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GOING BEYOND VIRAL OUTRAGE: ACCOUNTABILITY, EDUCATIONAL REFORMS AND PROTESTS

Megha Vasudeva

Introduction

The recent weeks have seen the emergence of another controversy in India that has grabbed the nation's attention not just for its significance but because it has brought to the fore certain deeper issues regarding the Indian education system and governance along with the politics of protests. While social media platforms have played an important role in the whole affair, there is always the risk that the discourse might turn out to be performative than productive. What is needed now is clarity the clarity of accountability, clarity of system failures and clarity of purpose behind public protests.

These aspects can be addressed in two key points – failure of accountability in governance and politicization of the movements.

Issue 1: The Problem of Accountability in Education Governance

Right at the crux of the issue stands a simple yet important question: who is accountable when things go wrong?

There have been numerous instances in India's education sector, which involved issues like the NEET exam paper leak. It would be naive to attribute all these to just one or two bad decisions. They indicate a fundamental flaw within the exam process and the security mechanism around it. In this context, accountability becomes the right of the leader, namely the Education Minister.

Leadership does not imply only accepting the successes but also accepting the failures. History is full of examples, and there is one especially relevant in the case of the Education Minister,

where Lal Bahadur Shastri resigned from the post of Railway Minister after a train accident even though he was not responsible.

Failure to accept accountability in such cases indicates that nothing can really stop this problem of exam papers leaking, which is quite disappointing from the point of view of the students' preparation.

But this problem runs much deeper than paper-based leaks. The reality is more complex.

Indian education system continues to push millions of its students towards a very select few careers like medicine, engineering, law and management. This tunnel vision is perpetuated by societal pressures, family pressure and lack of knowledge of other viable careers.

There are serious repercussions:

- Stiff competition – millions vie for a very limited number of government seats, particularly in medical colleges.
- Mental well-being issues – students suffer from burnouts, stress and depression as a result of continuous pressure.
- Lack of individualism – career choice is usually driven by external pressures instead of personal interests.

Another big issue that needs mentioning is the stigma associated with vocations. The careers in carpentry, welding and manufacturing, although crucial and economically feasible, continue to be considered less prestigious than the above-mentioned career options. And it's more of a society's fault than education system's.

Unless India learns to broaden its perception of success, such issues as examination malpractice will keep recurring.

Reasons behind the Existence of Paper Leaks

There is one more awkward truth that systemic corruption may thrive because of demand.

The existence of paper leaks does not rely only on administrative flaws but also on part of the population which can abuse these flaws. When people are ready to spend money in order to get admissions, meritocracy takes second place.

And there arises a vicious circle:

1. High competition results in desperation.
2. Desperation leads to demand for unfair means.
3. Demand supports underground systems which provide for leaks.

Problem 2: The Dilution of Movements and Concerns Related to CJP

It must be stated that although there is nothing wrong in terms of the demand of accountability in the field of education, but at the same time a problem does come when the movements become unfocused.

One of the major problems that has been pointed out in this regard is the politicization of the movement with its connection to the bigger issues, particularly through organizations such as Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP). It is not a problem that people do not have a right to protest, as this is quite important for democracy. However, this is the problem of diluting a specific issue into the agenda of many different socio-political issues.

Further, there is also a concern regarding who gets the chance to speak out when there are protests of this kind. According to some people, some of the speakers that come up in these protests have a record of having held beliefs or taken actions that seem to be against the interests of the nation.

Whether or not this assumption is true, there seems to be an element of doubt as far as the nature of the protest itself is concerned.

Risk of Mass Protests

The other key factor to consider here is the form of protests itself.

Protests are critical tools of democracy, but mass-scale protests can often:

- Become hijacked by people with their own agenda
- Lose control and turn into unrest
- Become a spectacle rather than a dialogue

In those circumstances, education reform, the actual problem, can become less significant as compared to political narratives and media coverage of this issue. This does not mean that there should be no protests; what it means is that it is necessary to act strategically, professionally, and focused rather than trying to achieve everything through emotions.

Social Media – Friend or Foe?

The role of social media in all this conversation should not be overlooked.

Today, media platforms prioritize viral content, outrage, and strong emotions over discussions. As a consequence of this:

- Issues become simplified and distorted
- The public opinion becomes polarized
- The actual activist efforts are forgotten in favor of performative actions

The problem is that people start dealing with issues as trends, not with their responsibility. They support causes just to post about it.

Conclusion: The Urgency of Focus, Change, and Critical Thinking

The current scenario emphasizes an important point – intentionality does matter, but direction is equally, if not more, important.

There is no doubt that India's education system is in need of change. Students need a system that is just, transparent, and in line with their career goals. The government needs to show accountability in both intent and action.

But, at the same time, any movement in the public realm needs to stick to its agenda. Diving into new areas or connecting with other voices might end up compromising the movement itself.

In addition, as citizens, we also need to show critical thinking. Every trending story may not necessarily have the complete truth in it, nor does every movement always hold true to its intentions.

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