

## Sanitising the Campus Politics

Campus elections have traditionally been a substantially risky proposition and they are increasingly becoming so with our university and college campuses often presenting a scene for sanguinary violence and internecine conflicts, much to the chagrin of high ideals and ethos of human values they represent. The Supreme Court's acceptance of the Lyngdoh Committee's recommendations on student union elections on the 21st of September, therefore, was a watershed development towards cleansing campuses. These recommendations relate to reforming the student union polls involving a slew of measures as recommended by the Lyngdoh Committee in its report to the court. In sum, these include the fixing of the age-limit of candidates at 25 years (28 years for research scholars), maximum permissible expenditure of Rs 5,000 by a candidate, ban on receiving political donations, submission of audited accounts by candidates to the college/ university authorities within two weeks of declaration of results, etc.

On the face of it, the apex court's acceptance of the recommendations sets the ground rules for campus elections and ought to bring about a positive improvement in the process. The unions have been barred from accepting funds from political parties, a stipulation that is said to have irked some of the political parties. The other major recommendation is that the ceiling on expenditure has been fixed at Rs 5,000 per candidate. These measures ought to make internal auditing mandatory if only to keep tabs on spending and receipt of party funds.

In a word, the responsibility of the college/ university authorities increases considerably. No longer can they afford to remain indifferent and allow matters to drift, or wink at the irregularities of the college union that owes allegiance to a dominant political party. Other grey areas have also been taken care of by fixing age limits on the contestants and by making 75 per cent classroom attendance mandatory for contesting. Hopefully, this should spare all campuses from such aberrations as highlighted by the Lyngdoh committee—a 54-year-old contesting the Allahabad University election with his 22 year old son leading the campaign.

The question is whether such prescriptions will serve as judicious means to the end. Obviously, much depends on the proper implementation of the measures. In the absence

of a regulatory body, there is little reason to believe that the rules will be adhered to with any strictness within the campus. There is also no clear directive on the supervision of the electoral process. The onus rests hugely on college and university authorities across the country to ensure that the recommendations are faithfully implemented. . Will teachers be expected to continue risking their necks in overseeing the process? Any lapse on that score will negate the purpose of the measures suggested.

Even though the recommendations are in the main intended to curb political influence, there is scope yet for parties across the spectrum to play footsie with the student leaders and make the atmosphere volatile at election time. But one feels that even though beyond-a-point political interference ought not to be there in student politics inside the campus, but in a democracy like ours, a modicum of the same should not only be resented but is also advisable. After all, the student politics is actually the nursery of the broader and larger politics at regional and national level and hence, a healthy link with the active politics and politicians outside the campus is advisable.

Also, generally it has been seen that during many of these student union polls take the hue of an assembly or parliamentary poll with all that police and other arrangements for keeping law and order in the campus. One fails to understand why should an innocuous student union polls should be allowed to become so. One has seen the massive police bandobast (read arrangements) during the student union polls in Delhi University (DU) because of the fact that a victory in DU elections has a lot of symbolism attached to it and also because of the massive number of students it involves. But on the other hand, the student union elections at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) are such a treat to watch.

At JNU, the student union polls are conducted peacefully and are actually an intellectuals' delight where the entire student union polls are conducted by the students themselves under the stewardship of an Election Commission chaired and peopled by the students themselves and without the shadow of police arrangement looming over the campus. Like the elections in many countries include the one in the United States of America, the student union elections at every level are preceded by an open intellectual debate among the candidates in front of all the constituent student voters and are also accompanied by peaceful campus procession and door-to-door campaign. Dashed with all the ingredients of an election, the JNUSU (JNU Student Union) polls are something that campuses across the country can learn a lesson from.

It is more than eight years since the Lyngdoh Committee presented its report, but the fact remains that the same still remains to be followed in majority of our colleges and universities even though the same has been implemented in the premier universities in the national capital. But the political parties ruling most of the constituent Indian states still remain reluctant to accept these recommendations as they fear losing political control of these institutions. But our political class needs to appreciate the fact that we cannot allow our campuses, the seats of higher learning, to continue grovelling in the dust because of seamier student politics as has been experienced over the years.

After all, a student union election is supposed to be a nursery from where candidates for local, regional and national legislatures are usually drafted. So, if these elections become a

happy stomping ground for negative politics, then one can only imagine the kind of leaders who may be churned out of this campus politics. One only hopes that Supreme Courts' intervention is accepted in the right spirit and the Lyngdoh Committee recommendations are implemented in the right earnest. If this happens, the same shall go a long way in sanitising campus politics and shall also have positive implications for our larger provincial and national politics as well.

### **Salient Points**

- The Supreme Court's acceptance of the Lyngdoh Committee's recommendations on student union elections was a watershed development towards cleansing campuses.
- The responsibility of the college/ university authorities increases considerably.
- The grey areas have also been taken care of by fixing age limits on the contestants and by making 75 per cent classroom attendance mandatory for contesting.
- In the absence of a regulatory body, there is little reason to believe that the rules will be adhered to with any strictness within the campus.
- One feels that even though beyond-a-point political interference ought not to be there in student politics.
- The student politics is actually the nursery of the broader and larger politics at regional and national level and hence, a healthy link with the active politics and politicians outside the campus is advisable.
- The political parties ruling most of the constituent Indian states still remain reluctant to accept these recommendations as they fear losing political control of these institutions.

### **Glossary**

**Sanguinary:** bloody

**Footsie:** the act of flirting or sharing a surreptitious intimacy