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A Cry of Anger Against Injustice

By: Puranjai

A student who is also an activist speaks of the injustice they see in educational institutions and society, and the economic bleakness that awaits them when they leave university in an India that to them increasingly resembles the '1984' of George Orwell.

When does a person protest? At what moment does a person step outside one's mundane life, of waging the daily, perhaps even the Sisyphean struggle against existence, and decide to demand answers? What is it like to search for answers in 'a sea of troubles' inhabited by creatures one sees only on television? We live in a time many describe as 'post-truth', where objective facts do not matter, our rights and citizenship do not hold water. What matters is the whip landing repeatedly on our salted backs.

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I write here not about the Jantar Mantar protests that culminated in the resignation of union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan. I write about the various issues that the youth of 2026 brought to the protest site, and about the feeling of injustice and angst that they carried there and allowed to carefully flow over the weeks that the protest lasted.

Yes, Abhijit Dipke created the meme page that garnered millions of responses. Yes, it was the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) paper leak that was the immediate spark for the protest but it was much more. The young brought with itself not just a paper leak but also the pent-up anger that had been bottled up. The past month saw the opening of the bottle. With all the anger held within, one could slowly feel a part of oneself dying each day.

An India that is Orwell's 1984

There is something horrific about the brutality of killing a piece of a person's soul. To dismember a limb is another thing, to do it to one's soul is quite another. Over the past decade, we all have died a bit. We have grown up in a country where one cannot express the full range of emotions a human being is capable of. A bunch of emotions is sought to be cordoned off by the state and its stormtroopers (you know, the Bajrang Dal, the Hindu Raksha Dal, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the *gau rakshak* vigilantes, and the like). One cannot even freely think and talk about issues very much relevant to our lives.

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A few years ago, I had come across Winston, a government employee in George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*, which was published in 1949. As a first-year bachelor's student at Delhi University, I was only beginning to realise and conceptualise the rotten system we were living in. The book stayed with me, as I am sure it does with everyone who reads it. It is a depressing thing that we refer to it in our conversations and our articles. I did not want it to be like this-to grow up in an India where *1984* is increasingly being referred to.

As in Orwell's novel, there seem to be too many chestnut trees around us, and a person lurking behind some of those. He is ready with a cloth-wrapped fist. In the twilight, as you stumble ahead, often looking behind your back, trying to walk and run at the same time, you crash into a body. You are greeted with a cloth-wrapped punch. No sound escapes your throat, not even a cough. A tear or two comes up, with great courage. But that is it. This is the everyday existence we live. You cannot yell about it. Now, the state is snatching away even the right to write about it.

At the protest site, I met several students from outside Delhi. One of them told me how he was failed in a paper because he questioned the college administration. Do you feel that? It is a mere sentence in this article, but it is a human being's, our fellow Indian's, life experience.

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To think, to question, to act is perhaps one of the fundamental aspects of a human existence. This government is snatching from us that simple human behaviour. To be human is no more accepted-one must accept subordination, one must pay obeisance. One central element of this scheme is to force us to experience individual lives bereft of any solidarity. Over the past decade, they have tried to hammer it into our veins, arteries, and nerves, that if a neighbour is arrested at 3 am, you need to keep quiet. If a student distributing pamphlets and reading Karl Marx or Jyotirao Phule is suspended, you need to keep your head down.

If Dalits and Muslims are lynched in police presence or are tortured to death in your nearest police station, you need to look away, or-if possible, highly encouraged even-applaud and cheer. If Adivasis are sought to be Hindu-ised, and the protesting ones bombed, raped, and gunned, you have to accept as truth the Press Information Bureau (PIB) statements that appear every now and then. If women and queer folks are denied rights in the name of laws that supposedly affirm those, we are supposed to cheer it as yet another masterstroke.

Hollowing out of Public Universities

At Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), my university, six years ago, the then Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) president Aishe Ghosh had listed some names of faculty members who were involved in threatening and targeting students. Sadly, they continue to remain at my university, while the ones who built this place brick by brick are hounded out. Presently, the condition of the pedagogy is such that under the name of decolonising the mind and education, the Hindu right-wing is driving a bulldozer against critical thinking and dialogue. Recruitments are made overwhelmingly from the gang of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) members, who neither have any interest in teaching nor are capable of teaching.

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One will easily find 'teachers' now who openly suggest students prepare for Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) civil services examinations, to stay away from politics, to not question their venom-or they would be labelled as Marxist, graded less, and denied admissions into PhD programmes. Our educational institutions are being brazenly attacked, and a whole generation of people is being crafted which would have seen nothing other than the hierarchical, violent atmosphere that exists in the campuses, as in their families and immediate environments. Brahminism is sought to be generalised.

Imagine, all of this happening with the active protection and encouragement of the state.

University Education, But No Work

Who will be accountable for all of it? When we ask about unemployment, the supreme leader of this country suggests selling pakodas. Ask for job security and benefits? You face the reality of having to find work in a country where around 90% of work is in the informal sector. This means that if you are a young person in India having dreams, having aspirations, it is an offence. You have to lose yourself to a life of drudgery and misery.

Mr 'Non-Biological' is not off the mark. There are no jobs in India. The secure and stable government jobs have declined or stagnated over the decades. Having a degree does not help you get a dignified standard of living either. The [India Employment Report, 2024](#), reports that the share of unemployed youth in total unemployment is 82.9%. If you have a college degree, there are increased chances that you would be without a job compared to your father having a degree back in 2000. This is because the share of educated youth in the unemployment pie has increased to 65.7% in 2022 from 54.2% in 2000.

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If you are a woman, you need to congratulate yourself for the even higher chances of being unemployed. With no jobs available on the market, and the quality of education dipping, one would perhaps have to resort to frying and serving pakodas on the street, and be part of the booming economy that India supposedly is.

There is a running joke here that students do a master's degree and a PhD to only delay the onset of unemployment. With no value to the knowledge gained, students force themselves to study to become bureaucrats. Even a casual visit to the library and reading rooms would let you know the immense strain students put on themselves to obtain a government job. This is not even Patel Nagar or Old Rajinder Nagar in New Delhi, where, put into a matchbox of a room, students spend their days and nights memorising and reproducing banal facts and government propaganda to land a job.

A lot of my Bachelor's and Master's friends are at home or some rented accommodation, trying to 'crack' a government exam. Every year during the 'prelims' of the UPSC Civil Services Examination, friends narrate stories to me about teary eyes of people who, having spent even their last attempt, could not get the job. The success stories are far and few in between and are accordingly covered and decorated, but that is not the story of most of the people.

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The picture of a shining India includes the setting up of private universities, set up by Indians and non-Indians both. Private universities such as Ashoka, Galgotias, or Victoria would replace the reputed public university of long-standing. Education, which should be available to all as a fundamental right and an avenue to access social mobility and discover newer horizons, is now being sought to be commodified.

We live in an era of resounding equality. Now, education would be brought at a par with a water bottle and a kurta. The market has flattened and equalised it all! Now you need not worry about grand rights and virtues. If you have a deep pocket, you can have the convenience of accessing foreign-like education within India itself! Of course, you should not question who would have the higher probability of having resources in the first place. Do not look at the starting line, stupid! Look at the grind of the competition and the juicy reward at the end.

The global economy works according to its own logic. India, with its huge labour pool, nowadays going through what many call a phase of demographic dividend, is served by a government that is functioning to reduce the cost of labour as much as it can. About 22% of the workforce earns more than Rs. 15,000 a month, while 55% earn less than Rs. 9,000 per month. If the worker feels the desperation and the necessity to form a trade union (its density rate was 19.8% in 2017) or call a strike or a protest, the government would swoop in to criminalise all activity, like at Noida and Manesar a few months ago. The Supreme Court would support the curtailing of trade unions, like the labour laws do, as when Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant held "flag-bearing unions" responsible for impeding the economic growth of our country.

When We Speak Up

When all the institutions fail, would there still be an honest person standing who could argue against hitting the streets? The government, with no honesty and moral integrity, had the willingness to stand against the youth. Upon this unrelenting generation, it chose to rain lathis, fire tear gas and pellet guns, and in Bihar, actual bullets. Hundreds have been detained and jailed for exercising a basic fundamental right. Dhananjay, former JNUSU President, and Sandeep Saurav, member of the legislative assembly from Paliganj in Bihar, were kept in custody for several days before being released after sustained pressure.

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The lakhs of people that turned up on the street this month were part of that pressure. When they could not see anyone with the might and the legitimacy to challenge the government, they came together. It was a place for venting one's anger, sharing one's grief, but also one of finding solidarity, friendship, and even love.

When people shout slogans, you can notice that it is not a routine activity by a political party's cadres. For, most of the people were protesting for the first time. The emotions were raw, and in every breath that one pulls to shout Inquilab Zindabad or Jai Bhim or BJP Murdabad, one sees hope. Why would a poor person from Odisha or Jammu and Kashmir spend days and weeks sleeping on barricades? Why would people spend their days and nights helping the less resourceful? Why would, in case you sat down for a nap, a complete stranger use a hand-fan to give you air?

It is because people have the capacity to deeply feel injustice, not only for themselves but for fellow human beings as well. And when they tremble with indignation, as Che Guevara would have it, the ground beneath them trembles as well.

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