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When Digital Satire Becomes Dissent

Inside the CJP Phenomenon

By: Sanam Roohi

The CJP refuses to fit old categories: apolitical versus political, satire versus protest, virtual versus physical, domestic versus diasporic. This is exactly what makes it a bellwether for how young Indians will do politics going forward.

When the Cockroach Janata Party's (CJP) protest led to the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, a politician with longstanding ties to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, it achieved something considered impossible only weeks before: forcing a serving minister out of office. The CJP is a satirical party that became an overnight Gen Z sensation, its creator Abhijeet Dipke - a thirty-year-old Indian international student at Boston University - starting an Instagram page in response to Chief Justice of India Surya Kant's remarks likening unemployed Indian youth to 'cockroaches' and 'parasites'. The choice of words was beyond callous: Rwandan radio once called Tutsis *inyenzi*, or cockroaches, and Nazi propaganda used *schmarotzer*, or parasites, to dehumanise Jews before violence followed. Indian Gen Z-the first generation of true digital natives, who inhabit a collectively claimed, age-defined global identity - responded by reclaiming the slur as a badge of solidarity, a vernacular that quickly spread from Instagram reels into everyday protest speech.

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What began as a satirical response grew from a hashtag and a Change.org petition-which crossed 39 million signatures before being taken down-into rallies across Delhi, Pune, Lucknow, Amritsar, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Jaipur, and an indefinite dharna at Jantar Mantar, gaining support from farmers' unions and a recognisable face in the Ladakhi activist Sonam Wangchuk. This first chapter turned antagonistic when police forcibly hospitalised Wangchuk. The CJP's subsequent call to march to Parliament (*Sansad Chalo*) on 20 July drew a massive turnout in Delhi, along with solidarity protests across Bengaluru, Kolkata, Mumbai and Pune, and as far afield as Berlin, London, and Toronto. The response on the street dissolved any lingering doubt about the movement's reach beyond the internet, as youth from small north Indian towns and villages marched to Jantar Mantar in sizeable numbers.

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Post-ideological but Anti-right

The sheer virality of CJP prompted a slew of analytical pieces within days of its launch, [one](#) tracing its anti-political lineage to Jayaprakash Narayan's 'total revolution' and the India Against Corruption movement - a comparison borne out by Dipke's insistence on a peaceful, Gandhian register, from asking followers to carry the *Tiranga* and offer flowers to policemen, to refusing to retaliate after BJP supporters slapped him at a Jaipur rally in June. But reading the movement as another cycle of anti-corruption moralism, or as apolitical because of that moral idiom, misses what distinguishes it.

Unlike Gandhi, Jayaprakash, or Hazare, Dipke and other CJP core members have not disavowed entry into formal politics. Its supporters already speak of the CJP as a political party in waiting, whose chief constituency is the students and youth of the country; some have said openly that existing parties have not met their demands and they want to 'give CJP a chance'. Like a party, it has released manifestos - its first reading as satire, requiring members to be 'unemployed, physically lazy, chronically online, and capable of professional ranting', its second, released in June, a serious document of exam reforms. Even the diaspora's relationship to the party mimics formal politics: NRIs abroad have noted, half-joking, that as foreign citizens they cannot formally join it, echoing the real bar on foreign nationals holding membership in Indian parties.



As the movement took shape, it revealed a post-ideological character: shared generational grievances-jobs, broken promises, a state that no longer works for its youth-held the coalition together rather than a shared ideology. CJP made Ambedkar its icon and *azadi* its chant, even as it also embraced *Bharat Mata ki Jai*, *Vande Mataram*, and *Inquilab Zindabad* as slogans. Its resolve to avoid platforming divisive issues, such as Umar Khalid's incarceration, at both Delhi and Berlin protest sites can be read as pragmatic and strategic—a way to pre-empt the wrath and subversive tactics the present government has deployed before, from the JNU protests of 2015-16 to the [Shaheen Bagh](#) protests of 2019-20 and the [farmers' protests](#) of 2020-21.

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Yet to designate the CJP movement as apolitical would be widely off the mark, as its loosely defined agenda is decidedly anti-right-wing. In fact, a more insidious form of resistance is taking root among many Gen Zs: an inter- and intra-generational political rupture. Both online and at the protest venues, the youth speak of challenging, arguing with and defying their Bharatiya Janata Party-supporting parents, friends, and colleagues. Many had never been political before; raised in comfortably middle-class households by enthusiastic

Modi supporters, they are now breaking ranks.

It is as much a generational verdict as a political one. Many of India's youth are leaving, or trying to leave, the country to study abroad or for better employment and life opportunities. Social media, combined with a rapidly growing Indian student population abroad, has simultaneously broadened the vista for Indian youth, who are suddenly aware of what higher education can look like elsewhere and what it delivers at home. While not clearly articulating it, Gen Zs understand that India's politics, education, and social fabric need an overhaul. Rather than being apolitical, their movement is a clear reflection of the politics of its time, echoing the widening gap between a government's failed promises to its youth and a generation's lived reality of foreclosed opportunities in their own country.

They are also aware of the chokehold the Indian government has on its media, evident in chants of '*godi media go back*' and '*godi media hai hai*' - *godi*, literally 'lap', used derisively for a media seen as sitting obediently in the government's lap. The protesters' stance during the first wave was clear: they were fed up with the tightly controlled television broadcasts that have shaped their parents' and grandparents' worldview.

Unsurprisingly, another form of politics - that of care and solidarity - was also crucial to this movement. Students at the protest site and online repeatedly pointed out that the government's only real interest was 'Hindu-Muslim' issues, flatly repudiating the BJP's communally divisive politics of hate. Critics were quick to ask how 'lakhs' were being spent keeping the Jantar Mantar site functioning; CJP supporters pointed instead to the Sikh and Muslim volunteers who provided food and supplies as a sign of *bhaichara*, as protesters sat through the scorching Delhi heat.

Discontent as Basis

Cockroach chapters have sprung up far and wide, including one in Berlin, where I am doing fieldwork. There, a recent graduate of a private Indian university called himself a cockroach, surviving in the city by working in the gig economy as a delivery rider. He is away from his family only because 'noone [Indian youth] wants to stay in India' - a sentiment that shows how the idea of Indian education's failure reverberates across borders. But while education is the primary target, reading the CJP as only a higher-education movement, concerned merely with the NEET paper leak or the CBSE evaluation irregularities that followed it, would misrecognise a deeper, amoeba-like discontent - expansive and continuously expanding.



For successive generations of middle-class students, competitive exams like the JEE functioned as an impersonal gatekeeper of a better future, one that claimed, at least in principle, to be indifferent to inherited privilege. But this generation of upper-caste, middle-class youth now faces unprecedented competition, as more students than ever - many of them first-generation learners - have entered higher education, only to realise that the promise was never meant for them in the first place. Beneath the anger directed at one compromised exam lies a more gradual recognition: that a degree no longer reliably converts into employment, a promise India made to its youth after the liberalisation and privatisation of higher education.

The employment data reflect this discontent succinctly. An Azim Premji University [report](#) found that nearly 40% of graduates under 25 are unemployed, noting that "the rapid expansion in the number of graduates has not been matched by commensurate growth in graduate employment" (18). United in their bleak view of the future, Gen Zs found in the CJP a language and platform for their grievances - a precarity that finds its most exact symbolic expression in the very name the movement chose for itself.

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The caste and class profile of CJP's supporters matters and complicates any story of a [unified](#) Gen Z uprising. Talking to 24-year-old Saheli (name changed) in Berlin, I learned that she and her friends root for CJP even when they encounter pro-BJP supporters among their peers in the city; for her, distance brought clarity, showing her realities she would not have seen inside India's tightly controlled social media algorithm.

To dismiss the CJP as apolitical, or as representative only of urban, upwardly mobile, upper-caste students, would be to assume Gen Z identification is narrow and to presuppose that higher education as a pathway to social mobility concerns only a slim section of Indian society, a claim flatly contradicted by the aspirations of India's rapidly expanding middle class, for whom education remains the primary, often the only, route to a life of dignity and security.

They watched Dhaka and Kathmandu flare up on Instagram in real time in 2024 and 2025. Earlier cohorts of frustrated Indian youth had no reliable way to discover that their private disappointment was, in fact, a shared and structural condition. But Gen Z does. At a time when Hindutva has found peak support, particularly among earlier generations of Indians globally, Gen Z is "not doing *mandir masjid* politics or *vote chori* politics. This generation is asking questions, demanding accountability," as actor Prakash Raj told the [NewsMinute](#) during the CJP rally in Bengaluru's Freedom Park.

The CJP's first wave exhibited a distinctive organisational form: leaderless, coordinated less through party structure than through a distributed architecture of care, solidarity, and shared grievance. It was precisely this decentralised, platform-native structure that made the movement so difficult for the state to manage through its usual playbook of co-option or repression. Surya Kant's insult had handed India's youth an emotionally potent, meme-ready identity, around which they built a cross-ideological coalition rallying behind one narrow demand. Sonam Wangchuk's fast then supplied the moral gravitas the movement had, until then, lacked. CJP's reach can be gauged by how many smaller cities - from Azamgarh to Mangalore, Patna to Vijayawada - hosted protests, each one displaying the same youthful irreverence toward authority and disregard for hierarchy.

For most of this first cycle, the government's stance was one of non-wilful tolerance. Yet it did not shy away from heavy-handedness, including early attempts to thin the crowds at Jantar Mantar and the censoring of CJP's X account. After the *Sansad Chalo* call, the movement saw for the first time what state and police brutality could look like. Undeterred, the students showed a resolve the government had not anticipated, despite trying. In the end, Pradhan's resignation became a cheaper option than continued confrontation with a rebellious Gen Z, many of whom come from families that make up the BJP's own voter base.

CJP's Future

It would be a mistake to read the CJP as simply the latest sequel to India's long romance with anti-corruption politics. When Anna Hazare sat at Ramlila Maidan in 2011, corruption meant something fairly concrete: bribery, red tape, and bureaucratic apathy. The fix on offer was institutional - a powerful ombudsman, the Jan Lokpal - fastened onto an otherwise functioning state. Gen Z differs in that it does not believe the state is functioning at all. The BJP, inevitably, is the implicit target not because the CJP is secretly a Congress or AAP front - as some BJP figures have suggested (although Dipke was, in the past, a social media volunteer for the Aam Aadmi Party) - but because the BJP is the only government most of this generation has ever known.

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Even as CJP supporters wound down their protest at Jantar Mantar, their counterparts at Mumbai's Shivaji Park continued their sit-ins. Already, an E20 Janata Party has formed online to oppose ethanol blending in petrol. CJP may not survive in its current form, but its durability as an institution was never really the point. What it has revealed is that a generation raised inside a broken system has finally found a shared language for its anger - one that travels across borders faster than any government's intention to block it.

What CJP's first wave has shown is that it refuses to fit old categories: apolitical versus political, satire versus protest, virtual versus physical, domestic versus diasporic. This is exactly what makes it a bellwether for how young Indians will do politics going forward. Whether the CJP formalises into a political party, as some of its own supporters already want, or dissolves back into the meme culture that produced it, is almost beside the point. Gen Z has learned that a leaderless, satirical party can become a political pressure group, and that a digital-native movement can extract concessions from a government otherwise unmoved by protest. If the next paper leaks, or the next promise breaks, they now know they can go back onto the streets - they need only a name to rally under, or a faux party to organise around. And cockroaches, as they like to remind everyone, are notoriously hard to get rid of.

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