

## **STUDENTS UNION IN NATION BUILDING**

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### **Abstract**

The emergence of youth as a distinct political class in India is conspicuous in this newly founded nations. The organized student movements in India have played a major role in our independence struggle. A student union is a combination of both associational and institutional interest group, like a trade union. In this paper a detailed study will be conducted on the relevance and role of the student union. The background and future aspirations of the students who are involved in the student unions is analyzed. Both the relevance and role of the student union in the universities and society is studied. Data is recorded through primary sources like interview schedule with both structured and unstructured questions and detailed discussions with the respondents. The study is done on 100 students from the H.N.B.Garhwal, University, Srinagar,Uttarakhand. The study revealed that the student union has worked not only for the students but also for the welfare of the society and hence its relevance increases in the present day.

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## Introduction

India, the second most populous country in the world is spread over 32, 87, 263 sq. kilometer. This geographically and ethnically vast nation is bestowed with beautiful lofty Himalayas, natural vegetation, rich heritage, vast sea line, deserts, vivid flora and fauna. The country has one of the longest rivers in the world and the most fertile lands called the Ganga plains. It has an ancient history of university based education known worldwide for its high quality discipline education system. These ancient universities are well known for their culture and ethnicity, be it Taxila, Vikramshila, Nalanda etc. later as history grew, in the medieval history of education system, educational centers also grew up in large numbers. The prime educational centers of that time were Delhi, Lahore, Ajmer, Rampur, Bidar and Jaunpur. Under the British rule, three universities were formed in 1857 under Charles Wood Dispatch. They were Bombay, Madras and Calcutta Universities.

In the modern education system of India, the university system took a turn and brought new changes in the education and university system per se. The universities in India are divided into 4 main categories: Central University, State University, Deemed University, and private University. The numbers of universities have increased tremendously since India achieved independence. In these universities, youth play an active role in creating powerful leaders of future. As it is said, that student power is a nation's power. This student power has brought revolutionary changes in the society through their acrimonious resentments.

The history is full of such incidents where student politics have changed a country's social, economical and political frame. Student power was formed during Indian national movement on the call of M. K. Gandhi, S. C. Bose, and J. P. Narayan. The 1905 Swadeshi Movement had a broad scope due to the involvement of young students. The civil disobedience movement also witnessed the spark of the student political power. Similarly, Assam students united against the Cunningham Circular. The students of Kashi Hindu University came forward as powerful equipment in the Quit India Movement. In the India political history; two movements are the landmark to symbolize the power of student union. One is the J. P. movement of 1974 and the other is the Assam student's movement, which has made a mark in the society.

In India, Student Movements have more than 150 years of history. In 1848 Dadabhai Navaraji founded 'The student's scientific and historic society, as a forum for discussion. This can be considered to be beginning of student movements in India. In this period, the part of the struggle students questioned education system itself. There was a full commitment among students to work for the freedom of the country. The Indian independence provided a turning point of the student movements in India. There was a marked transformation of perspective in the leadership of the movements led by the students. In place of the mass student organizations, many local ad-hoc groups have emerged. The broader ideological questions are kept aside and the local political conflicts have taken the front seat. The agitations on university issues are more controlled by the influential political class.

After the Indian independence i.e. the post independence era the power of the youth increased manifolds and the students realized their power that can change the decisions which are not in their favor. This resulted into changes in student centric issues like academic freedom, admission policies and plans, welfare of the students at large. These changes gave rise to the birth of many student unions with varied political ideologies.

The ills of the politics in our country have affected the higher education of the country. Framing of policies for education often faces the color of the ruling party. The syllabus in schools and colleges gets transformed to depict the best interest of the ruling political party. This strengthens the power of the student unions attached to a particular political party. Clashes among the student union, boycott, of the classes, violence in student elections, displaying muscle power all these disruptions affect the studies. Time and again demands have been raised to ban the student union but it would be unconstitutional. The constitution of India gives equal right to everyone to assemble and form associations. Taking away this right would hamper the fundamental rights of individuals and in this case student union.

The Supreme Court in this issue ordered the government to form a committee to look into the issue. Following the order, a committee was constituted by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development, chaired by J. M. Lyngdoh. The committee recommended that the universities and colleges throughout the country must conduct student elections for a better representation of

students. These elections may be conducted in a manner that conform the standard prescribed by the committee.

### **Important Recommendations of Lyngdoh Committee**

- The political parties must be completely dissociated from the student elections and representation of students.
- The entire process of the election i.e. from the day of filing up the nomination and declaration of the results should be completed in a time period of 10 days and must not exceed more than that.
- Elections must take place every year and it should be held between 6 to 8 weeks once the academic session has commenced.
- The committee also recommended on the age limit to contest the elections. A student pursuing his/her graduation must be between 17 to 22 age. The committee recommended relaxing the age for professional colleges where the courses take more than 4 years. For the post graduate students, the maximum age limit set by the committee is 24- 25 years to contest a election. For the students who are pursuing Ph. D, 28 years was found appropriate to contest the election.
- The maximum expenditure per candidate shall not exceed Rs.5000/-

### **Overview of Literature**

The under mentioned literature has been consulted for the subject.

1. **Pattnaik (1982)** studies in detail the student politics in JNU as a case study. He classifies student organizations as left or right which is a result of ideological basis of politics. Students political preferences were investigated with various criteria as personality of the candidate, caste/religion, political ideology. A relationship was determined between student's party affiliation and political interests and political participation.
2. **Lyngdoh Committee (2006)** was constituted by the order of the Supreme Court to examine and recommend about certain aspects of the student body and student union elections conducted in universities, colleges and institutions of higher education across India. Among the key recommendations of the committee is the disassociation of student elections and student representation from political parties. Age of the candidate is also limited which is between the

ages of 17 and 22 for under-graduate and 24-25 years for post graduate students for contesting elections.

3. **Bhatnagar (2013)** finds out that there is a decline emphasis in education among the new breed of student leaders, the academic performance is no longer treated as the cornerstone of success. The student leaders due to this are not able to convert into national leaders as they are unable to connect well with the people, understand their problems and solutions. The article further adds that politics of region, women power dominated the entire 90s.

4. **Mukherji (2013)** examines the politicization of student union in India. She states that major political parties as Congress, BJP and CPI (M) continue to use student unions to establish their stronghold across the campuses all over the country. This has resulted the complete ban on the politicization of student union by best educational institutions in the country like the IITs and IIMs.

5. **Vijetha (2013)** in her article about ex-presidents of Delhi University Students Union (DUSU) finds out the former's dis-contentment regarding the recommendations of the Lyngdoh Committee. The ex-presidents opined that the clauses in the recommendations, as a student who has once contested for elections cannot contest again and age criteria resulted in the lower number of students sticking with the party and eventually becoming difficult in creating good leaders.

6. **Ajmal (2014)** studies the student activism right from its beginning in Young Bengal Movement in the early nineteenth century to 2007 when the Supreme Court judgment resulted 27 percent OBC reservation.

7. **Das (2014)** explains in detail about the meaning of the term governance, higher education and student's participation. He states that the traditional idea of student as a passive receptor is no longer tenable in the present world. Instead there is a growing reorganization of students as a responsible stakeholder in the arena of higher education. He further asserted that student union on the one hand ensures participation of students in governance while on the other hand provides the students to select or elect among themselves to administer the governance of institution to they are enrolled.

8. **Munshi (2014)** revisits the dynamics of student politics from a political economic perspective using game theory. The paper limits itself with a particular variety of campus politics where larger political parties play a major and decisive role in determining campus outcomes.

9. **Sen (2014)** in her paper examines the pros and cons of student union. The paper studies in brief the Lyngdoh Committee formed for eradicating evils which has resulted in universities and colleges due to the formation of the student union.
10. **Basu (2015)** reports that University Grants Commission (UGC) has asked to all universities to implement the Lyngdoh Committee Report. The premier educational body has sought a report by September 18 on conducting elections to student bodies. The author reports on the backdrop of Maharashtra, where student union elections were banned in early 90s due to violent incidents and law and order problems.
11. **Sharma and Bhaumik (2017)** questions the existence of politics without violence in Delhi university. The paper voiced the views of the students that violence is unjustified and unacceptable but the ban on student politics is not the solution to curb violent protest. The students opined that the right to protest can't be taken out from them.
12. **The Hindu (2017)** reports that the Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal is all geared up to change the very nature of student union in West Bengal. It states that the state which has a long history of student politics and produced not only ministers and members of parliament but also chief ministers. As per the proposals the principal or college leader will hold the post of president of student union, likewise the college or university teacher will be the treasurer of the student union body.

### **Study Area**

Uttarakhand is a state located in the northern part of India. Known for its natural beauty, it was carved out of Himalayan and adjoining districts of Uttar Pradesh on Ninth November 2000, becoming the 27<sup>th</sup> state of the Republic of India. The University town Srinagar-Garhwal [30 13'-13'30" North Latitude and 78 45'-47'4" East Longitude] is situated on the bank of river Alaknanda in the Lesser Himalaya, right in the heart of Garhwal region, enroute to the world famous Holy shrines of Badrinath and Kedarnath. The town is known as an education hub of the Garhwal region. People from nearby villages and towns come to Srinagar for higher studies. The town has many educational institutes like the National Institute of Technology, H. N. B. Garhwal Central University, a state sponsored medical college, one ITI, one polytechnic institute, several government degree colleges, and many CBSE and ICSE affiliated schools. As a result of people's movement, Garhwal University was established in December 1973, under the provision of U.P.

Universities Act, at Srinagar (Garhwal). The University was rechristened as Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University in 1989, to mark respect to Late Sri Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna. The status of the HNB Garhwal University has been upgraded to a Central University on 15 January, 2009.

### **Aims and /or Objectives**

The objectives of the present study are to evaluate the overall impacts of student union elections on the educational, political and social needs of the students of the state of Uttarakhand. Further the present research study focus on the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the role of student union in the university and society per se.
2. To examine the relevance of student union in the university.
3. To study gender parity and socio-economical conditions of the students involved in student unions.
4. To study the extent at which the student union has been responsible for fulfillment of the needs of the students with reference to equitable, affordable, and employment oriented education and infrastructural development in the university.
5. To check whether student unions has been revitalizing the political needs of the students.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of the study includes the detailed study of student union, viz. its history, vision, goals, strategies and outcomes. Further the students' union elections will be studied with particular reference to the Garhwal Central University in the state of Uttarakhand.

### **Scope and Methodology**

The study was carried out in both the campuses i.e. the Birla campus and Chauras campus of the central university of the state viz., HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar, Uttarakhand. It was not possible to carry out the study in all the universities and colleges of Uttarakhand due to the limited resources and time constraints at the disposal of the researcher. The exact number of students in student politics cannot be collected as there is no such data in the university and students join and leave the union with a formal process.

### **Sample of the Study**

The sample constituted of 100 students (respondents), both male and female, who are connected to the active student unions. Stratified Sampling would be used to collect the data, followed by systematic or random sampling.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

The data for the present study was collected with the help of primary as well as secondary sources. The primary source consists of interviewing the respondents with the help of interview schedule, which include both structured as well as unstructured questions related to the different aspects of the research problem. The secondary data was collected with the help of records, reports, books, magazines, newspapers, articles and website etc. Besides this, observation method will also be used by the researcher in order to have a close view of the phenomenon so as to collect some additional information.

### **Analysis and Interpretation of the Data**

After the process of data collection was over, the obtained data was arranged in proper order to analyze it. The data is subjected to statistical operation, starting from coding, scoring, tabulation and writing of the research report. In order to make data meaningful, the necessary tables were made. Correlation- Coefficient method and percentage method is used as a statistical tool to analyze the data. The data was analyzed and interpreted. In the last, the conclusions were drawn from the whole field work analysis.

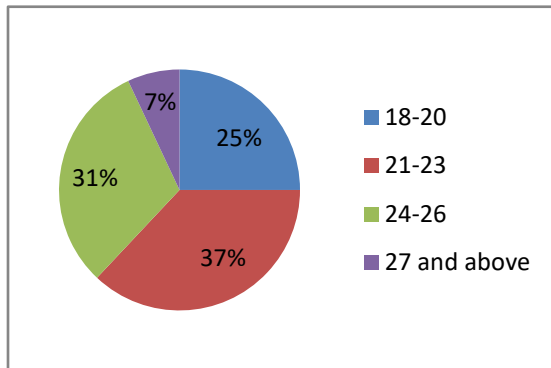
### **Relevance of the Research**

The study will be quite relevant with respect to having an in depth study of Student Union in the university. The impacts of Student Union in the university and its role in social engineering will be investigated. This will add to the theoretical study of education in the state plus suggestions to improve the Student Union will be helpful in achieving the education needs of the students in an effective manner.



## Data Analysis

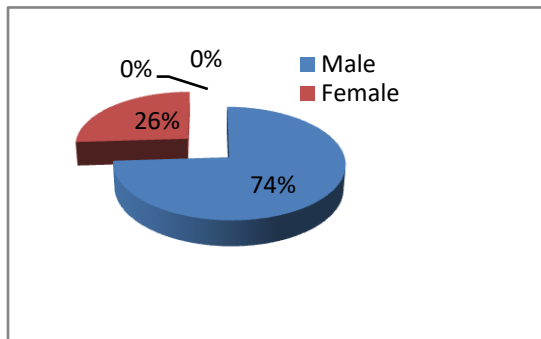
### Age of the respondents



The study has highlighted the age factor that is one of the important aspects in the student union. It was found in the study that most of the students (37%) who are part of the union are between 21-23 age group. 31% students are between 24 to 26 years. A minimum of 7% students are above 27 years. It is

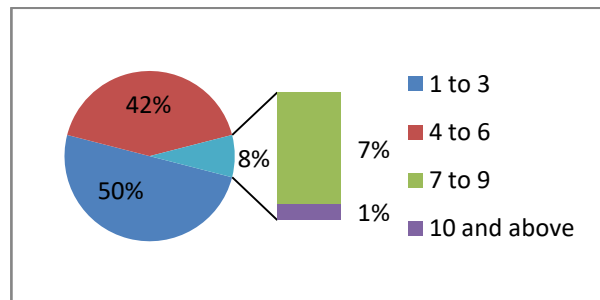
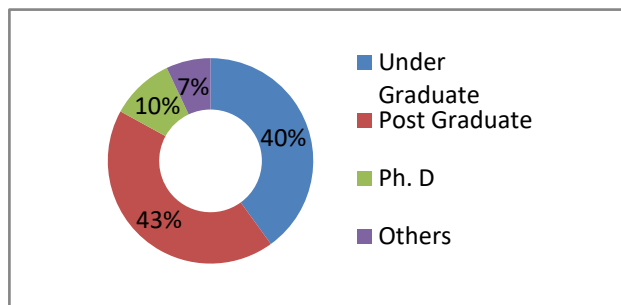
because they are from the major national level

### Sex of the respondents and number of female members in the respondent's party/group



parties and consider it as a stepping stone of their career in politics. Female participation in the national/state level and even in the university level has always been lower to that of the male members. There were only 26% female members who have shown interest in the student union. Whereas there were 74% male who are directly or indirectly connected to the student union.

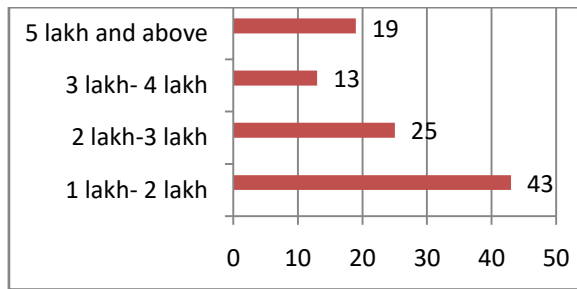
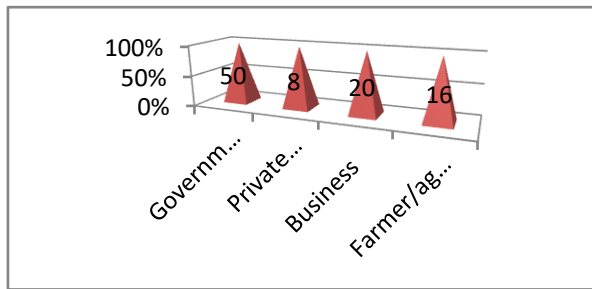
### Education of the respondents and number of years in the university



There have been discussions from Panchayats to parliament on the education of the politicians but here in the university elections the picture is little different. 43% students are pursuing their post graduation and basically the art subjects. 40% students are in the graduation level. A very few go up to the doctorate level. 7% students have enrolled themselves in diploma and other vocational courses.

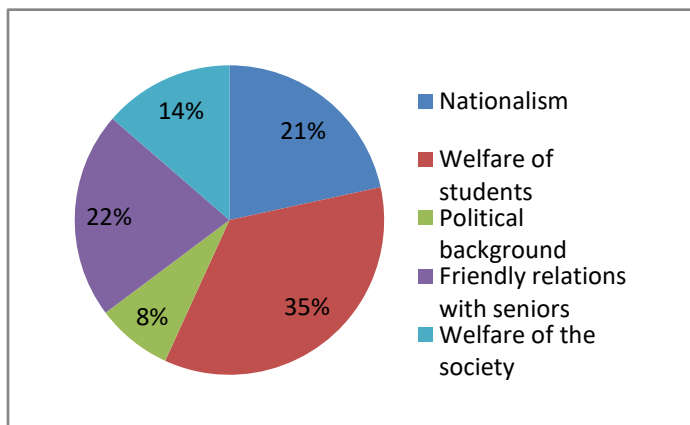
Number of years in the university and education level is shown to understand that there are students who spend years in the university just to remain in student union. There are also respondents who have spent 10 years or more in the university. A maximum of 50% students are new in the union and are active for 1 to 3 years. 7% students have given 7 to 9 years of their adulthood in student politics.

### Economic background of the respondents



Economic strength plays an essential role for motivating the student union to contest an election. It was mentioned by a respondent that around 3 to 4 lakh of expense is usual in the student union elections. It was found that most of the active leaders and members have parents from government sector (50%). A few respondents (16%) were from families dependent on agriculture.

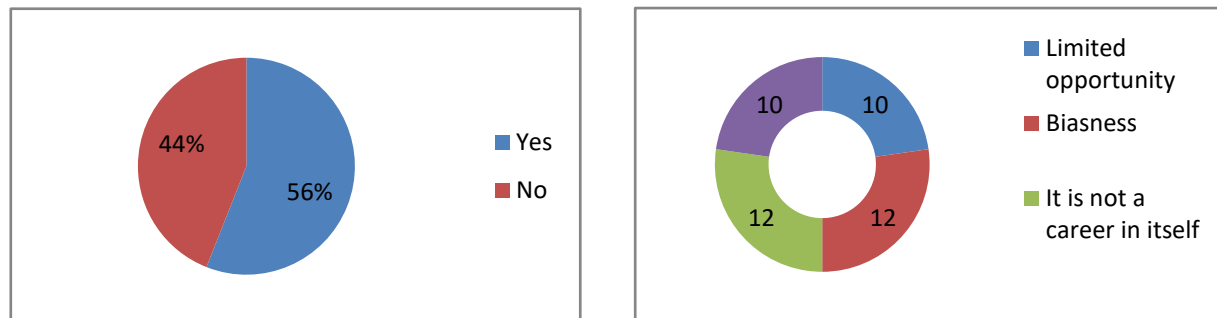
In the second graph the yearly income of the family of the respondent is shown. Maximum students i.e. 43% are from the families whose annual income is between 1 to 2 lakh. 19% students belong to families with annual income more than 5 lakhs. These are students who have a business family or are from big cities.



### Objectives behind joining the party/group

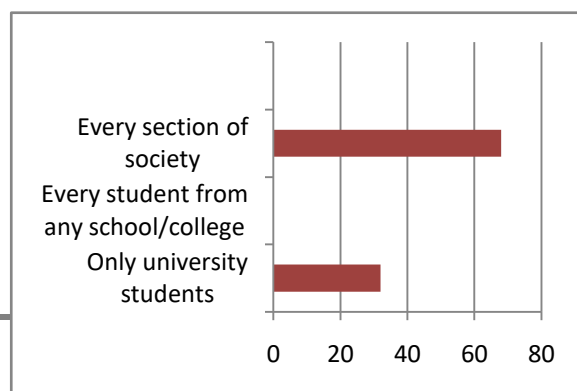
The respondents believe that student union is a forum through which the students can solve the problems in the education system. 35% students joined to work for the welfare of the students. A feeling of nationalism is also mentioned by 21% respondents. As much as 22% students think that to maintain cordial relations with the seniors can help them in the university to get their work done easily. Only 8% students belong to families with political background.

### **National/state level representation by previous members from respondent's party/group and reasons behind not reaching the higher level**



It is a general assumption that student union elections are a platform for the students who want to make their career in national or state level politics. This is clear with the views provided by the students. 56% students said that yes, members of their parties have reached at national or state level. Whereas, there was also a large number of students who feel that since none of the members reached up to the national or state level, it finishes in the university only and later they have to find a different job opportunity. Out of the 44 students who said that none of the student reached up to national or state level, they gave the following reasons. 12 students said they have faced biasness at the higher levels. A similar number of students feel that it is not a career in itself therefore they remain a part of student union till they finish off their studies and look for other opportunities. Limited opportunity is another reason of not reaching up to the formal political stage.

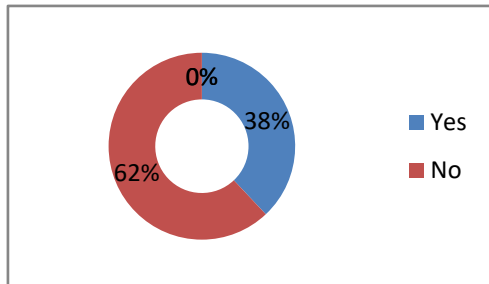
### **Scope of welfare oriented programs**



When asked about the scope of the student union, most of the students, 68%, said that they work for the entire society and not just the university or colleges. Whereas 32% students have formed

new groups and therefore work only in the university and for the students of the university

### Major movements of the parties/group that have created a revolution in the state/nation.



To study the intensity of the movements started by the student union of Srinagar, it was found that a few major groups have started movements which were recognized by the students throughout the nation/state. 38% students said that they started such movements. Occupy UGC, library movement, formation of the

new state Uttarakhand are the highly recognized movements' started by the student unions of Garhwal University. 62% respondents said that they have not yet started any such movement.

### Conclusion

After an in depth study of the student union of the H.N.B. Garhwal University student unions and their role in the education system and society it was found that the student union since is an age old concept has strong roots in the university set up. Every year elections take place for various posts which covers several factors like education, administration, economy, regionalism, ideology, and gender. Following are the findings:

- 1) It was found that young students in their early adulthood are active in student union because recognition in the university and society makes them feel important. At this age students come in contact with each other and create an effective peer group. Creating a bigger social circle is also a priority of the young generation that makes them enter into the student union. Students at this age feel the need of autonomy and need of power that they seek in student union.
- 2) In the study it was found that there are only a few girls as compared to the boys. As per the male respondents, they do not get female participants who actively join the union due to various reasons. Economic constraint, family pressure, introvert attitude, less exposure are some of the reasons of less female participation.
- 3) While collecting data on the educational factor it was found that the numbers of students involved in student union are more from the post graduation level. To remain in the student

union the students study for more than 5 years. They go for multiple courses to remain in the university.

4) The students who actively take part in the student union are either from lower middle class or middle class. It was found in the study that students from the economically weaker section have experienced the ground level problems and they know the power a politician hold in the country. They know the social issues a citizen faces and hence they dedicate themselves to solve such issues.

5) The role of the student unions in the welfare oriented programs has reached up to the society. The parties/groups who have members more than a thousand are reaching the common mass other than the university students. It was observed in the study that the students first make a firm base in the university and then cover the entire society of a particular region. When asked about the issues solved by them. The respondents mentioned that they have solved the water issues of the community in Srinagar. They have also banned liquor shops which were running illegally. The student unions like ABVP and AISA have actively participated and initiated infrastructural development work like construction of bridge, planting trees, facilitating bus services during the peak season etc. They have also mentioned that these groups provide free education to children from weaker section. In this way they play an active role in the society and get recognition.

Former vice chancellor of Manonmanium Sundaranar University V Vasanthi Devi said in an interview that a strong union can prevent abuse against student union. She further added that “A strong elected student body is the best immunity. The union must be able to give voice to individuals”. However, a fair representation of students must be taken care of by the union. It is a democratic student body that prevents harassments in colleges and universities. It was mentioned in a report by a committee headed by J. M. Lyngdoh.

After a detailed study it can be finally summed up that student unions have worked as a link between the administration and students. Therefore, its relevance is as important as any other democratic body. At the same time there needs to be a constitution framed by the student union so that the union itself does not break the laws and the elections are conducted in a peaceful manner within a limited budget. The recommendations of the Lyngdoh must be followed with

heart and soul. Many learned politicians today who represent the nation were once a part of student union like H. N. Bahuguna, Chandra Shekhar, Narendra Modi, Arun Jaitley, Mani Shankar Aiyer, Vijay Goel, are a few names who have worked for years in student union. Universities like Lucknow University, Allahabad University, the Banaras Hindu University and Delhi University are a few universities in India which have given several top leaders to the Indian politics. College politics provide a platform for the development of new leadership. One of the prime bases of democracy are the youth movements and the student politics.

### **Recommendations**

The university needs to bring some improvement in student union. Firstly, there has to be a formal forum for all the students who become a part of student union and who wish to be one. There should be meeting once in a month among all the groups to bring improvement in the university work process. A formal formation of the constitution and swearing-in-ceremony of the students can make them sincere towards their duties. Equal participation of females should be ensured. 50% seats should be reserved for the female candidates so that can have equal representation. And finally there has to be a redressal forum that can solve the disputes of the student union so that classes and heated discussions can be avoided in the campus that hampers the working atmosphere of the educational institutions.

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