendency to have a more doctrinal understanding of Marxism, with a frequent use of terms such as bourgeois (55) and imperialism (34).

This statistical approach to texts produced at JNU provides additional evidence that the left discourse at JNU is not homogenous, and that even among Marxist organisations lexical differences are significant. Contrary to many media voices which portray the left on campus as an indiscriminate whole, the results show that, in fact, the current dominant left discourse is rather different to what it was in the early 2000s. If we go back to “cluster 8” and see how it evolves in time (Figure 6-6, showing whether words in the cluster are likely to be over-represented in particular years), it is possible to notice that the cluster is more closely linked to the post-2007 period, after which AISA has been dominating JNU campus politics (cf. Chapter 3). This score of association (i.e. chi-squared test χ^2) after 2007 (with 2007 being the first election in which AISA won all posts) indicates that with the coming of a new leading organisation on campus, a new Marxist discourse has emerged, shifting its focus from practical student welfare to more rhetorical emotional revolt.

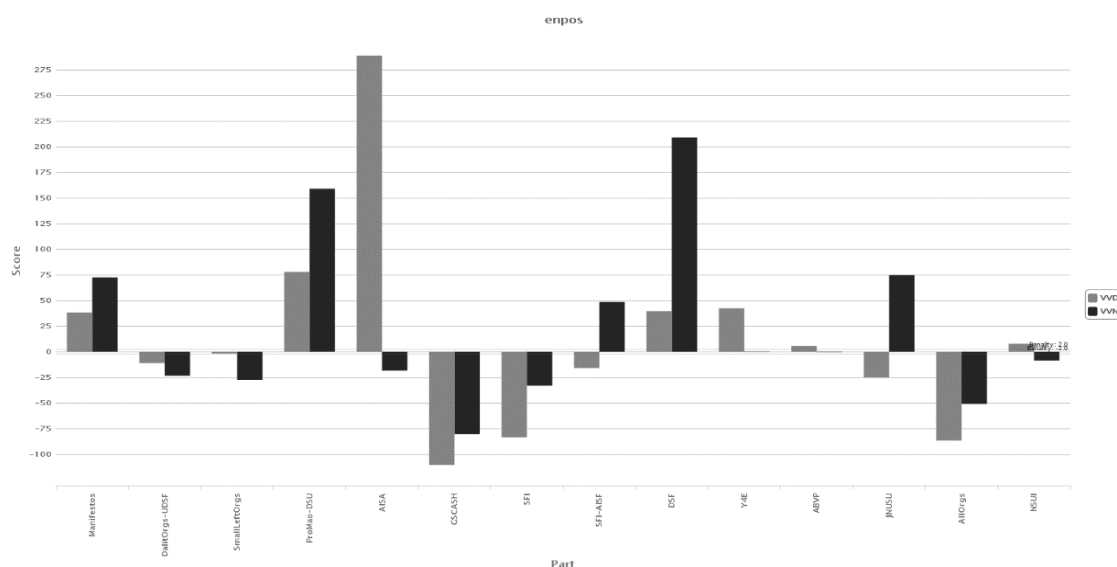
Figure 6-6. Score of Association (χ^2) of “Cluster 8” per Date of Pamphlet

6.2.2.3 SFI's Pragmatic Present vs. AISA's Ideological Past

As just exposed, socialisation at JNU leads to various politicisations and political discourses, even among communist outfits. Another evidence of such a divide is visible when examining the grammatical structure of the pamphlet discourse of AISA and SFI. Because SFI is more prone to engaging with pragmatic concerns, their pamphlets are more likely to be written in present tense. This is not the case for AISA, the organisation on campus which uses the past tense the most, as shown in Figure 6-7. If lexical verbs in the past tense are very much over-represented in the AISA sub-corpus as compared with that of the SFI, it is because of the accusative tone preferred by AISA activists. A typical AISA sentence involves a critique of past actions of central governments, CPI(M), industrialists and *zamindars*, thus more prone to recollect facts in the past tense.

The literature on textual analysis has shown the strong link between political content and the prevalent use of specific grammatical forms. Mayaffre (2012), for instance, in his study of discourses of French presidents has shown how with the passing of years, French presidents increased the proportion of present tense in their discourses, a move that compensated the rarefaction of the use of nouns. “Our politicians are not any longer descriptive, conceptual, theoreticians and ideologues; they became practical and pragmatic” acknowledges Mayaffre (2012:43). The excessive use of the present tense is associated with pragmatic performativity and a certain reluctance to engage directly with ideological issues. Through looking at the way AISA uses tenses at JNU, it appears that the organisation has resisted the “pragmatic turn” affecting political discourse in liberal societies.

Figure 6-7. Use of Lexical Verbs, Past Tense (VVD) and Past Participle (VVN) in the PaRChA Corpus



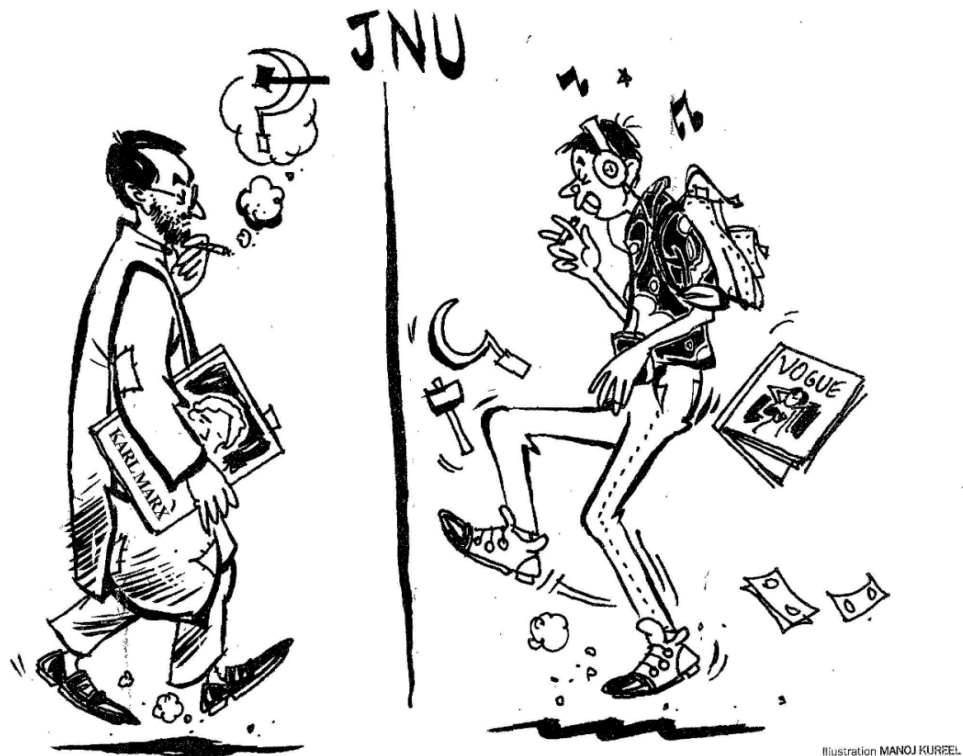
The high level of ideological leanings of AISA might not be the only explanation for such frequent use of the past tense. I suggest that AISA's inclination towards indictment rhetoric and anti-establishment critique (in particular against CPI(M) as former ruler in West Bengal) led the organisation to use the past tense to recount the "appalling" account of parties in office. The idiosyncratic sentences in AISA rhetoric are full of aggressive sermonising against those who hold office. A good example of this can be found in the reference below cited in an AISA pamphlet. This is an often-mentioned harangue, pronounced for the first time by AISA JNU student activist Chandrashekhar in a speech not long before his death in 1997 – in which he warns students about their long-standing passivity despite the harsh circumstances faced by India's weaker sections. This sentence pronounced by former JNUSU president is recorded in the movie *Ek minute ka maun* and is quoted in numerous other AISA pamphlets:

Our coming generations will ask us for an answer, they will ask us, *where were you* when new social forces were being unleashed, *where were you* when people who lived and died every moment, every day strived for their rights, *where were you* when there was an assertion of the marginal voices of the society. They will seek an answer from all of us [emphasis mine] (AISA pamphlet 2014b).

It appears that this call for action of AISA requires a "dark picture" of Indian society, in which enumerated in the past tense are many of the atrocities endured by the wretched of the Indian earth. To summarise this de facto role specialisation within the communist family, I report on the next page (Image 6-1) a cartoon of Manoj Kureel, published in the *Times of India* (1 November 1998). The left character is supposed to represent the "old-fashioned" communist activist at JNU who keeps on reflecting about wider issues while the one on the right, the "new communist," focusses on the wealth of students linked with campus-centric issues. Though clearly exaggerated (wrongly indicating that new leaders from SFI and AISA are somewhat publicly consumerist), the

cartoon is an interesting stylised representation of the existence of a divide between the romantic ‘warfare Marxist’ and the pragmatic ‘welfare Marxist’.

Image 6-1. Cartoon, “Not much left of the Left”



The romanticism associated with firebrand leftist politics has evaporated. Campus problems — more hostel rooms, better transport facilities and the availability of water — today take centrestage in any form of activism.

6.3 Conclusion

In my year and a half of fieldwork in Jawaharlal Nehru University, I was able to retrieve a large number of pamphlets from personal holdings. They were mostly kept in mediocre condition and their integrity was jeopardised. However, digitisation was not only an essential step towards durable preservation, it offered the possibility of showing how different political socialisations led to the adoption of very different ideological frameworks. Of course, political pamphlets can be seen as a specific form of speech authored by a small number of individuals, characterised by defined codes and stylistic prerequisites – e.g. the use of indignation and an accusative tone in the search for political truth. However, pamphleteering can also be seen as a component of activism as a social practice as we have seen in section one. Through pamphlet distribution, affiliated students politicise their own generation, communicate an ideological interpretation of society, and introduce new concerns – such as gender equality or inclusive caste representation – to the broader community of students.

This chapter has given emphasis to pamphleteering as an activity enabling constant contact between activists and common students, therefore fuelling political socialisation on campus. It has also shown the consequences of political socialisation on the forging of political opinions. The chapter confirms that even seemingly similar organisations in terms of ideology, such as two Indian communist organisations, develop significantly different subjectivities on campus. The textual analysis of JNU pamphlets is not only useful to understand better the anti-establishment culture of this university, it helps to make sense of some of the various language identities of leftist and nationalist parties in India as a whole. I am aware that the diversity of political identities is only imperfectly reflected by political pamphlets and their lexical worlds, which are produced by a small number of individuals. However, pamphlet discourses offer a window into the different ideologies internalised to some extent by affiliated activists.

Although both AISA and SFI organisations are Marxist, the way they operationalise Marxist credos in pamphlet discourses is very different. Because of their emphasis on the denouncing of social violence and the complicity of the established elite, AISA developed a ‘warlike discourse’ with a special appeal for morbid idioms such as murder and rape. AISA relentlessly emphasised what it believes is the true nature of Indian society, exposed to decadence, immorality and the violence of modern capitalism. Given the ruthlessness of Indian elites, society never appears in their discourse as an appeased collective; it is described appositely as a brutal and merciless battleground. In a sense, AISA’s leitmotif reverses the Clausewitzian idiom; it is no longer “war as politics by other means,” but “politics as war by other means.” This emotional emphasis can be traced to the Naxalite past of the organisation and its desire to embody the suffering of the most deprived sections of the Indian population. By diverting its interest from concrete and pragmatic issues defended by SFI, I argue that AISA has substituted a ‘Marxism of reason’ with a ‘Marxism of heart’.

Such analysis of the rhetorical and ideological outcomes of political socialisation at JNU triggers two related questions. Firstly, from this account it is difficult to assess the exact importance of student organisations on campus, in particular smaller ones which produce fewer pamphlets than established ones such as SFI, AISA, AISF, ABVP, DSF, NSUI and DSU. Second, little is known about the role of student elections in the process of political socialisation. The next chapter will try to show the importance of the electoral game, which can be understood as a culturally informed festival providing emotional retributions to its participants. In this context, the chapter will show the importance of student organisations – both those contesting elections and those that do not – in framing the “political festival,” securing networks of political loyalties and favouring the emergence of new political agendas.

7 The Political Festival: The Cultural and Electoral Role of Student Organisations in Campus Politicisation

This chapter examines the extent to which political activists are more important than the student organisations they are representing, and how such organisations contribute to the JNU electoral culture – which in turn creates a conducive environment for campus political socialisation. I uncover the voting pattern of JNU students in various campus elections and how such elections are actually experienced by students as playful festivals. I conclude by outlining the centrality of political organisations and groups in representative campus politics, irrespective of whether they are willing to contest elections or not. The aim of this chapter is to consider the final goal of political socialisation at JNU, which is to create the conditions for political commitment, agenda-setting and organisational allegiance.

The analysis is based on participant observation of three student elections between 2014 and 2015, and on the data collected by *tallymen*,¹²⁷ appointed as counting agents by political organisations at the time of the election of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU), as well as the election of student representatives for the Gender Sensitisation Committee Against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH). I then compiled available data, covering the period 2012-2015 and the year 2004. As I will explain in detail, the results show a significant, but not absolute level of loyalty to political organisations. After giving empirical attention in previous chapters to the continuous familiarisation of individual students with various campus organisations, I now scrutinise a specific political outcome of such processes, namely the pervasiveness of organised groups in shaping electoral support at JNU. I include in these groups non-communist outfits such as the ABVP, but also two non-electoral collectives, a queer group (*Dhanak*, the Rainbow) and a Dalit group (the United Dalit Students' Forum, henceforth UDSF).

The chapter is divided into three parts. In the first section, I introduce the electoral culture of JNU, in which the festive and carnival-like atmosphere surrounding student elections exalts the democratic and partisan culture of the campus. I suggest, in line with the literature focusing on the emotional rewards of political participation (Banfield 1968; Woods 2009; Traïni 2009) that political socialisation is associated with the pleasure of participating in the student election process – in which public counting and results are an opportunity for party-like behaviours. By looking beyond this celebratory ambiance, I subsequently measure the organisational influence in JNU elections.

¹²⁷ In this case, a *tally* is an unofficial observation of an election count carried out by representatives of political organisations. Tallymen observe the opening of ballot boxes and count the set of votes on individual ballot papers. They record the vote of each voter on “tally sheets” which are then assembled together to inform the organisation about the voting patterns of the electorate.

My main ambition in section two is to show that student support for organised politics is strong at JNU, and is more visible when looking at votes for university-level representatives rather than for their school (i.e. cluster of departments). This shows how student organisations are central to the politics of campus. As students vote for campus-level student representatives, they give preference to consideration of political stands made by student organisations rather than favouring personal friendships with classmates and peers from similar regional backgrounds. However, I also claim, in line with other chapters, that political preferences are shaped by campus-based networks of friendships and acquaintances, embedded in a particular electoral culture and fostered by a series of political organisers.

In the third section, through taking the example of Dhanak and UDSF pressure groups, I examine alternative cases of politicisation that do not follow ‘electoral tracks’ and which prove useful in impacting the agenda-setting of more ‘mainstream’ leftist groups. Such accounts confirm that political socialisation pervades campus life because it is not limited to the once-a-year “election fever”¹²⁸ surrounding students’ union polls.

7.1 Polls or Festival? JNU Elections as Cultural Artefacts

Campus politics occupies a modest space in Indian democracy for two reasons. Understandably, student elections are local in scale, contrary to state and general elections.¹²⁹ Additionally, elected student councils have overall limited decision-making responsibilities. Yet, elections at JNU do not only seem a tool for selecting political candidates and cadres; they are a process, though organised by a small set of players, in which a broad-based *carnival* democratic culture is in display. Through understanding how campus elections appear for students as a culturally-loaded celebration, it is possible to understand how participation and interest for politics becomes with time a pivotal aspect of being a “JNUite,” thus facilitating the political socialisation process.

As argued by Spencer (2007), some political scientists tend to apprehend elections as a statistical phenomenon, looking in a teleological manner (that is in the light of final results) at who won, who lost, and by how much. This approach fails to understand interactions between individuals and political structures – what Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya, taking the case of West Bengal, calls

¹²⁸ This is one of the most favoured expressions of the Indian media when reporting on JNU elections. I found no less than 23 expressions using the term “election fever,” “poll fever” or “fever pitch” between 1977 and 2006. E.g. *Hindustan Times*, 4 October 2004, “Fever pitch on JNU poll day” or *Indian Express*, 11 October 2005, “Caught in poll fever, JNU students blame each other.”

¹²⁹ The 2014 Lok Sabha elections mobilised a cohort of voters larger than the entire European population, while the Jawaharlal Nehru Students’ Union (JNUSU) election gathered 4640 voters. Moreover, only a few of India’s 711 universities actually organize elections on their premises (UGC annual report 2015). The 2006 Lyngdoh recommendations, which provided guidelines for the conduct of elections in universities, extensively considered campus elections as a source of malfunction in law and order, involving violence and the participation of outsiders involved in party politics. Most elections in university campuses are limited to mere nomination or class representation. In 2006, out of 229 universities surveyed, only 41 followed a direct election system (Lyngdoh 2006). Most major educational institutions of the country do not organise elections at all, including the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology, major state universities (Madras, Bombay, Patna, Osmania etc.) and leading universities such as Presidency University and Banaras Hindu University.

Party-Society (2009, 2011) – and how these participate in the creation of a particular political culture. Therefore, this chapter does not aim to discuss the various batches of elected representatives at JNU. It is enough to say that several leftist outfits, mainly the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), dominated campus politics in turns through their respective student organisations: SFI from the mid-1970s and AISA in the last decade (see Chapter 3).

Customarily, student elections happen twice a year at JNU, in September for designating representatives at the school and university level, and in April for the selection of student representatives of the Gender Sensitisation Committee Against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH) – which, as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, is in charge of enquiring and redressing cases of gender-based harassment on campus. Periods of campaigning see a dramatic intensification of political events organised on campus. From the crack of dawn until deep into the night, activists organise, monitor and participate in countless political activities initiated by their student organisation. The repertoire of contention (Tarrow 2006) includes a plethora of activities.¹³⁰ Let us now describe the two festival-like moments of the electoral process: the presidential debate and the counting process. Through presenting the case of ABVP participation in this process, the section illustrates how politically integrative these two events are.

7.1.1 The “Tribunician” Body on Stage: Presidential Debate as Oratory Performance

As Mukulika Banerjee (2015) noted in her ethnography of the 2009 General Election, one of the important aspects of campaigning in India is to be seen and to address speeches. At JNU, as elsewhere, the activist performs in public and exercises his or her “political tongue” (Bourdieu 1986 [1979]:461) in order to mobilise the students in General Body Meetings (GBMs), campaign meetings, and at a lower scale, group discussions. The “body public”¹³¹ of the activist can be described as *tribunician* – in the roman sense, a *tribune* is an elected representative for common people, assuming the role of an oppositional figure in a given political system, without however

¹³⁰ These include protests in Jantar Mantar (the official place for demonstrations in Delhi) with the police sometimes arresting protestors; protest marches (*juloos*) on campus; torch-light marches; effigy-burning of personalities; sit-ins (*dharnas*, *dera dalos*); public events; meetings in the school cafés; human chains; presentation of fact-finding expeditions; welcoming of political guests; pamphleteering on mess tables at breakfast, lunch and dinner time; campaigning in front of school entrances; meeting for planning strikes and reading groups; General Body Meetings (GBMs – school wise voting on a specific agenda and preceded by discussions); UGBMs (same process but at the university-level); cultural events; film screenings; street plays; memorial lectures; political workshops; room, class and mess campaigns; signature campaigns; *chanda* campaigns (money contribution); one-on-one discussions; personal phone calls to solicit voting; reading groups; and more recently campaigns through Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, etc. Even hunger strikes around different issues, planned ahead of elections, are held to show the dedicated nature of future candidates.

¹³¹ In the context of JNU, I define a “body public” as a body appearing at the centre of campus debates and which is subject to public critique. On the contrary, I suggest that an affiliated activist also has a “body organisation,” which is devoted to political organisation, and remains hidden as much as possible, keeping undisclosed a potential affiliation with a political party (while membership to a student organisation is publicised). This body is secretive and hierarchy prone.

having direct control over law-making. The author who first drew a comparison between the communist party and the figure of the tribune was Georges Lavau (1975, 1981) and similar comparison can be easily extended to student communism at JNU, as their activists exert influence over the administration but have no ability to exert decision-making over the functioning of the university. As a former president of the Students' Union (2013-4) put it, "what we have is a representative post, not a power post" (Rafi, interview 2014). Tausiq, another former student elected as general secretary (2012-3), rather disillusioned, said something similar, "JNUSU has no executive power, it is a body of representation with lobbyist attributes, the one to negotiate with administration."

Captions of senior JNU activists engaging in public activities (see Image 4-1 p.90) demonstrate how comfortable they are in being centre stage and addressing various audiences. The activists learn specific sloganeering and the appropriate time at which they should perform. The activists' oratory ability is assessed when he or she performs in diverse settings, appealing to a specific network of sympathisers, deciding whether to address a speech in English or Hindi, finding a rhetorical pirouette to avoid uncomfortable questions, and knowing how to keep a cool temper after being insulted by rival organisations. The "body public" of the activist appears to be a performing one, in two senses: Firstly, in a theatrical way, the activist has to be recognised as an activist, a 'real one', which involves giving speeches, sometimes on stage (see Image 7-2) but also includes wearing a specific outfit, comprising an unshaved beard for men, an unwashed and old drab coloured *Kurta* (loose collarless shirt), *chappals* (flip-flops) even in winter, *gamchha* (thin cotton towel to protect from the sun) in summer, and a *jhola* (jute satchel) (cf. Chapter 4). The institutional character of the performance is particularly visible when looking at the oath ceremony organised after JNUSU elections (see Image 7-1). On this occasion, in which new office bearers swear allegiance to the JNUSU constitution, a crowd of activists and sympathisers chant and throw celebratory slogans while elected members belonging to their organisation read their oath.

Image 7-1. JNUSU Office Bearers Oath Ceremony 2014

I _____, do swear/solemnly affirm that I will bear full faith and allegiance to the JNUSU constitution, that I will uphold the mandate, that I will faithfully discharge my duties and responsibilities upon which I am about to enter and that I will do right to all manner of students in accordance to the principle of natural justice without fear or ill-will. I resolve to protect and preserve the democratic cultural ethos of this university and function in the best interest of the student community, standing by and for them throughout my tenure.



Photo Credit: Author

Image 7-2. Presidential Debate 2014-15

Photo Credit: K. Parkar

7.1.2 On Counting Day: Sweat, *Naras* (slogans) and Booze

Author's fieldnotes

“As a first-year student, it is difficult to mould completely into the JNU ethos. Who you hang around with defines your political affiliation I suppose.” Shin, a newly registered student in Japanese studies was witnessing her first electoral night in the campus of New Delhi. Organisations from different political backgrounds were dancing – five out of seven main ones being part of the Marxist-Leninist ideological umbrella – drumming, chanting and shouting slogans in favour of their much-supported candidate, and affiliated individuals were siding in different corners of the lawn while the Election Committee (all formed by voluntary students) was announcing intermediary results every hundred odd votes counted. Coming from an activist tent, where a student organisation had installed mats, blankets and mattresses in order to camp for the night, an activist’s friend was coming to us with voice hoarse from sloganeering; “the election in JNU is like a party where *naras* [slogans] replace songs.” (Fieldnotes, 2015).

Counting day (or more precisely, counting night), after which electoral results are reported by the JNU Electoral Commission, is the climax of the “electoral fever” mainly because it follows a very intense political campaign. During such campaigns, JNUSU contestants have to sweat it out, repeat the same political slogans over a very long period of time and convince professors to let them speak two minutes to students in on-going classes. A senior activist told me once, “only pregnant women know the pain of giving birth; the same occurs with campaigning activists” (Rafi, interview 2014). Consequently, as I observed, common students were exchanging with political messages more than usual, which were reaching them at any time of the day or night.

During that time, professors invited by student organisations used to intensify their tackling of burning issues until late in the night and politicised talks over *chai* were more frequently seen

around night stalls until two or three in the morning. As a senior activist said, “there is no pause in the political game” (Divya, interview 2014), but during campaigning time this was particularly obvious. As a result, campaigning put activists under constant pressure, since they needed to reach out all day long until exhaustion. Mishra, an SFI candidate, admitted to me one evening how time-consuming such campaigning activities were: “I cannot wait for the election to finish, then I can write my paper. Nowhere in India activists are more dedicated than in JNU... [4 months later] I am a very burned out man, I am waiting for the march of the 26th and then I will take rest for a while.”¹³²

In particular during the time of campaigns, representatives could be seen on an everyday basis in campus premises, organising political meetings, protests and cultural events with ideological undertones.¹³³ The following is an excerpt of an interview with John (see vignette below), a former vice-president (2006-7) from AISA that shows the multi-tasking and the amount of efforts involved in campus campaigning.

On any given day, I'm doing everything from helping people with their registration to helping them with hostel problems to dealing with – to writing posters or giving speeches on the war in Iraq, or the World Trade Organisation. Oh, my goodness. People live and breathe it here, truly. The student politicians here... student activists literally sleep about five, six hours every night and spend the rest of every day just doing politics and nothing else. (John, interview 2015)

At election time, speeches are addressed in messes for breakfast, in classes in the morning, in messes for lunch, at General Body Meetings (GBM) at midday, at political events in the afternoon, and among songs and slogans on the way to the next public performance and on the way from it.¹³⁴ It appears that the learning process of political repertoires is quintessentially social. On one campaigning day, puzzled, I asked a new Muslim student how he could recite such a long Malayali song. “I learned that during my MA days in Trivandrum... By hearing you learn, the juniors learn from seniors” (Aryadan, interview 2015). Indeed, slogans played a crucial role in the conduct of campaigning activities. For example, the following (Figure 7-1) is a translation of one verse of a song in Bhojpuri – a Hindi dialect of North India¹³⁵ – AISA activists used to perform regularly.

¹³² Before the polling AISA will make sure they approach each individual “at least two times” in their hostel room with teams of two to three “foot soldiers” (Chiran, interview 2015).

¹³³ They are incredibly in demand and hardworking, getting solicitations from students including at night time, engaging with the administration and professors on a range of issues. So-called “active” affiliated students go around the campus, paste posters and distribute leaflets, explain their political views and one of their parties to individuals and groups, do public speeches, ask for votes at the student elections, invite professors and personalities to address talks at night on current issues.

¹³⁴ Later pamphleteering resumes, and the activist-candidate monitors the performing of a street play in the evening. From the campaign room the activist makes his or her way to her hostel room later in the night and takes brief coaching advice from seniors.

¹³⁵ Bhojpuri is mainly spoken in the eastern end of Uttar Pradesh (Purvanchal region), in the western part of Bihar state, and in the northwestern areas of Jharkhand.

Figure 7-1. Bhojpuri Song Interpreted by AISA Activists on GSCASH Counting Day 2015
(photo by author)

The rich have access to all resources. They drink Pepsi-cola whereas the poor don't even have access to clean drinking water... and are left with drinking their tears.

The new education policy is designated in such a way that the ministers can send their children to good schools, but the poor in order to subsist send their children to shepherd cattle and work in the field.



Photo Credit: Author

Overall, campaigning activists are dutifully cheerful and seemingly perennial, relating to hundreds of students and sharing a sense of camaraderie and togetherness. Sharing food is one of those revealing elements of the affinity between the candidate and the common student, which will help the candidate to secure his or her vote. In 2014, Rafi, then president of JNUSU would come down to the *canteen* (cafeteria) of his school in a hurry and put his hand on the shoulder of a sitting student. He would plunge his hand in the hot *aloo paratha* (potato flatbread) the student was eating, carving out a chunk before putting it to his mouth. The discussion would be brief, lasting a couple of seconds, and he would leave as abruptly as he arrived.

The night-long counting process of the student-led Electoral Commission gives space for contestants and cadres to echo partisan radical slogans, spreading in chorus the clamour of *Laal Salam* (Red Salute) and *Inquilab Zindabad* (Revolution will Win) in every corner of the campus. A couple of weeks before that, student organisations would have made sure to cover various walls of the campus with vermilion portraits (see Image 7-3 next page for an example) of heroes of the

left (and some right), including Irom Sharmila,¹³⁶ chained factory workers, or Hugo Chavez who in 2005 gave a speech at JNU to a packed audience.

Image 7-3. SFI Poster Portraying Marx, Engels and Lenin, School of Social Sciences (III) Building



Photo Credit: Author

From this account, it appears that the day of the election is the moment where the JNU community imagines itself to be a united group, celebrating its democratic ethos. As a culturally shared event, the election of JNUSU can be seen as a festival in which the JNU community reifies its group-identity (Durkheim 1912, Turner 1982, Rao 2001). The latter is self-conscious, argumentative and politically oriented but also experienced collectively at a more subjective level when participating in events such as counting day.¹³⁷ JNU polling can be therefore seen as a cultural practice that fosters feelings of belonging to the JNU community.¹³⁸

Beyond identity-based features, JNU elections also share *carnival* features as they abolish the distinction between the ideological activists and non-affiliated common students. On that specific night only (with the exception of Holi celebrations) many student leaders can be seen in a state

¹³⁶ Irom Chanu Sharmila (1972-) is a civil rights activist from Manipur, a state of North-east India. She is known to have conducted 16 years of fasting between 2000 and 2016, protesting human rights abuses resulting from the application of a security law, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in her state (Bhattacharyya 2016). In the 2017 Legislative Assembly elections in Manipur, Sharmila garnered less than 100 votes (*Indian Express*, 11 March 2017).

¹³⁷ In Bourdieu's words, this unselfconscious level of identity exists as *doxa* and serves as a naturalised process of social reproduction of the community (Bourdieu 1977 [1972]:169; Guneratne 2002). Celebrating elections is accepted as part of the given order of JNU life and serves as an actor-oriented (Hughes-Freeland and Crain 1998) vector of differentiation, understood as an experience that singles out participants and makes them significantly different from others (Bell 1992, Shneiderman 2015).

¹³⁸ In *Myth and Meaning* ([2013], 1978) Levi-Strauss admits that "in order for a culture to be really itself and to produce something, the culture and its members must be convinced of their originality and even, to some extent, of their superiority over the others."

of inebriation, putting aside for a couple of hours their responsibility as protector of the student community. This lasts until morning and then activists will start being worried again about their respectability on campus, and those who drink *daru* (alcohol) will do so in the secretive space of a locked hostel room. The levelling effect of this carnival (Bakhtin 1986, Banerjee 2015) can also be seen in terms of sloganeering. The distance between activists and other students is temporarily obliterated as groups of students shout festive and ironic slogans that mimic traditional sayings but subvert their meaning. Traditional *naras* are derided and activists are mocked publicly. Laughter is here to deride for one night the seriousness of leftist ideology and its promoters. The content of the jokes shouted is not anecdotal, for they reveal how rooted the political culture is at JNU. The jokes – and for instance the one displayed below in Figure 7-2 – do not point primarily at a sexual or religious imaginary; they concentrate on the political folklore of the campus and those who represent it.

Figure 7-2. Political Slogan

Original slogan

Jab laal laal lehrayega, tab hosh thikaane aayega
(When the red flag flutters, you will come to your senses!)

Parodic version

Jab laal laal lehrayega, tab saand peechhe aayega
(When the red flag flutters, the bull will come running after you!)

7.1.3 ABVP Politics Dissolved into the ‘Socialist’ JNU Festival

This electoral carnival reveals the pervasiveness of a campus ‘legitimate culture’ (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]:23) in which terms of political debates are categorised around ideas like social redistribution and liberal values. Evidence of this is found when looking at the organisation that is seemingly at the fringes of the ‘leftist ethos’ of JNU: ABVP.

As explored in Chapter 6, ABVP’s discourse is based on a Hindu-centric nationalism and aims at ‘eradicating’ the communist influence on university campuses (Jaffrelet 2007:18). However, interviews with several right-wing student activists brought to the fore striking similarities with several left-leaning political arguments. It is was possible to assume from their account a certain standardisation of acceptable views on topics like women’s and queer rights, socialism, rights of marginalised castes and democratic deliberation, across organisations on the left and right of the political spectrum: “Off the record, I am Marxist; like Ram, my concern is how to feed people... promote equality” (Birendra, JNU student and former DU treasurer of ABVP, interview 2015).

In many respects it appeared that, to a certain extent, the campus instilled values among ABVP members that conflicted with some of their own organisational leadership outside of campus. One ABVP JNUSU presidential candidate admitted to me his socialist leanings: “Here ABVP is socialist in character, I cannot deny it. We want freedom for girls, reservation for deprived based on economic grounds, more democratic rights... Not like those communists who prevented ABVP to talk in the last Anti-Modi march” (Hrishabh, interview 2014). Another PhD student and ABVP

activist, very active in the years 2007-08, openly criticised caste humiliation perpetrated by Brahmins: “ABVP embraces the liberal values against caste oppression. At the time of my grandfather Dalits were not allowed in the house [...]. My father let them in but then they have to sit on the floor. When dad was not in the house I allowed Dalits to sit on the bed [...]. I am fighting inside the party to make insulting behaviour stop” (Bharat, interview 2014).

This reluctance to support religious and caste violence persistent in my interviews with ABVP activists. Bharat, who was seen with other ABVP activists throwing stones at a Dalit JNUSU candidate back in 2007 (Singh 2007b, 2007c), was now (2014) claiming to me that he was fighting within RSS to stop insults against Dalits and Muslims. Commenting on a then fresh anti-Muslim incident – a Shiv Sena Member of Parliament,¹³⁹ complaining about the food he was served, had force-fed a *chapati* (unleavened flatbread) into the mouth of a Muslim caterer fasting during Ramadan – he replied, “this is just unacceptable, I will not let these things happen.” Some ABVP activists like Saharsi, former candidate in a Delhi University student election (and also accidentally, my roommate for several months at JNU) gave examples of the difficulty of reconciling RSS ideology with the values internalised on campus. For instance, one day, while commenting on the series of forced conversions (labelled *Ghar Wapsi*, “home coming”) of Muslims carried out by a Hindu group in Agra, the *Dharam Jagaran Samiti* (Religious Awakening Committee), Bhaskar expressed to me his deep unease:

Ghar Wapsi... they are some VHP [Vishva Hindu Parishad, another right-wing Hindu nationalist organisation] people who do that, I don't like it. They are also some fringe elements, Sakshi Maharaj [i.e. a notoriously controversial MP] in BJP for example. But I think India is the most inclusive country. That does not mean that government is patronising reconversions. The government is actually concerned, look this year [there was] no violence on Valentine's Day... Of course I oppose government's forceful conversion. If Muslims were doing that, then some Hindu would be converted forcefully. So far I have not found RSS guilty or even involved... but somehow yes they support that actually. I think there should be a genuine [i.e. different] voice from RSS. ABVP should not follow blindly what RSS says. It is very difficult to defend Ghar Wapsi, but because of RSS some feel obliged to defend that in public.

It would be wrong to consider right-wing ABVP activists and sympathisers as excluded from the JNU electoral festival. Sandeep Mahapatra, the only JNUSU president elected from the ABVP platform, acknowledges that his years in the university were life-changing, as JNU is “different from other places/institutions where one can personally experience the openness of ideas, where everyone is embraced by the all engulfing JNU culture” (Mahapatra 2009). Another alumnus and former anti-left activist admits that “once out of the campus one has a tendency to defend Marxism and on this count one is as emphatic as any other comrade” (Singh 2008e).

There are evident tensions between the official line of the organisation and the personal convictions of some of its members, such as Pradeep Narwal and two other ABVP office bearers, who in February 2016 decided to resign from their posts. In a pamphlet they denounce the “hooligan”

¹³⁹ The Shiv Sena is a Mumbai–Maharashtra–centred Hindu party based on a nativist pro-Marathi ideology.

behaviour of the government and, most importantly, the opposition to protests against the academic authorities that led Rohit Vemula, a Dalit activist from Hyderabad, to commit suicide in January 2016. The pamphlet concludes by stating two traditionally opposed slogans, one of the ABVP *Vande Mataram*¹⁴⁰ (Mother, I bow to thee) and the second of Ambedkarites, *Jai Bhim* (Victory to Bhim, the nickname of Dalit leader Bhimrao Ambedkar) (Narwal, Yadav and Hans 2016).

7.2 Partisanship in JNU Electoral Culture: The Organisational Vote

In this section the focus shifts from the cultural components of campus elections to the electoral behaviour of its voters. Student elections are, as just examined, an unmissable event in the academic year at JNU. However, doubts persist about the extent to which student groups are central in the electoral process. The underlying question is whether JNU elections are just an aggregate of votes motivated by personal, departmental, caste or regional kinships or rather the intangible sign of allegiances being crystallised on the basis of party identification. As explained in this section, the fact that a significant section of students practice a variant of straight-party voting, that is the practice of voting for every candidate that a political organisation has on the ballot (Campbell and Byrne 2009; Plescia 2016) is an indication that parties – and in our case student organisations – matter more than the personality of individual candidates. I consider this additional evidence of the importance of activists’ influence in the process of political socialisation at JNU. Results, based on the presentation of vote combinations, indicate that a significant section of students – though not all – do vote for all the candidates of a single organisation, thus showing that political behaviours are often intimately linked to the activity of campus-based student organisations. I suggest that at JNU, the sets of individual contacts maintained by student leaders (irrespective of whether they actually contest the student poll or not) do translate at the time of elections into broader networks of loyalties to student organisations.

7.2.1 Party Identification and Organisational Vote

While the spirit of elections is captured by the carnival atmosphere in which they are conducted, the dynamics of political partisanship and participation in the election culture of JNU can be understood through measuring the ‘organisational vote’, which I define as being the expression of a strong preference for a single political organisation. Organisational votes are very common at JNU, representing in some cases more than half the votes cast. An ‘organisational vote’ can be

¹⁴⁰ If the freedom movement was inspired by the idea of spiritual nationalism, fertilised by *Vande Mataram*, a poem written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1882, it rapidly became a hymn to the motherland, but because it referred to Hindu goddess Durga, it was rejected by the Muslim League who labelled it as “idolatrous.” For the secular left, *Vande Mataram* became after independence a synonym of Hindu fanaticism (Jaffrelot 2007).

identified through the voting for every student-candidate representing a student organisation in a specific election. In this sense, the organisational vote bears resemblance to the “straight-party vote” in which voters cast votes to candidates of the same party on an election ballot (Campbell and Byrne 2009). There are two differences however. The first is that the straight-party vote usually applies to different elections organised on the same day (e.g. in the case of American elections: for the president, senator, representative, governor, etc.). The organisational vote applies to a single election containing several individual races (i.e. to various posts such as JNUSU president or JNUSU general secretary). When a voter gives all his or her votes to candidates of the same student organisations, activists call this voting pattern a panel vote. The second difference in the straight-party vote is that the organisational vote also includes another form of electoral behaviour called the “freeze vote,” in which voters are asked by an organisation not to cast a vote when they are not filling a candidate for that specific post. “If not me, nobody” is the logic of the freeze vote which I consider an integral part of the organisational vote. A panel vote or a freeze vote is thus an indicator of organisational voting.

Organisational votes at JNU express the unconditional support of the voter for a specific student organisation. There are multiple players that are actively engaged in this electoral process, and among them are cadres, activists, political leaders, ideologues and even professors. The subsequent analysis suggests that student organisations structure the political culture through methods of capturing a monopoly of representation on campus. Through an analysis of election data, I argue that political organisations push sympathisers, cadres and new students towards the organisational vote. The extent of organisational voting is more important when electing all-campus representatives, and is a strong indicator of the strength of student outfits on campus.

In this section, I claim that the importance of the organisational vote lies in the fact that irrespective of the identity and personality of candidates, the winning organisation can bank on its networking presence and account for the penetration of political orientation during the previous academic year. I claim that party identification involves a certain degree of association with an organised politicised group, and this identification has predictable relationships with the perceptions, evaluations, and actions of the voter (Campbell, Gurin and Miller 1954, Kothari 1971, Prysby and Scavo 2013). I adopt here the Michigan theory of party identification which assumes that identification is primarily affective (Burden and Klofstad 2005). Most contestants represent

a student organisation that has its own party affiliation and political identity – some of which I described at length in the previous chapter.¹⁴¹

The organisational vote can be perceived as an indicator of a sense of belonging that shapes political understanding of the surrounding world, both inside and outside campus. In an era where governments around the world face more and more distrust from those they represent (Della Porta, Andretta 2013), a good proportion of students have a positive opinion of party activism on campus. While not necessarily being synonymous with blind trust in JNU politics, a result of the Attitude Survey is that 76.7 percent of JNU students hold the opinion that politics on JNU campus is “Excellent,” “Positive” or “Fair.” More affiliated students were satisfied with campus activism: 36.1 percent of those having an excellent opinion of political activism were members of a political organisation, while on average only 24.1 percent of those who answered the question were affiliated students.

7.2.2 Quantifying the Organisational Vote

To understand the power of the organisational vote in determining political space in the JNU campus, I turn to an analysis of data collected from past elections. From Figure 7-3 I see that panel votes can range from 36 to 48 percent in a given election, and contribute to the majority of the votes of the five major parties. This number exceeds 50 percent if we integrate in the count “panel breaks.”¹⁴²

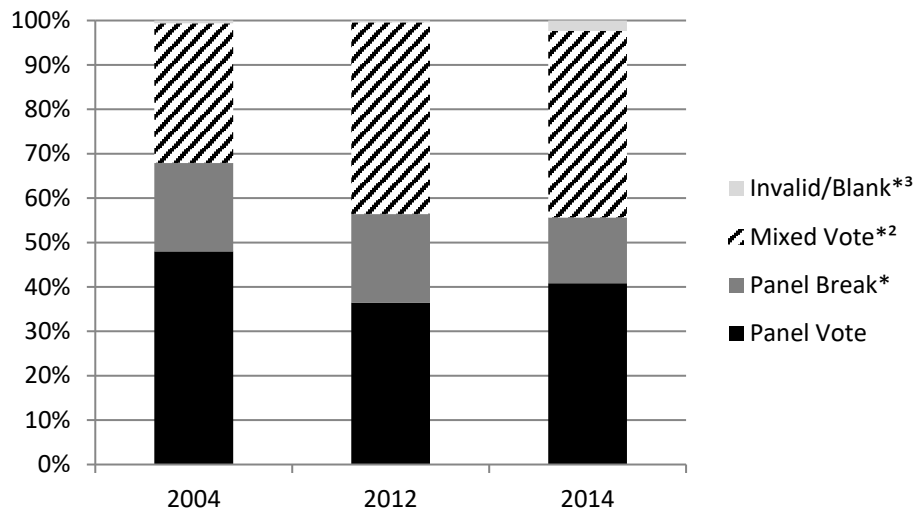
I suggest that the combination of panel votes and panel breaks provides a significant indication of the organisational culture at JNU because it provides an indication of the closeness between students and campus organisations. A comparative indication can be found when looking at the National Election Survey (NES) conducted amongst a representative sample of Indian electors by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS). When asked whether there is any political party they feel particularly close to, less than one third of respondents (nearly 28 percent in 2009, and 32 percent in 2014) gave a positive answer. Compared to this relative distrust in

¹⁴¹ See Chapter 6. Relying on text analysis of a large corpus of pamphlets issued by political organisations over JNU’s history over the past four decades, I identified the dominance of specific lexical fields that were employed by each locutor in the JNU campus. Broadly, campus organisations can be understood across the political spectrum. As I can see from Figure 6-2, pp.139-140, ABVP tends to favour the vocabulary of the right, focussing its campaigns on nationalism, Islamophobia, mythology, Hinduism and using oppositional geographies of China and Pakistan recurrently. The three main left organisations – AISA, SFI, AISF – criticise the nationalism of the ABVP and point to the faults of the BJP and the RSS in national politics. I also see a strong focus of the left on domestic crises concerning farmers, minorities, and lower classes and castes. Contrary to the views of individual ABVP members described earlier in this chapter, the ABVP literature more rarely addresses issues concerning marginalised occupational, class, caste and identity groups.

¹⁴² Activists define a panel break as voting where all votes except one will be for an organisation, while the remaining one would be for a candidate of another organisation. Panel breaks show strong support for the organisation, but not at the cost of following the organisation’s instructions of voting for all candidates. Unlike the cadres, this indicates the non-cadre, yet sympathiser vote. The tendency for panel breaks increases if there is a candidate who manages to cut across organisational structures, as a trustworthy leader, and has appeal across sympathetic voters.

political parties, JNU students from the years surveyed appear to put a relatively higher level of trust in the choice of candidates filed by student organisations.

Figure 7-3. Distribution of Vote Patterns at the 2004, 2012 & 2014 Elections for Central Panel



*Panel breaks also include so-called “quasi-panels” in which the panel vote is broken by a blank vote. *²Mixed votes also include “lone votes” in which voters cast only one vote. *³In the 2014 elections, the category Invalid/Blank also included the “None of the Above” (NOTA) vote, indicating disapproval of all of the candidates contesting. The NOTA vote was not an option prior to the 2014 elections. Average panel votes in 2004: 48.0 percent (1,571 voters out of 3,272 counted). Total votes cast: 3,346. Total number of students on the voter list: 4769. Approximate total turnout: 70.2 percent. Average panel votes in 2012 (March election): 36.5 percent (1,679 voters out of 4606 counted). Total votes cast: 4,637. Total number of students on the voter list: 7,551. Approximate total turnout: 61.4 percent. Average panel votes in 2014: 40.8 percent (1,839 voters out of 4,505 counted). Total votes cast: 4,640. Total number of students on the voter list: 8,061. Approximate total turnout: 57.5 percent. Source: Electoral Data and PaRChA archive, courtesy Lenin Kumar, Kanhaiya Kumar and Sunand Singh. Compilation by author.

The number of panel votes is very important for student organisations as it is a reliable measure of the number of core supporters they have on campus. During my fieldwork, I could see the effort made by several organisations to take an inventory of the loyalties they had on campus. For instance, one day in summer, a couple of months before the election, AISA leaders met in order to make a list of the students they talked to (so they could assume who had potentially sympathetic views to their cause). The standard procedure was to break the AISA activist team into smaller brainstorming units, each one dealing with one specific school of study. As indicated in Image 7-4, leaders then go through the list of students in that particular school and list the names of students they need to talk to in order of priority.

Image 7-4. AISA Activists Listing their Sympathisers in the School of Social Sciences

Leaders spend considerable time and energy recording this information. ABVP and SFI had a maximum share of the panel vote in the 2004 elections, but this was overturned by the massive share of panel votes for AISA in the 2012 election. While the panel vote share for AISA dropped in the 2014 election, the ABVP got a large chunk of panel votes from certain schools. The biggest proportion of its vote share from panel votes (62 percent) came from the School of Language, while half of AISA's vote pool was composed of this kind of voting behaviour. This can be explained by the very strong organisational presence in a school that comprises a large proportion of undergraduate students.

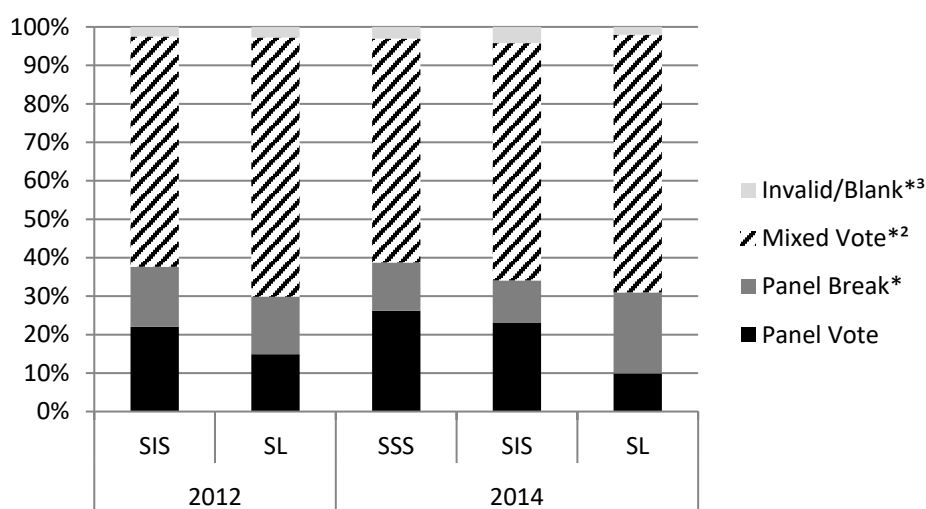
Interestingly enough, the proportion of panel votes has decreased in past years (for instance, nearly half of voters opted for panel voting in the 2004 student elections, as compared with slightly more than 40 percent in 2014). For our analysis, this distribution indicates a few tendencies visible in campus elections. Firstly, the propensity of panel votes indicates that there are sizeable sympathisers and cadres that work with each organisation. Second, this also indicates the ability of organisations to persuade and influence new and old students to recurrently vote for their candidates regardless of the class, caste, community and personal bonds of central panel candidates, councillors or GSCASH representatives. Third, while at every election the campaign is based on current student issues and national politics, this dedicated vote-share indicates a process of political socialisation that organisations need to maintain.

When looking at school councillor elections, the tendency to cast panel votes diminishes (cf. Figure 7-4 next page). In the three main schools (School of Language (SL), School of Social Sciences (SSS) and School of International Studies (SIS)) students vote for five school councillors, and there (even if we consider Panel breaks as organisational votes) the majority of voters mix votes.

The mixed vote pattern is almost always over 50 percent (in 2012, it was 54 percent in SIS, and 56 percent in SL; in 2014, it was 48 percent in SSS, 56 percent in SIS, and 58 percent in SL).¹⁴³

This mix in the counsellors’ vote is indicative of socialisation motivations behind the vote that are less influenced by party affiliation. In brief, I can summarise this process as one where voting in the school is a smaller social affair – since voters personally know the candidates, votes are cast on the basis of friendship and visibility of the candidate around the school. The second reason is that organisations do not always have enough effective leaders to fill five candidature positions for election. Thus organisations push other candidates who may have leadership potential for positions in later years, in order to learn campaigning, speaking, and debating skills.

Figure 7-4. School-wise Distribution of Vote Patterns at the 2012 and 2014 Elections for School Panel



All the data collected for school votes was not suitable for analysis as some counting sheets were missing. Data was kept in the School of Language (SL) (2012, 2014), School of International Studies (SIS) (2012, 2014) and School of Social Sciences (SSS) (2014).

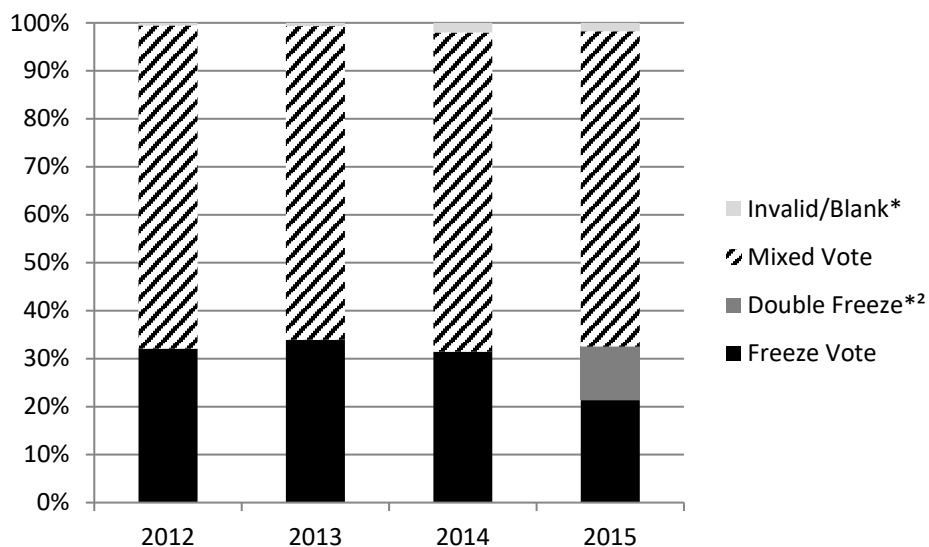
Cadres and strong organisational sympathisers may also cast freeze votes, especially in the case of the election of two student representatives for the Gender Sensitisation Committee Against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH) – which mainly inquires about reported cases of gender discrimination, including molestation and rape. Looking at the results of the tabulation of data provided by the organisation (Figure 7-5 next page) it appears that the strategy is of great efficacy. Around one third (32 percent in 2012, 34 percent in 2013, 31 percent in 2014, 33 percent in 2015) of voters have chosen this method of voting. The organisation benefitting the most from this

¹⁴³ At the 2014 SL elections, there were a number of “Quasi panels” which are a form of panel breaks, with the specificity that one vote is kept blank. This abnormal pattern was due to the disqualification of an AISA candidate, Cheten Tyagi, just a couple of days prior to the elections. AISA activists therefore asked their supporters to cast their vote minus one, and “freeze” the last one.

behaviour varies depending on the election year, but overall the gain from this practice is equally distributed across parties.

Those who have “frozen” their vote have not only followed a voting recommendation from the student organisation they are affiliated with, they also renounced half of their democratic right to vote. Abstaining from casting a vote for political reasons is a tradition in democratic cultures (i.e. the option of None Of The Above, NOTA, which was introduced for the first time in 2015) but it can be safely assumed here that “freeze-voting” qualifies as an expression of party discipline in which students align their voting strategy to the one party they are affiliated to. Once again, I face here a form of “organisational voting” in which students manifest their attachment to a specific political structure.¹⁴⁴

Figure 7-5. Distribution of Vote Patterns at the Elections 2012-2015 for GSCASH



*Contrary to the 2014 election for the JNUSU, the NOTA vote was not accounted for in GSCASH elections except in 2015. *2In 2015, ABVP filed two GSCASH candidates instead of one (which is the custom for this election). Therefore, instead of asking students to freeze their vote, ABVP campaigners requested students to cast two votes, one for each candidate. In order to avoid confusion for the reader, I did not call this a panel vote but a double freeze, as I consider the motivation for casting this kind of vote comparable to that of the freeze vote.

¹⁴⁴ It is possible to see that when it comes to GSCASH elections, the tendency for the freeze vote is significant across parties. In 2015, a chunk of freeze votes were translated to double freeze votes (equivalent to panel votes) since ABVP put up two candidates for the election. This indicates that even after subtracting the potential 10 percent vote for previous years, when it comes to the agenda of gender justice (which might be considered a less partisan issue), politics in organisations of the left takes primacy over issue-based politics. However, this figure also points out that regardless of the ABVP’s floating of two candidates, almost 65 percent of the ballot was divided across two candidates – indicating that the larger student body participating in the election, while sympathising with left organisations, could be distinguished from the cadre since they largely did not fall under the sway of the freeze vote.

7.3 Political Socialisation Beyond Electoral Politics: Dalit and Queer Cases

The analysis of vote combination gives a good understanding of the importance of student organisations in JNU campus politics, but such an approach has the inconvenience of obscuring the political work of groups that do not contest student elections. I do not wish to end this panorama on JNU student politics without acknowledging the importance of non-electoral and non-affiliated groups in the fuelling of political socialisation on campus.

As stated previously, in order to complete the discussion of political socialisation at JNU, it is important to account for the impact of those groups who, in addition to contributing to alternative forms of politicisation, also challenge the hegemony of AISA, SFI and other elected groups. When looking at the party affiliation of JNUSU presidents it is tempting to assume that public life on campus can be reduced to the organised politics of rival left organisations – occasionally challenged by its main right contender, the ABVP. This contradicts two empirical realities. Firstly, as indicated by the survey, almost a third (29.5 percent, 339 observations) of students declare that they have never participated in JNU politics. Second, among students who declare participating at least once a month in political activities, most of them are not affiliated to communist organisations. My survey indicates that 56.6 percent of students who participate in political activities at least once a month are not affiliated with mainstream political organisations. As this section is now going to show, some are concerned individuals and others are still part of micro socio-cultural groups; both play a crucial role in the democratic life of the campus. As my ethnographic account clarifies below, these eclectic and loosely organised groupings serve as lobbies for causes that are not genuinely advocated by AISA, SFI and others of the elected left. After acknowledging the diversity of profiles in JNU activism and its limits in Chapter 4, I aim here to complete the portrait of JNU political diversity from the point of view of its non-mainstream ideological stands.

7.4.1 The Contest over Dalit Representation

During my fieldwork, while established student organisations attempted to be the voice of the entire student community, I found that three particular groups were able to produce important counter narratives. The first challengers are the groups that defend specific caste or community interests such as OBCs (AIBSF, All India Backward Students Forum), upper castes not benefitting from reservations (Youth for Equality), and Muslims (ISO, Islamic Student Association).

The most vocal umbrella of critiques comes from sections of the Dalit community who, as suggested earlier, accuse the left of not being legitimate representatives of the cause of caste oppression. One of these young men is Tulasi, a Dalit member of the United Dalit Students' Forum (UDSF) who traces his political awareness to his days in Osmania University in Hyderabad – where he participated in student-led campaigns that led to the creation of the state of Telangana in 2014. As a member of the JNU Electoral Commission well-versed in the political scene on

campus, he was on good terms with left activism but, in his own words, kept arguing with them on the question of representation of former ‘untouchables’. He complained profusely about the upper caste composition of parties such as CPI(M) and CPI(ML), the parental bodies of SFI and AISA, and the attempt of left organisations to integrate some underprivileged castes in order to transform the campus into a “gallery space to patronise Dalits.” His suspicion was that the left’s support of reservations¹⁴⁵ is instrumental and that deep down, the leadership of communist parties in India advocates for an “economic revolution” in order to oppose “social revolution.”

Tulasi’s critique of the left’s dominance in JNU campus politics was longstanding, and was made apparent to me one evening, as we were walking together to the local market in JNU. There we unexpectedly passed by Draupadi, a former AISA vice-president student representative (2013-4) from the Adivasi community who had recently withdrawn from active participation. Hearing from her about the aloofness of AISA and the personal betrayal that “Dro” had experienced was for Tulasi a confirmation of the malpractices of the left towards minorities. Commenting on an article of a politburo member of CPI(ML) (*Dailyo*, 2 March 2015) (and secretary of women’s wing¹⁴⁶) on the rape of a Dalit agricultural labourer, Tulasi suddenly became emotional: “How does she dare to speak on the behalf of Dalits... this is so patronising [...] You see, in April... Phule and Ambedkar’s birthday is coming... What are they [AISA] going to do apart from token representation...? Nothing. I was asked by Dilip to come to the public meeting... He will keep calling me... but I won’t come.” Tulasi, like other UDSF activists, believes that AISA prevents OBCs and Dalits from accessing leadership positions in politics and society, and this is reflected in the pamphlet material they release (AIBSF pamphlet 2011; Chowdhury and Kumar 2006; Sudhakar and Kumar 2005).

Tulasi embodies the political line of UDSF, the non-electoral cultural group he belongs to (AIBSF-UDSF pamphlet 2011), which shares the same opinion as small and volatile political *bahujan* groups such as the aforementioned BSF (Amardeep and Sreenival 2012; BSF pamphlet 2011; Karakoti 2009). These groups articulate the same critique against the organised left, but contrary to individuals like Tulasi, they build an electoral platform, affirming that they “want a platform for *our* [Dalit-led] politics” (Patani, interview 2015).¹⁴⁷

In Chapter 4, I showed how the left, and in particular AISA, used the practice of declassing to embody the cause of Dalits. Fundamentally, sacrificial narratives are extremely important for the left because they legitimise all-encompassing forms of campus representation which include Dalits

¹⁴⁵ See Chapter 3, and in particular the “*No Mandal, no Kamandal* polemic,” involving CPI(ML)’s short-lived stand against OBC reservations in the early 1990s.

¹⁴⁶ All India Progressive Women’s Association (AIPWA).

¹⁴⁷ While I was conducting fieldwork, another Dalit group, the Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students’ Association (BAPSA) had just created its own political platform. After a first electoral attempt in 2015, the organisation made a significant score at the 2016 elections. Notably, its presidential candidate Rahul Sonpimple came second with 1,545 votes, a first-time achievement for a Dalit political outfit at JNU.

and other deprived communities (and place them under the communist umbrella). The online controversy in May 2016 on the Dalit platform *Round Table India* between Bhojpura (AISA) and Patani (BAPSA), two JNU activists born as Dalits, whom I interviewed in 2015, is absolutely revealing on the fundamental question: Can the Dalits represent themselves? Since the leadership in CPI(ML) is in majority upper caste (*savarna Marxism*), Patani accuses Bhojpura of collaboration with a party that does not defend “Dalit agency but Manu agency.”¹⁴⁸ The exceptional length of the last answer (more than 4,500 words) exemplifies how not only Bhojpura, but the organisation itself, felt the need to explain why it is entitled to overcome identity politics and represent discriminated groups – including marginalised castes, minorities, women, Adivasis, workers, labourers and every other “marginalised section” (Kumari 2016). This representative claim is possible *only if* the middle-class and upper-caste left leadership can prove that it can transcend its own social status:

Didn't Babasaheb say, “I was born in the Hindu religion indeed, but do not want to die in it”? Likewise, when a person born to the upper castes decides against living and dying as a part and representative of the brahmanical and casteist order, they come and join the progressive and revolutionary movements and give their lives to it. And I consider such people to be worthy of respect. You claimed that only the Dalits and people from Backward Castes sacrifice their lives and become martyrs. I want to utter some names to you here. [The two following paragraphs list 23 non-Dalit martyrs¹⁴⁹] (Bhojpura, *Rountable India*, 29 May 2016).

Importantly, the bone of contention relates to the sincerity of “left declassing.” JNU leftism, through talking on behalf of the poor, can embody a radical imaginary through an aesthetic of personal sacrifice and devotion to the student cause. Only if left representation goes beyond simple ritual and becomes alterity and embodiment, then communists can be seen to represent Dalits. Dalit activists such as Patani refuse to accept the genuineness of the left commitment, its sacrificial overtones and the romanticism attached to it.¹⁵⁰

Part of the political challenge posed by this contending Dalit discourse originates from their aspiration to re-appropriate the Dalit “heroes,” the anti-Brahmanical figures and the Dalit social

¹⁴⁸ The Manusmriti is a medieval Sanskrit legal text, presenting itself as a discourse given by sage-ruler Manu on the attributes of *Dharma* (duties) (Jaffrelot 2007). Dalits following the thought of Ambedkar identify the laws of Manu as the religious and symbolic source of caste discrimination. Ambedkar famously organised two conferences in Mahad municipality (the second in December 1927) in which he symbolically burnt a copy of the Manusmriti (Roy 2014).

¹⁴⁹ Names mentioned are: Mahendra Singh, Brijesh Mohan Thakur, Chandrashekhar, Shyam Narayan, Mani Singh, Shah Chand, Tribhuvan Sharma, Laxman Sahu, Jagadish Yadav, Arvind Choudhury, Nagbhushan Patnaik, Vinod Mishra, Charu Majumdar, Johar, Sheela, Lahiri, Manju Devi, Rama Naresh Ram, Jagdish Master, Rameshwar Yadav, Anil Baruah, Gangaram Kohl, Prameshwar Munda.

¹⁵⁰ The romantic take of left activism is often attached to their practice of political fasts. Discussing a hunger strike against fines and rustication of students involved in campus protests, former Students' Union president Amit Sengupta (1989-90) compares the ascetic form of politics with its opportunistic counterpart. Student hunger-strikers are “luminescent, innocent, aware, intellectually steadfast, aligned with the poorest of the poor, in solidarity with justice and the fight for justice” as compared to a government which has “no history of struggle, thus being parasites of power, [growing] under State patronage.” He concludes: “they have never made sacrifices” (*Hardnews*, 12 May 2016).

reformers invoked by the left for political gain. Thus, contests over the representation of the Dalit community can be identified in JNU pamphlet production. My textual analysis shows that the mentions of Ambedkar (1891-1956), Phule (1827-1890)¹⁵¹ and Periyar (1879-1973)¹⁵² – who developed strong critiques against caste oppression, useful to locate in pamphlet discourses on low caste empowerment – are clearly not monopolised by the United Dalit Students’ Forum (UDSF), the All India Backward Students Forum (AIBSF) and other so-called “backward” groups. Actually, the organisation referring the most to Ambedkar is AISA, and the SFI-AISF combination along with the Democratic Student’s Federation (who have many political references in common) are particularly interested in mentioning Phule. While I do not go into the details here of why left organisations refer to different Dalit figures, I this result as evidence of the integration by mainstream JNU organisations of the ‘social-justice’ political vocabulary. It is strong evidence that political discourses are produced within *and* beyond the realm of electoral politics, indicating that political learning is diffuse and pervasive.

7.4.2 Reframing the Gender Debate: A Queer Critique

Until now, three ideological alleys for politicisation at JNU have been described: the Marxist (AISA, SFI, AISF, DSF, DSU), the ‘soft’ Hindutva (ABVP) and the caste empowerment one (UDSF, AIBSF). However, another set of groups and collectives, focusing on gender issues, deserve our attention. Specifically, an important critique of established left representation on campus came in the past few years from the emerging queer scene, which is currently vocal in highly educated Indian circles (Dutoya 2016). Such a case, as described in this subsection, further broadens the scope of application of the politicisation model developed in this thesis. Through giving the example of the transition of a queer collective (i.e. *Anjuman*, 2003, 2004, 2009 and then *Dhanak*, cf. *infra*) from a private support group to a public interest group for the LGBT+¹⁵³ cause, I recount another example of politicisation on campus, focusing this time on the case of gender identities.

¹⁵¹ Jyotirao Govindrao Phule (1827-1890), a social reformer from a Maharashtrian low-caste (*Mali* caste of gardeners) background, is considered to be one of the earliest representatives of the Indian “social revolution,” characterised by his attempt to abolish caste (Omvedt 2004).

¹⁵² Periyar Erode Venkata Ramasamy (1879-1973), also called Ramasamy Naiker (1879-1973), is a social reformer from Tamil Nadu, who started a movement against Brahmanism, which he labelled Aryan “domination.” He consolidated the Dravidian movement, which sought to make his state independent and free from the imposition of Hindi as a compulsory subject in schools (Ram 1974).

¹⁵³ LGBT+ is used as a self-designation for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender community. The plus sign refers to additional queer identities, such as the Intersex, Asexual and Pansexual ones. Other variants of the acronym are used, such as the LGBTIQ, LGBTIQ+, LGBTQA+, etc. In the interest of clarity and ease of reading, I use the term LGBT+ even though some individuals may not identify with this acronym (Roffee and Waling 2016).

In JNU, most political questions related to gender are traditionally concentrated with the period preceding the election of the two representatives of the GSCASH I introduced elsewhere.¹⁵⁴ Soon after I arrived on campus, I started interviewing a small group of gay, lesbian and transgender students from higher urban educational credentials who had decided to oppose the institutional discourse on gender at JNU. Dhanak, a queer collective created in 2012 as a private support group, had decided to *come out* and hold public meetings soon after the Supreme Court of India recriminalised same sex intercourse on 11 December 2013 (Gourab, interview 2015; see also Ghosh 2016, 2017). Taking over Anjuman, a defunct queer organisation started in 2003 advocating for the recognition of gender identities going beyond male/female dichotomies, they felt that campus representation neglects non-normative sexualities and the stigmas attached to such orientations. In this subsection, I present the case of Abu, a frail and usually taciturn man from Rajasthan who had learned, according to his friends, to assert his gay identity while studying his MPhil and PhD at JNU:

So we [Dhanak] wanted to be safe, safe, safe. Then what we heard was this complete inaction and complete othering, which was being done by the Students' Union, which was the point where I got very furious and we had this meeting and we decided that probably it is high time that the campus really needs to know that there are queer students in this campus. [...] In a department like mine, [in which] the only form of inequality we talked about were poverty and unemployment and all these issues, which are very relevant issues. Nobody... or gender, if we talked about women issues, never talked about queer issues... Never a mention. It's like we have... complete ignorance and dis-acknowledgement of the fact that thing... even can exist.

Contrary to the case of Dalit politics, the goal of Dhanak was not only self-representation but to be represented better by existing student organisations. Dhanak supported the SFI candidate for the GSCASH election in 2014, and the candidate in turn criticised the rival organisation (AISA) accusing it of “suffocating diversity” on campus (SFI pamphlet 2014b). Dhanak served in 2014 as a queer pressure group, lobbying for a shift in the safety-based discourse on gender and advocating for practical reforms such as the increase in number of *queer sensitive* staff in the JNU counselling cell and the setting up of AIDS screening material in the campus health centre (Dhanak pamphlet 2015). The safety trope in the gender debate was most evident when looking at the use of the

¹⁵⁴ These elected students, customarily women (other committee members include faculty representatives, legal experts, social workers and psychologists), take part in the enquiries and writings of reports on particular cases of sexual harassment occurring in JNU premises. The student representation in GSCASH is important for political organisations as they can portray themselves as the champions of gender rights. This is partly why both AISA and SFI (Heba, interview 2014; Krishnan, interview 2014) claim leadership in the creation of this independent body (see Chapter 3). The evidence from pamphlets shows that AISA might have initiated the debate on the creation of an independent body handling cases of sexual harassment in 1997, but it was the SFI-led Students' Union that instigated and inaugurated the GSCASH in 1999 (Srinivasan and Maurya 2009; Convenor SSS 2009; SFI-AISF pamphlet 2006).

lemma woman in JNU pamphlets. The latter is most frequently associated¹⁵⁵ with vocabulary related to choices of outfits (jeans, wear, clothes), sexual violence (rape, men, sexually, protection, gang-rape), foeticide (pregnant, womb), familial and social brutalities (molest, sati, khap, honour, marry, husband, spy, couple, Valentine's), and monitoring of personal freedoms (Policing, code, choice, stereotype).

The way queer activists affected representation was utterly performative; it involved the organisation of queer movie festivals, the “rainbowing” of the campus (colouring the campus trees, stairs and building with the colours of the LGBT+ flag) and the reading of personal material (poems, reading of diaries, songs) in order to make their issues known to students and affiliated activists. A few examples come to mind;¹⁵⁶ but for the purpose of this subsection I discuss the “Talk to me” event, a public performance organised by Dhanak a day before the University General Body Meeting – the public meeting in which GSCASH contestants go on stage to address JNU students. On this occasion Andheri, the initiator of the Dhanak group, began talking first and after a couple of minutes, he removed his tight superman t-shirt to reveal another one, pink in colour. The scene, symbolising his coming out in a “hetero-patriarchal” environment was witnessed by a crowd of students and most of the GSCASH candidates. Members of the Dhanak group and a couple of outsiders came to the centre of the circle and told their stories. In between personal narratives, candidates showed their interest in the queer movement. Taking the initiative to question the activists, several candidates displayed a diligent curiosity; SFI candidate Kotaya asked what the “T” letter in the acronym LGBTIQ stood for and AISA candidate Shrini requested the definition of the concept “intersectionality.” In the attempt to represent queer interests, left organisations had to win the trust of the queer group. Abu made no mystery that the final goal of the meeting was to educate the left on the queer issue.

Later on what we found was everybody, every person who was contesting for GSCASH started talking about it all of a sudden, without probably even understanding what queer rights is about. This is why we had to organise last year this event called ‘Talk to me.’ Just before the GSCASH election we came up with this... where we invited all these contestants, who were contesting for

¹⁵⁵ Through looking at words that appear together (i.e. co-occurrences, or significant association between text units), it is possible to describe and understand the context in which terms are used. Instead of looking at words in JNU pamphlets in an isolated fashion, it makes more sense to look at the semantic environment in which these words are used (Tournier 1980, in the first issue of the Academic Journal *Mots*). For more details on the definition of co-occurrences as compared with similar notions such as the one of collocation, cf. Legallois (2012) and Chapter 6.

¹⁵⁶ For instance, in February 2015, queer activists from JNU and Delhi University protested while detained with two hundred others by the police. The group, angered against the proposal of a Hindu nationalist leader of the Hindu Mahasabha to forcefully marry couples seen on Valentine’s Day, started performing belly dances, singing songs and reading personal stories in bridal dress as recommended by the protest organisers. Inside the premises of the police station in Parliament Street in Delhi, same-sex kisses were observed with curiosity and bemusement by the police personnel, while applauded by the 200-odd activists encircling the improvised stage. Among others, Aditya, the young Delhi University professor and transgender, came to the centre of the courtyard and started declaiming some of her prose on her sexual encounters, dressed in a colourful red sari and a red heart painted around her nostril. While declaring with verve that “the only one who will touch my body is a faggot” the crowd cheered with thunderous clamour.

the post of GSCASH to come to us because everybody was talking very progressive – we want gay rights, we want lesbian rights – but do you understand what exactly are you going to do?

The sensitisation work of Dhanak certainly contributed to the democratisation of the queer issue on campus. Interestingly, the textual analysis shows that nearly 56 percent of the total use of the word queer (or its plural) in the recent history of JNU pamphlets (1994-2014/5,¹⁵⁷ PaRChA archive) has been only in 2014/5.¹⁵⁸ Through lobbying, Dhanak successfully impacted the gender discourse of campus organisations. At the 2014 GSCASH election that year, members of Dhanak decided to support the SFI candidate Kotaya and waved the rainbow flag while she was giving her candidate speech. Subsequently, after Kotaya was elected, Abu and other members of Dhanak came to congratulate her for championing the “rainbow cause” (Image 7-5).

Image 7-5. Abu Congratulating Kotaya (left) for her Election as GSCASH Representative (right)



Photo credits: On the left, Kotaya’s courtesy, on the right, photo by author.

7.4.3 Political Socialisation through Non-affiliated Individuals

Before completing the panorama of the various ‘unorthodox’ actors involved in agenda setting in JNU politics, some words need to be said about those non-affiliated individuals who politicise new students and challenge the political routine of mainstream organisations. During my fieldwork, I observed that several individuals were successful in gathering followers around them on a non-partisan base, and these individuals played a role in mobilising either in favour or against the organised left. This is the last example used in this thesis to show the ubiquitous tendencies of political socialisation at JNU.

¹⁵⁷ The last pamphlets I collected during my fieldwork were in April 2015, but because of the relatively few number I could gather in the year 2015, I categorised them as 2014 pamphlets.

¹⁵⁸ The score of specificity, measuring the likelihood of over-representation of the word in a specific cluster (i.e. here the year 2014/5) is very high (63, when a score of 2 is already statistically significant).

Non-affiliated individuals can be defined as loosely associated small and rather informal networked influencers. They are not *per se* part of the electoral competition prevailing at JNU but, in the long run, they had at times a decisive influence in the shaping of public opinion on campus. Some of them ran small and short-lived independent collectives or stood on their own; they organised episodic activities on issues that were not addressed by the main leftist organisations. A spectacular example of an initiative launched by unaffiliated individuals is the 2012 attempt to organise a beef festival on the campus premises. The controversial event was organised by a collective of individuals (CDRCF) (CDRCF pamphlet 2012; Sundar 2012) with the support of other modest political groups such as the Naga Study Forum (Naga Study Forum pamphlet 2012) and the Marxists' New Materialists (The New Materialists pamphlet 2012). The initiative, infuriating Hindu traditionalists, led to administrative sanctions (Kumar and Raj 2016) and an official condemnation by the Teachers' Association of the university (Lobiyal and Reddy 2012). Other initiatives by these influential individuals addressed a variety of questions such as hostel shortages, the non-inclusion of the visually impaired in the democratic debate on campus (JNU Deliberations pamphlet 2014a, 2014b, 2014c), and ideological alternatives to AISA and SFI on the question of Marxism – The New Materialists (The New Materialists 2012, 2013a, 2013b), Campus Front of India (CFI pamphlet 2012, 2013), Students for Resistance (SFR pamphlet 2012), Hundred Flowers (Hundred Flowers pamphlet 2012) – and secularism e.g. Concerned Students (CS pamphlet 2013a, 2013b, 2015). Political influencers, like other political groups, wrote pamphlets, organised lectures, seminars or memorial lectures (though on a less frequent basis than more established student organisations), and provided competing political narratives that conflicted with those of established student organisations.

As in the cases of Dalit and queer activism, most concerned individuals were deeply dissatisfied with mainstream forms of JNU representation – some of them being actual former cadres of dominant leftist organisations. The case of the self-proclaimed “(In)decent Proposal,” who at the end of 2014 started advocating for a relaxation of the rules on drinking alcohol in public, and on gender division in campus accommodations, is worth mentioning (Indecent Proposal pamphlet 2014). Denouncing the moralism of left activism (which for the most part refrained from disclosing their drinking habits to common students), the initiative received some support from highly educated students, which led established organisations to label them as “elite” when they decided to organise a meeting with alcohol in the open (Indecent Proposal pamphlet 2015). Drumi, a PhD student at the School of Social Sciences summarises the spirit of the initiative: “GSCASH does not have the vocabulary to address this, and the organised left will not take the risk to alienate part of their constituency [...] It [GSCASH] is not only about women, it is about privacy, condom machines, security.”

(In)decent proposal, in the words of Drumi, is a good example of an articulate (though peripheral) counter-narrative challenging the gender disparities in the left movement: “Women will nurse your wounds in the communist party. You are not in the party as a comrade, you are a courier, a foot-

soldier... the wife has to prepare tea for male comrades.” As she suspects patriarchy to be an essential component of Indian communism she also proposes to replace hierarchical decision-making with a more anarchic model: “We don’t preach, we have only a collective, not even a party, we write a *parcha* (pamphlet)... well three... and [organise] one public meeting and a party in Kaveri tank [water tank near Kaveri hostel]... to reclaim space. It is up to collective wisdom.”

7.4 Discussion: Student Politics as a Transformative Experience

In summary, I outlined three cases of alternative politics to the established student organisations at JNU. The first non-electoral political narrative came from autonomous sections of the Dalit community and was articulated around the critique of upper caste leadership in left parties. The second was operated by a queer group against reducing the gender discourse to the question of woman empowerment. The third was proposed by individuals and small groups on a variety of issues unaddressed by more mainstream student organisations. Such critiques of more visible student organisations at JNU – and in particular those of the left – are an additional indicator of the quasi-omnipresence of politics at the JNU campus.

These accounts are informative because they reveal that the actual bone of contention in campus politics is successful representation of various sections of students and a range of relevant issues, and that ‘alternative public groups’ are able to politicise sections of the student community on a variety of issues. While major left and right student organisations compete for elective posts and recruit new members to their party, the critique of small groups aims mainly at changing the agenda of dominant left organisations, making sure they integrate causes such as the recognition of queer rights, or the promotion of Dalits to positions of command in communist parties. These eclectic, yet influential non-electoral groups occupy an important place in JNU campus politics as their interventions bring to the fore new debates and ‘polemics’, hence challenging the JNUSU and the dominant left on a variety of issues. These groups serve as lubricant for the conduct of student politics on campus, enriching the debate and making possible alternative forms of participation.

7.4.1 Electoral and Non-electoral Student Politics on the Same Level

Mainstream and alternative forms of politics at JNU have two points in common, however: Firstly, they both put an emphasis on public performance, an aspect of representation often under studied.¹⁵⁹ As shown in Chapter 4, oratory, bodily and cultural performances play a fundamental role in JNU politics, and part of my effort in this research has been to explain how high-frequency political performances are instrumental to the creation of activist legitimacy on campus. A former

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Blom Hansen (2004) observes that the plebeian male politics of Shiv Sena in Maharashtra state is not only based on actual district presence but on the rumoured strength of their local *shakhas* (daily gatherings), fuelled by the ability to generate moods through spectacular public performances.

activist of Youth for Equality (see Chapter 3) notes for instance that “Just about everyone [in JNU] is performing, so language is so artificial in JNU, seemingly being concerned, moralistic. The performance is about championing the causes of others, belonging to a very sensitive lot... pretending you have an urge to do something for them” (Khammari, interview 2016).¹⁶⁰

Second, established representation and its critiques both involve profound and long-lasting personal and cultural changes. In the same vein as activists in established left organisations, students participating in queer and Dalit groups also described their commitment to JNU politics as a transformative experience. The before/after dialectic at JNU resembles the one of Kanshi, a Dalit from Orissa who re-discovered his identity at JNU: “Before JNU I was feeling shy about talking about Dalit issues, because it is shameful, society doesn’t want to talk about it. In JNU, I got confidence because of my new knowledge through peer group discussions, partly during food stall discussions (*dhabawazi*), partly in classrooms. UDSF explored my mind. I realised I was exploited, in JNU MA I realised.” The university – as mentioned by professor and JNU Dalit activist Vivek Kumar in his public lecture series on nationalism (Kumar 2016) – plays the role of a “social mother” to students coming from poor and marginalised backgrounds. Beyond the case of Dalit activism, this chapter and the study in general shows that in the case of left, queer and to a certain extent, Hindu-right activism, the act of representing involves a significant amount of re-fashioning. To quote a former activist (vice-presidential candidate 2012) and now professor: “JNU is not just where you go, it’s what you become” (Ingole 2016).

7.4.2 Conclusion

This chapter aimed at providing further evidence of the centrality of student organisations and groups on campus political life. In line with previous chapters concentrating on the process of political socialisation at JNU, it is now possible to affirm how important such organisations are in structuring and fuelling it. The pervasiveness of organisational voting, understood as the electoral expression of broader loyalties towards a political structure, has benefitted parties that could effectively create a strong sense of belonging among the student community. I suggest that factors favouring the organisational vote include party identification through social bonds and ascription to specific ideological orientations, which I discussed in the previous chapter. Political networks are not always organisational in nature, especially at the school-level. The organisational strength of bodies such as AISA, SFI or ABVP, is more visible in campus-level elections in which voters tend to do straight-party voting by giving all their votes to a single organisation.

¹⁶⁰ As the sociologist Eric Goffman suggests (2002 [1959]), some social performers might not be taken in by their own routine and the *impression of reality* they attempt to engender. Whether activist performances reflect inward views of reality is not really a question I attempt to answer, though I accept the idea that public behaviours of activists often conform to those of rituals, as individuals portray their respect to a certain set of intangible ideological values (Goffman 1971).

This chapter is also a testimony to the commitment of a range of voices that do not ‘play’ the electoral game but do provide a crucial contribution to the democratic debate on campus. Their cases are necessary to understand that the process of politicisation does not necessarily have to be motivated by electoral concerns. Small groups of Dalits, queers and non-affiliated individuals do in fact politicise sections of students without intending to contest student elections.

The manifestation of the organisational vote, however, can be fully understood only in light of the larger electoral culture on campus. While the vote analysis reveals an entrenched system of politicisation, mobilisation and strategic calculations in which organisations and voters make conscious political choices, the revelry and festivities of campus elections suggest a manifestation of the *carnival* spirit which indicates a certain light-heartedness. The latter displays an electoral culture celebrating democracy, participation, and competitive argumentation. Such celebrations, and the emotional retribution attached to participating in them, constitute an additional incentive to take part in political activities, leading to the progressive acquisition of the values promoted by certain political groups and the ethos of the university at large.

8 Conclusion

8.1 Revisiting the Argument

This dissertation, which relies on ethnographic, textual and survey data, has examined the importance of the campus as a political space, in which cultures of participation are reproduced – notably through the concerted action of micro-cohorts of activists and the peripheral yet legitimising presence of vocal left wing professors. The study showed the relevance of the campus both as a territory of socio-political interpretation and as an alternate geography for political experimentation. The concern of this work, as summarised in the introductory chapter, was to explore how university educated youth, set apart from the spheres of family and work, renegotiate their political attitudes in light of prolonged exposure to a university campus environment.

This thesis has looked at educated youth as cultural agents engaging in political activities, contributing to the academic literature on educated Indian youth and its concerns on a variety of issues – reviewed in Chapter 2 – such as (un)employment (Jeffrey 2012), gender and caste assertion (Lukose 2009; Subramanian 2015), liberalisation (Liechty 2003) and civic engagement (Krishna 2012). The initial puzzle emerged from survey studies (De Souza 2009; Kumar 2014) that indicate that the young Indian generation has similar voting patterns compared to other life stages. The study of JNU politics shows that participation of the youth is more intensive than the average Indian, cuts across most caste and community divides, engages with non-dominant left values, and is motivated by more than immediate or material improvements for students – although these are important, especially for the communist stream embodied by SFI.

From the 16-month long fieldwork I conducted in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), I conclude that its students qualify as a distinctly politicised group, distinguishing themselves from older generations and other sections of the educated youth. Fundamentally, the more time spent on campus, the higher the chance that students perceive themselves as politically active – a finding I introduce elsewhere (Martelli and Ari 2017). JNU, an elite institution, selects students from various Indian states and backgrounds, and appears to be a compelling home for transforming student views through politicisation. Although influenced by Marxist politics, politicisation does not mean uniformity of political commitments, presenting a kaleidoscope of approaches to student activism, giving due space to a variety of political trajectories and biographical profiles engaging with public action.

The contribution, which relies on an everyday account of local politics, addressed first the field of political mobilisation by showing that subjective political commitments can be best explained through interactions with peers, elders and authoritative figures. In Chapter 5, I explained how such intergenerational political socialisation was intensified, thanks to the brokerage practices of activists who served as street level bureaucrats and personal councillors for students experiencing difficulties. The same chapter also made sense of the diverse techniques – such as sheltering students without hostels in activists' residential rooms – used by political organisations to intensify

their connection with the student community and gain their political support. I have attempted to show that activist careers are forged on the basis of *in situ* socialisation rather than inherited from childhood. This finding contradicts the dominant academic study of political youth (described in Chapter 2) and calls for a re-evaluation of the role of secondary socialisation in the forging of political attitudes. From my account, it can be said that the residues of pre-college learning are not necessarily hardened in later life, showing that the lasting effects of early experiences might be in places the result of the university juncture in which political impressions leave a strong imprint on individuals.

From my political ethnography at JNU, activism appears as a diachronic process in which individual identities are renegotiated for the purpose of political action. In the case of pro-Marxist youth politics, the enactment by activists from elite and middle-class backgrounds of a culture of self-denial enables them to identify with the most deprived sections of the Indian population. In a conversational manner, the same left culture offers the possibility for some disadvantaged sections such as Dalits and Muslims to assert their identity and participate in campus political life. This perspective was emphasised in Chapter 4, in which I discussed the notion of *declassing*, a term used by upper and middle-class left activists to refashion themselves and allegorically embrace the cause of the Indian underbelly. The culture of declassing is an essential tool in the hands of left activists, as it provides them with the legitimacy to speak on behalf of Muslims, Dalits, women, and campus workers; however, some sections of these groups challenge the self-proclaimed “declassified” and attempt to represent themselves.

The multiplication of political outfits on campus and their constant competition fosters a unique diversity of participant profiles, including OBCs, Scheduled Tribes, and an active minority of women and individuals from elite backgrounds. Organisations following the line of parental organisations such as CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML) and RSS are very important as they set the dominant agenda debated on campus. However, their activism has to adapt and assimilate claims produced by less structured forms of activism, including cultural groups (leftist or not), collectives representing minorities (Dalit, OBC, Muslim) and non-normative gender voices (queer). This phenomenon was encapsulated in the third section of Chapter 7.

In addition to locating itself within the field of political mobilisations, the dissertation engaged with the literature on youth and politics in India. Contrary to previous studies that emphasise the ways in which youth reproduce class and caste advantages (Jeffrey 2014), I explained how political activism in anti-establishment political organisations (CPI(ML)), CPI(Maoist) and increasingly CPI(M) and CPI have prevented activists from entering certain, but not all, privileged positions in the job market, in particular those in the corporate and public administration sector – with these realms considered corrupt. As full-time politics often means overwhelming levels of personal sacrifice, most left activists and former Students’ Union office bearers embraced another type of privileged position, professorship, (for the exact figures refer to Table 5-2 p.116), thus reproducing academic opportunities for the next generation of left activists. Former campus leaders who have become integrated into the teaching body are not only in a position to fund

campaigns of new batches of activists, but through public speeches they also give additional credibility to public action on campus. They also ensure senior MPhil and PhD students involved in activism have enough free time away from assignments and academic duties to conduct daily political activities. Therefore, as described in the last section of Chapter 5, JNU politics appears as an pervasively intergenerational activity.

Moreover, existing studies on South Asian youth have focussed on the way the youth negotiate with pervasive political ideas such as globalisation, liberalism, or nationalism (Liechty 1995; Bénéï 2000; Parry 2003; Mazzarella 2003; Sarangapani 2003). In addition to the robust findings of such literature – summarised in Chapter 2 – the thesis shows that the factors structuring the political stand of educated youth can be more localised and idiosyncratic. At JNU, it is the Marxist political paradigm, as it has historically crystallised on campus in the early 1970s, that organises political discussions on campus. Contrary to commonly accepted views, I showed in Chapter 6 that an ideological stand such as communism entails significantly different cultural practices in the Indian context. Within the left movement, different historical legacies have led to the emergence of distinct discourses. In the tens of thousands of JNU pamphlets I collected – covering most of the activist history of the campus – at least two distinguishable rhetorics emerged: ‘social warfare’ and ‘students’ welfare’. The former discourse, enacted by AISA, is a continuation of the warlike language of former Maoist guerrilla CPI(ML) – which embraced armed struggle until the early 1990s. It emphasises the reporting of brutalities, including murder, rape, torture, starvation and shaming, committed by power holders such as the police, army, governments, industrialists, men, upper castes, upper classes, etc. Its principal opponent, SFI, inherited instead the political tradition of parliamentary communism, entailing the championing of everyday students’ well-being and the defence of concrete student-based demands. From that point of view, the campus appears as a window open to left rivalries, epitomising their regional, historical and cultural divides – and for that matter JNU politics is very much embedded in the larger Indian political landscape.

However, the effects of a subsidised way of life – including housing, catering, primary goods etc. – in the green heart of Delhi should not be minimised. JNU is above all a residential place and a space of living before being a site of higher learning, and because many students lead a semi-enclosed, and administrated way of life, it qualifies in many ways as a *total institution* (e.g. work camps or boarding schools), as described by sociologist Eric Goffman (1961). *Total institutions* tend to minimise differences between residents. Because JNU restricts *de facto* spatial mobility, the exposure to campus activities of JNU students is greater and this facilitates on-campus socialisation, ultimately intensifying the processes of politicisation resulting from it. As the university limits social intercourse with the outside world, it creates homogenising patterns, favouring the emergence of common values between the right (e.g. ABVP) and the left, including appreciation for democratic debate, freedom of movement for women, social justice for marginalised castes, and economic redistribution for the unprivileged. Due to the tendency of the university to isolate its students from the rest of the city, the campus could retain specific

ideological features at odds with political trends at the regional and national level, thus indicating a form of marginalisation of the leftist and value-based politics it professes. The future will show whether such political marginalisation is only temporary or long-lasting.

While profiling the emergence of activist endeavours, this dissertation has scrutinised youth politics from three different analytical angles. At a macro-level, I described *in extenso* what makes JNU a political campus without giving too strong an emphasis to the identity of its specific components. In Chapter 7 for instance I described how the electoral culture of the campus became festival-like, celebrating as much the victorious candidates for Students' Union representation as the democratic ethos of the campus itself. While my analysis of voting in JNU elections reveals an entrenched system of politicisation, mobilisation and strategic calculations, in which organisations and voters make conscious political choices, the revelry and festivities of campus elections suggest a manifestation of the *carnival* spirit which indicates the playfulness of political participation.

Within the JNU campus, various institutional (administration, Students' Union, Teachers' Association, GSCASH) and organisational (AISA, SFI, ABVP) actors play political roles. At a meso-level, I looked at the specific trajectory of political outfits within the campus space, exploring for instance in Chapter 6 the specific languages they develop. I gave specific attention to the competition between various left outfits and shed light on their quest to monopolise campus representation. Through the study of primary sources – mostly pamphlets – throughout the history of the university, I distinguish three identifiable phases in which various understandings of youth communism has emerged. From the first discussion of the JNU bill in 1964 to the beginning of the Emergency (1975) triggered by Indira Gandhi, the views of its faculty were mostly aligned with a dominant socialist ethos in public life, and concretised by the alliance at the centre between the Indian National Congress and the Communist Party of India. After the Emergency (1977), the increasingly monopolistic political leadership of SFI found support from many students and teaching faculty. SFI's thirty-year dominance at JNU followed a similar political trajectory to the Left Front (1977-2011) under the aegis of CPI(M) in West Bengal. In the mid-2000s, AISA, a relatively new and more radical communist force from Bihar, replaced the deeply criticised SFI, making JNU politics even more at odds with the liberal turn of "India shining."¹⁶¹

The dissertation has sought to bridge the macro and meso perspective with the micro one, by chronicling different personal trajectories involved in campus activism. In Chapter 4, I have shown that the cultural practice of Marxist-Leninism can be understood differently according to one's background. I ought to repeat again that the personal embodiment of communism entails strategies of declassing for middle and upper classes, and mechanisms of assertion for deprived sections, including the Dalits and Muslims. Additionally, I have used in Chapters 5 the term *consecrated heretics* to define deviant career aspirations of most JNU student activists. The term

¹⁶¹ In 2004, it was not the Congress which won the general elections but the BJP which defeated themselves, the latter having crafted the pro-rich slogan "India Shining."

'heretic' is used here in a secular manner as a form of transgression of the code of conduct of national Indian politics. Acknowledged and respected within the premises of campus, these highly professionalised young politicians have few alleys to continue engaging with public action after their campus years. As aforementioned, the nature of their political stand is becoming increasingly marginal in India thus their campus *consecration* turns out to be interiorised as *heretic* – that is, deviant – by activists themselves.

To conclude, JNU campus activism can be understood only if one locates the different phases of personal adjustments and gradual adaptations in the inclusive culture shaped by peers, mentors, professors and organisational strategists. In a half-secluded environment where personal aspirations become politicised, it is misleading to differentiate socialisation processes from ideological ones. Former Students' Union president Madrasa (2013-14) told me an aphorism that, to my knowledge, best characterises the political socialisation of educated youth: "The organic link between the students and their union *is based* on politics" (emphasis mine). From that can be derived its logical variant; "the organic link between the students and their union *generates* politics," taking the form of new activist commitments, identities and friendships, both within a student organisation and among the broader university community.

8.2 The Way Forward

While the case of JNU provides insights into the everyday practices of contemporary youth participation, the impact of politics on students in other Indian campuses remains unclear. Two reasons can explain this: firstly, as of now there is no attempt to conduct an exhaustive survey to chronicle student-based political routines across India; second, there is no agreement on a common framework to study the political engagement of the youth on university campuses across the country.

It is high time to scrutinise contemporary trends in both elite and marginalised educational institutions in a context of increasing enrolment. Student movements are gaining more visibility in traditional and social media, owing to large public participation – this was evident in the very recent Jadavpur University *Hokkolorob* movement, the Film and Television Institute protests, the Rohith Vemula agitation at Hyderabad Central University, as well as the JNU mobilisation that ensued. There is thus an observable *re-politicisation* of the educational institution in the public imagination which needs urgent attention.

The student politics that I have documented at JNU might indicate a revival of value-based forms of student activism – a hypothesis that needs to be substantiated through further ethnographies and discourse analysis. What can be said at this stage is that the JNU case challenges the generalisation of existing arguments on Indian student movements, such as the primacy of interest-based politics concerning campus accommodation, administrative efficiency, job prospects and daily amenities (Altbach 1970; Hazary 1987; Shah 2004; Price and Ruud 2012).

One of the broader implications of the thesis is to open the road to further ethnographic research of everyday youth politics, while keeping in mind a broader comparative framework. In addition to JNU, special focus should be given to major universities such as Jadavpur University (West Bengal), Osmania University (Telangana) and Delhi University (New Delhi). This comparative approach shall aim to complete the research already initiated at JNU. The first two venues may be surveyed because they have a long-lasting tradition of activism; they also offer a wide range of anti-establishment campus organisations, including a vibrant scene of communist-oriented parties. In Jadavpur University, students have historically been involved in the political movements of post-Independence Bengal, from the iconoclastic attacks of early Naxalism (Banerjee 1984) to the 2015 anti-police “Hokkolorob” movement (Sen and Gundemeda 2015). At Osmania University, students and particularly Dalits (Garalyté 2016) are involved in the decades-long movement for the creation of the Telangana state (Pingle 2014). The oppositional language of these two field sites can be compared to the case of Delhi University (DU), which has developed a political culture more in tune with national-level party-politics. DU, the epitome of Congress/BJP political competition, has experienced occasional agitation (Oomen 1974), such as the 2014 protests against the reform of the three-year undergraduate programme. Research of interest related to DU may include finding issue-based and campus-oriented forms of dissent along with an alignment of parental political norms. Alternatively, an additional case study displaying a type of politics under the influence of various right-wing *shakhas* (RSS daily meetings) should be considered, such as Banaras Hindu University (Uttar Pradesh).

The above-mentioned universities serve as a reminder that future research on the politics of the educated youth needs to report variations across India’s varied subnational units. A future comparative study of campus-based politics in India should make sense of the “infra-national diversity” (Sinha 2015) of Indian higher education and the spatial variability of regional political movements. Put differently, there is a need to scale up findings and measure the extent to which the dissent model of JNU politics is generalisable. The ambition is to draw inferential statements about youth politics in India while cognisant of its subnational variations.

One of these inferences should engage with the nature of linkages between campus and broader society. Campuses are part of the broader ecology of urban political participation; they are useful for parties and movements in order to mobilise and recruit biographically available students i.e. those, in large numbers, who face few constraints to mobilisation. More generally, youth politics is a way to scrutinise the continuity or change of power relations in society. As mentioned earlier, the Jat student leaders studied by Craig Jeffrey in Western Uttar Pradesh (Jeffrey and Young 2014) used their knowledge of educational institutions to become intermediaries between local state officials and private educational entrepreneurs. This thesis shows that activists in a university in New Delhi use their closeness with the politicised section of professors to find tenured positions – some of them eventually returning to the place in which they learned politics after serving in junior positions elsewhere.

The question of youth political participation appears therefore to be intrinsically linked to the question of social mobility and the reproduction of socio-cultural elites. University not only promotes certain groups through selective educational advancement, it also opens a space for the grooming of new political personnel who in turn use its advantageous position for self and collective gains. The changes in youth politics in Indian campuses prefigure new *rappart de force* between generations, but also between religious, caste, ethnic, linguistic and class-based communities.

To conclude, it has been indicated here that the political and cultural space JNU represents is today marginalised, because the actors that keep it alive are more and more isolated in the Indian political scene. On the terrain of values, however, JNU still commands significant authority as the preserve of secularism and democratic argumentation. The major protests that followed the arrest of Kanhaiya Kumar, AISF president of the Students' Union on 12th February 2016, on charges of sedition, triggered protests and created the conditions for the unity of students, the teaching body and activists across party lines.¹⁶² The reaction to this, and the arrest of two other Maoist sympathiser activists over alleged anti-India speeches,¹⁶³ was followed by daily meetings in the administration bloc renamed for the occasion "freedom square" (*Youth Ki Awaaz*, 19 March 2016). Forty-one lectures by JNU and other leading professors on the theme of nationalism were made in this precise open-space. The subsequent academic sanctions imposed by the administration on the students involved in the controversy triggered the indignation of the teacher's association and led to a hunger strike from political activists of various organisations (*Scroll.in.*, 9 May 2016). Such events confirm that JNU still resonates as a resilient pro-free-speech institution defended by a wide network of academics, intellectuals, artists and alumni. The university remains a coveted political space where generations of political activists and concerned citizens, investing in the field of academia and redistributing opportunities for activism, have created the conditions for new generations of politically active students to emerge.

¹⁶² There are numerous accounts of the incidents (*Scroll.in.*, 3 March 2016). For an overview see Martelli and Rahman (2016).

¹⁶³ On February 9, a group of students formerly affiliated with the pro-Maoist group Democratic Student Union (DSU) organised a cultural event in JNU campus (Sabarmati dhaba) against the hanging of Maqbool Bhat (the co-founder of Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front) and Azfal Guru, who were sentenced to death for his alleged implication in the 2001 attack of the Indian Parliament. Subsequently, a case of sedition against six JNU activists (Kanhaiya, Umar, Airban, Ashutosh, Rama and Anant) was filed in a police station near campus (Vasant Kunj). The complaint was registered under Indian Penal Code Sections pertaining to sedition (124A) and criminal conspiracy (120B). The Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) president Kanhaiya Kumar was arrested on 12th of February 2016 and booked. On February 23 Umar, Airban decided to surrender to the police. A couple of weeks later, Kanhaiya (March 2) Umar and Airban (March 18) were granted bail and returned to campus. Meanwhile, crowds of students and citizens rallied across the country. On February 18, thousands of people, including artists, lawyers, students, teachers and professionals went on the streets and marched to Parliament Street, New Delhi. Apart from daily sit-ins and protests at JNU, a series of lectures (mainly on nationalism) were delivered by reputed academics including Partha Chatterjee, Nivedita Menon, Achin Vanaik, Tanika Sarkar, Mridula Mukherjee and Ayesha Kidwai.

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Appendix

Respondents Cited

<i>Name</i>	<i>Alias</i>	<i>Background</i>
Abu	yes	PhD student, queer activist in Dhanak and SFI sympathiser, interview 2015.
Adarsh Panipat	yes	Advocate, AISF mentor at JNU, interview 2015.
Aditya	yes	Gender Studies Faculty in Ambedkar University and queer activist.
Aisha	yes	MPhil student, DSF activist, interview 2015.
Ajmeri	yes	PhD student, former SFI and DSF senior activist, GSCASH elected representative, interview 2014.
Akhil	yes	BA student, AISA sympathiser, interview 2014.
Ali	yes	BA student, former SFI and then AISA sympathiser, interview 2015.
Amarendra Mishra	yes	JNU Professor, former SFI JNUSU president, interview 2014.
Amit Sengupta	no	Former Professor of Journalism at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, former non-affiliated JNUSU president, interview 2014.
Andheri	yes	PhD student and queer activist in Dhanak, interview 2015.
Anupam Roy	no	CPI(ML) official artist and cartoonist, maker of numerous AISA posters at JNU, interview 2014.
Arathi	yes	PhD student, AISA office bearer, interview 2014.
Arpita	yes	PhD student, AISF activist and former JNUSU general secretary candidate, interview 2015.
Aryadan	yes	MPhil student, SFI Activist, interview 2015.
Atul	yes	PhD student, SFI activist and former JNUSU presidential candidate, interview 2015.
Avijit Pathak	no	Sociology Professor at JNU, interview 2014.
Azad	yes	PhD student, former AISF JNUSU president, interview 2015.
Bangaru	yes	PhD student and SFI JNUSU presidential candidate, interview 2015.
Bankuri	yes	PhD student, AISA office bearer, interview 2015.
Barthi	yes	MPhil student, AISA office bearer and former JNUSU president, interview 2014.
Berhampuri	yes	PhD student, AISA office bearer and former JNUSU presidential candidate, interview 2014.
Bharat	yes	PhD student, former ABVP activist, interview 2014.
Bhima	yes	PhD student, former senior SFI activist, interview 2014.
Bhojpura	yes	MPhil student, AISA office bearer and former JNUSU general secretary, interview 2015.
Birendra	yes	MA Student, former ABVP treasurer In Delhi University and former JNUSU general secretary candidate, interview 2015
Chandauli	yes	MPhil student, AISA activist and former JNUSU General secretary, interview 2014.
Chiran	yes	PhD student, AISA office bearer and former JNUSU General secretary, interview 2015.
Chitranshu	yes	MA student, AISA activist, former office bearer, interview 2014.
Dhanbadi	yes	PhD student, AISA activist, interview 2015.
Dilip	yes	PhD student, AISA office bearer and former JNUSU presidential candidate, interview 2014.
Dipen	yes	MPhil Student, DSU Activist, interview 2014.
Divya	yes	Assistant Professor at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, former senior JNU SFI activist, interview 2015.
Draupadi	yes	MPhil student, former activist in AISA and former JNUSU Vice-president, interview 2015.
Drumi	yes	PhD student, non-affiliated and politically involved in (In)decent Proposal, interview 2015.

APPENDIX

Gautam	yes	MPhil student, former AISF sympathiser and then NSUI activist, interview 2015.
Gorakh	yes	Former AISA office bearer and JNUSU general secretary, interview 2015.
Gourab Ghosh	no	PhD student, queer activist in Dhanak and SFI sympathiser, interview 2015.
Gowda Kishore	yes	Joint-secretary of the All India Kisan Sabha, former SFI JNUSU president, interview 2015.
Gyan	yes	MA student, ABVP activist and office bearer, interview 2014.
Hariti	yes	MA student, DSF activist, interview 2015.
Heba	yes	Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study Shimla, former SFI JNUSU president, interview 2014.
Hilsari	yes	MPhil student, SFI activist, interview 2014.
Hrishabh	yes	PhD student, ABVP activist and JNUSU presidential candidate, interview 2014.
J.P. Kashi	yes	JNU Professor, Former Free Thinkers JNUSU president, interview 2015.
Jitendra	yes	PhD student, former SFI and now DSF activist, interview 2014.
Jitendra	yes	Political Science Assistant Professor at the University of Delhi and former JNU AIBSF activist, interview 2014.
John	yes	Hindi literature professor at the University of Chicago, former AISA JNUSU Office Bearer, interview 2015.
Joyi	yes	PhD student, senior SFI activist, interview 2015.
Kanjira	yes	PhD student, senior SFI activist, interview 2015.
Kanshi	yes	MPhil student, Dalit UDSF activist, interview 2015.
Karim	yes	PhD student, former DSU activist, interview 2014.
Karima	yes	PhD student, SFI activist and current JNUSU general secretary, interview 2015.
Kashif	yes	PhD student, former NSUI activist and Assam Congress spokesperson, interview 2015.
Kavita Krishnan	no	CPI(ML) Politburo Member, former JNUSU joint-secretary, interview 2014.
Khammari	yes	PhD student, former activist and pamphlet-writer of Youth For Equality, interview 2016.
Khasim	yes	MPhil Student, AISA sympathiser, interview 2014.
Kollami	yes	Former PhD student and former JNU DSU in-charge, interview 2015.
Kotaya	yes	MA student, SFI activist and GSCASH elected representative, interview 2015.
Kunwar Sudhanshu Lal	no	PhD student, AISF senior activist, interview 2015.
Lakhi Munger	yes	International Studies JNU Professor, former AISF activist and JNUTA representative, interview 2015.
Lino	yes	MPhil Student, Non-affiliated and politically active in various occasions, interview 2014-15.
Madrasa	yes	PhD student, former SFI/DSF activist and JNSUSU president, interview 2014.
Muzaffar	yes	MA student, AISA activist, interview 2014.
Nalanda	yes	PhD student, ABVP senior activist and office bearer, interview 2015.
Nalini Ranjan Mohanty	no	College Principal, former JNUSU president, interview 2014.
Nihar Burdwani	yes	Economics Professor at the University of Delhi, AISA JNU unit in-charge, interview 2014.
Niraj	yes	MA student, AISA sympathiser, interview 2014.
Pallavi	yes	PhD student, AISA office bearer and former JNUSU president, interview 2014.
Patani	yes	PhD student, Dalit BAPSA activist, interview 2015.
Pradeep Narwal	no	MPhil student, former ABVP office bearer.
Pranav Duv	yes	Left Collective member, former CPI(M) Convenor of the Research Unit, former SFI JNU unit in-charge, interview 2014.

Pratap	yes	PhD student, former AISA office bearer JNUSU president, interview 2015.
Radha	yes	PhD student at King's College London, former JNU student, interview 2016.
Radhe	yes	BA student, former AISA sympathiser, interview 2014.
Rafi	yes	PhD student, former AISA office bearer and former JNUSU president, interview 2014.
Rahul	yes	MPhil student, SFI activist, interview 2014.
Rai	yes	PhD student, AISA activist, interview 2015.
Rajesh	yes	MPhil student, Dalit Activist at JNU and at the All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation, interview 2015.
Ramashankar Yadav/Vidrohi	no	Former PhD student and vagrant in JNU premises for over 30 years, interview 2014.
Raxauli	yes	MPhil student, Concerned Students activist, interview 2015.
Riju	yes	Economics Professor at JNU, former AISF JNUSU general secretary, interview 2014.
Roukeli	yes	PhD student, Delhi State president of SFI, interview 2015.
Sachin	yes	Lecturer in Cinema Studies at the Symbiosis School of Economics in Pune, former SFI senior activist, interview 2015.
Sadhna	yes	JNU student and GSCASH complainant.
Saharsi	yes	MPhil student, ABVP activist and former Delhi University Students' Union candidate, interview 2015
Samuel Divekar	yes	JNU Professor, former AISF JNUSU vice-president, interview 2014.
Sheohari	yes	MA student, AISA activist, interview 2014.
Shin	yes	BA student and non-affiliated, interview 2015.
Shrini	yes	MPhil student, AISA activist and former JNUSU vice-president, interview 2014.
Sulochana	yes	Visiting Faculty at the Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts in Pune, former JNU SFI sympathiser, interview 2014.
Sumbul	yes	MPhil student, AISF activist and JNUSU presidential candidate, interview 2014.
Suneet Chopra	no	Former CPI(M) Central Committee Member, co-founder of SFI at JNU, Interview 2014.
Surajit Mazumdar	no	JNU Professor, former SFI JNUSU president, interview 2014.
Tanuja	yes	Professor in Chandigarh, former AISF JNU activist, interview 2015.
Tausiq	yes	PhD student, former AISA activist and JNSUSU general secretary, interview 2014.
Thiruvanan	yes	MPhil student, AISA activist, interview 2015.
Thrissuri	yes	PhD student, SFI activist, former JNUSU joint-secretary candidate, interview 2015.
Tulasi	yes	MPhil student, Dalit UDSF activist, interview 2014.
Vaishali	yes	PhD student, ABVP senior activist and office bearer, interview 2015.
Vishnu	yes	PhD student, ABVP Central Working Committee Member and JNUSU joint-secretary 2015-16, interview 2015.
Vishnu Hans	yes	Former JNU SFI activist, in-charge of archiving SFI pamphlets, interview 2014.
Zach Murti	yes	Kerala Public Service Commissioner, former Teen Murti Fellow, former ASIF activist and JNUSU general secretary, interview 2014.