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Political Instability and Its Influence on Higher Education: A Study of Students' Perceptions in Manipur University

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Abstract

Higher education is one of the major indicators of development in today's society. That is why countries around the globe are giving a premium emphasis on higher education, be it on its funding, enrolment, expansion, quality, etc., countries are giving heeds to everything for its development. Higher education in India has also made a remarkable change since Independence. But, today, due to many factors in our national life such as socio-economic factors, political factors or environmental factors, our educational institutions are getting affected to a great extent. Besides these factors, higher education in the country also faces many challenges and issues. Some of these major challenges and issues are related to its growth, quantity, quality, disparities between rural-urban, male-female disparity, regional disparity, fast trending process of privatization in higher education institutes, impact of globalization on higher education, etc. Manipur is not an exception to all such phenomena. Manipur remains as one of the most unstable States in the entire North-Eastern States of India with varying degrees of extremist activities happening in the State. Terms like bandhs, strikes, economic blockades, etc. needs no special description for any people residing in Manipur. In the recent years, an uncountable number of bandhs, general strikes, economic blockades, etc. have taken place in the State. Every aspect of life gets affected due to these factors. Education sector is one among the most affected one. The present study thus attempts to discuss some of the major influences of political instability on higher education in the State of Manipur.

Keywords: *Higher education, Manipur, bandhs, strikes, economic blockades.*

Introduction: Education has often been seen as a fundamentally optimistic human endeavour characterized by aspirations for progress and betterment. It is understood by many to be a means of overcoming handicaps, achieving greater equality and acquiring wealth and social status. Education is something that is perceived by many as a place where children can develop according to their unique needs and potential. It is also perceived as one of the best means to achieve greater social equality (Reddy, 2016). The countries across the world are, therefore, placing a premium on higher education (Bhoite, 2012).

Higher education refers to “education beyond Secondary school level, that is, viewed as intellectually more rigorous and sophisticated than that of the secondary level, and that either leads to academic degree or is on a comparable intellectual level” (Concise Dictionary of Education, 1982). According to Dictionary of Education (1989), higher education refers to tertiary education of an academic level higher than that attainment on completion of a full secondary education. Higher education in India stands for college or university education. The education may be of the nature of General, Vocational, Professional or Technical. According to Devi (1995), higher education refers to education in post higher secondary institutions, colleges and universities. It is higher education, firstly because it constitutes the topmost stages of formal education and more importantly, because it is concerned with process in the more advanced phases of human learning.

In India, the University Grants Commission has made mandatory the introduction of grading system and directed the universities to standardise their examinations and follow the pattern of semester system in their curriculum. Also, at present, in India, the universities have the system of working in collaboration with other universities of the world to take up joint research projects in various fields, especially in health, science, pharmacy, etc. Various universities have also taken up the initiatives of student exchange programme in order to promote good education among different countries of the world to further relations with such countries.

The State of Manipur: Since Manipur got its Statehood on 21st January 1972, the small land-locked State today is inhabited by distinct groups of people which are Meitei, Naga, Kuki, Pangal (Manipuri muslims) and various other ethnic groups which speaks all different dialects. There are 29 dialects spoken in Manipur. The State is divided mainly into two parts: plain or valley areas and the hill areas and it has 16 districts in all including the newly formed districts on December 9, 2016 through the Manipur government gazette notification. The hill areas consist of ten districts namely, Senapati, Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Chandel, Churachandpur, Tengnoupal, Pherzawl, Noney, Kamjong and Kangpokpi. The valley area comprises of six districts which are, Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, Bishempur, Jiribam and Kakching. The hills are inhabited mainly by the Kuki, Naga, Zomi and smaller tribal communities and the valley areas are inhabited mainly by the Meetei Sanamahism, Meetei Bhrahmin and Meetei Pangal (Meetei Muslim (Source: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manipur>). The State shares nearly half of its border with Myanmar in the east, Nagaland in the north, Assam in the west central and Mizoram in the west lower and south-western parts. The State of Manipur has an area of 22,327 sq. km which is 0.7 percent of the total land surface area of Indian Union.

In Manipur, the past few years has witnessed various extremist activities such as bandhs, strikes, economic blockades, in a continuous manner. The practice of calling bandhs, strikes, economic blockades, etc. has become so common in the State that every single person including small children are aware of such terms. And as a fact, everyone gets affected by them directly or indirectly. Education system is also one of the most affected

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sectors besides many sectors such as health, transport and communication facilities, power supply etc.

Significance of the Study: In the wake of the existing frequent political instability in Manipur, the researcher thought it relevant to study how far this frequent political instability such as bandhs, strikes, economic blockades, etc. are affecting education and higher education in particular in the State of Manipur.

Objective of the Study: To study influences of political instability on higher education as perceived by university students.

Methodology and Sample selected for the study: For the present study, 60 (30 male and 30 female) final year students doing University Masters' Courses in Manipur University were selected randomly. Manipur University was purposively selected as it has co-educational facilities and has all departments with a maximum number of students belonging to diverse ethnic groups.

Law and order breakdown in Manipur: Manipur is a conflict ridden State in the entire North-Eastern States of India as many incidents keep on happening in the State due to one or the other reasons. Any kind of unwanted activity taking place in the State affects society in a disastrous way, be it killing incidents, rape cases, molestation cases, fake encounters, fights for protecting State integrity, etc.

Table no- 1: Sex-wise distribution of students' views on breakdown of law and order

Sr. No.	Breakdown of law and order	University students		Total
		Male	Female	
1	Yes	17 (56.7%)	18 (60%)	35 (58.3%)
2	No	13 (43.3%)	12 (40%)	25 (41.6%)
	Total	30 (100.0%)	30 (100.0%)	60 (100.0%)

*Figures in brackets represent percentages.

As evident from Table-1, out of 60 university students, more than fifty percent of them, that is, 35(58.3%) felt that there was breakdown of law and order in the State of Manipur during their study periods. A relatively higher proportion of students, that is, 25(41.6%) did not feel so.

Influence of bandhs and strikes on higher education in Manipur: Bandhs are generally called by socio-political organisations such as civil societies, women's associations, etc. to protest against the government authorities when it failed to look into certain public issues or grievances. And it is supported mainly by youths and women voluntarily.

Table no- 2: Students' perceptions on influence of bandhs and strikes on higher education in Manipur

Sr. No.	Frequent bandhs and strikes have influence on higher education in Manipur	University students		Total
		Male	Female	
1	Yes	28 (93.3%)	23 (76.7%)	51 (85.0%)
2	No	2 (6.66%)	7 (23.3%)	9 (15.0%)
	Total	30 (100.0%)	30 (100.0%)	60 (100.0%)

*Figures in brackets represent percentages.

As indicated in Table-2, more than three-fourth of students, that is, 51(85%) felt that frequent bandhs and strikes in Manipur were having a great influence on higher education in Manipur. Table-2 clearly shows the poor state of higher education in Manipur due to frequent imposition of bandhs and strikes in the State. When bandhs and strikes takes place in the State, study environment often gets disturbed as bandhs supporters does not allow the schools, colleges to remain open. Moreover school vehicles' transportation totally comes to a halt as drivers fear for their lives and fear for destruction of their vehicles when agitated bandhs supporters pelt stones on them, which sometimes leads to serious injuries. There are many reported cases of casualties in relation to such incidents. Most importantly students themselves are not willing to go to schools, colleges, university, etc. and study due to fear of going outside their homes during such bandhs and strikes taking place in the society. Thus, students become mentally discouraged to pursue higher studies in the State. However, only a small proportion of students, that is, 9(15%) felt the opposite.

Influence of frequent economic blockades on higher education in Manipur: Owing to its topography, the State of Manipur is divided into two regions namely hills and valley. The valley lies in the centre of the State and is connected to the rest of the country by roads only through National Highways (NH-39 and NH-150, both renamed as NH-2 and NH-53 (renamed as NH-37). Among these three highways, NH-2 is the main one. This highway is the main life-line of Manipur, which connects the State to the outside world. On everyday basis, thousands of vehicles move along this route to bring essential commodities such as petrol, diesel, gas, medicines, food items, etc. from other parts of India. Besides this, this route also serves as a major form of transportation in the State. During the time of economic blockades or bandhs, the people residing in these areas take the maximum opportunities to exploit the rest of other people living in Manipur thus making them face the toughest time with many unrest situations. . Economic blockades are called indefinitely and the period ranges from a week to three months and above. Such blockades have disastrous effects in the entire State including education system. Thus economic blockades paralyzed normal life of every Manipuri people with scarcity of various essential supplies being a major concern apart from violence which is a common activity during such blockades.

Table no- 3: Perceptions of students on influence of frequent economic blockades on higher education in Manipur

Sr. No.	Frequent economic blockades have effect on higher education in Manipur	University students		Total
		Male	Female	
1	Yes	30 (100.0%)	25 (83.3%)	55 (91.7%)
2	No	0 (0.0%)	5 (16.7%)	5 (8.3%)
	Total	30 (100.0%)	30 (100.0%)	60 (100.0%)

*Figures in brackets represent percentages.

An examination of Table 3 revealed that more than three-fourth of students, that is, 55(91.7%) felt that frequent economic blockades taking place in Manipur were having an influence on higher education in the state. Interestingly, all the male students, that is, 30(100%) believed so as against girls' 5(16.7%). Also, when students were asked as to why they think that economic blockades were having an influence on higher education, they responded that such blockades were directly affecting their education to a great extent. Some of the reasons given by them were: prices of petrol, diesel, etc. soars up exorbitantly thus affecting their education as transport facilities also got affected. Timely availability of books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and many other reading materials were not possible for students to get. And even when students got such things, the prices were very high. Besides all these, stocks of all essential supplies such as LPG cylinders, food, oil, etc all shot up excessively as thousands of trucks carrying these essential supplies got stuck at the various parts of the highway and could not entry the valley area.

Students Migration from Manipur to other states of India for pursuing higher education: As a result of frequent political instability in the State, the most affected sector among various sectors is education, especially higher education. As all the educational institutions, be it schools, colleges, university, all remain close during the time of bandhs, general strikes, economic blockades, etc. Students cannot go to these institutions. Thus, affecting higher education adversely. Subsequently, stakeholders of higher education in Manipur think better to study outside the State as they cannot pursue higher studies peacefully without any disturbances.

Table no- 4: Perceptions on students' migration to other states for pursuing higher education

Sr. No.	Students migrate from Manipur to other states for pursuing higher education	University students		Total
		Male	Female	
1	Yes	30 (100.0%)	28 (93.3%)	58 (96.7%)

2	No	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.67%)	2 (3.3%)
	Total	30 (100.0%)	30 (100.0%)	60 (100.0%)

*Figures in brackets represent percentages.

A cursory look at Table 4 revealed that more than three-fourth of students, that is, 58(96.7%) felt that students from Manipur migrate to other States of India for pursuing higher education.

Further students were asked to rank the factors for students' migration from Manipur to other states of India for pursuing higher education according to their importance. The mean score value of these factors were calculated by assigning 1 to the most important factor ranked as first, a score of 2 to the factor ranked as second, a score of 3 to the factor ranked as third, a score of 4 to the factor ranked as fourth and a score of 5 to the factor ranked last. The lower the mean score value, the more important was the factor responsible for migration of students from Manipur to other states of India for pursuing higher studies.

Table no- 5: Reasons as to why students from Manipur migrate to other states of India

Sr. No.	Reasons for students migration from Manipur to other states for pursuing higher education	University students (mean score value)		Combined mean	Rank
		Male	Female		
1	Manipur lacks good quality educational institutions	2.36	1.89	2.12	1
2	Infrastructural facilities such as health, power supply, transport and communication, etc. are not found in abundance in Manipur	2.30	2.57	2.43	2
3	Manipur face frequent political instability	2.60	2.64	2.62	3
4	Due to drug addiction problem in Manipur family pressure to students are high	3.63	3.75	3.69	4
5	Influence from others who are already studying outside the state	3.83	4.14	3.98	5

As revealed in Table 5, university students have ranked “Manipur lacks good quality educational institutions” (2.12) as the most important factor for migration of students from Manipur to India for pursuing higher studies. This clearly indicates the lack of good and quality educational institutes in the State of Manipur. As a result of such shortage of good institutions in the State, students who are more concerned about their studies and careers have to migrate from Manipur to complete their studies without any disturbances “Infrastructural facilities such as health, power supply, transport and communication, etc.

are not found in abundance” (2.43) was ranked second by the students as this factor was another major problem face by the people of Manipur. “ Manipur face frequent political instability” (2.62) was yet another major issue which needs no special description in Manipur as frequent political instability due to one or the other reasons keeps on happening here in the State. Such kind of political turmoil often disturbs every activity, education sector being one of the most affected sectors as schools, colleges, etc. all remain close besides many offices, banks, hospitals, etc. “Due to drug addiction problem in Manipur family pressure to students are high” (3.69) was also another problem encountered by every people residing in Manipur especially by parents of youths. They always have this fear in their minds that their children would get drug addicts as drug addiction was also another big issue in itself which needs to be curbed completely from the society at present. So, parents ultimately thought it better to send their children far away from home to protect them from such drug addiction problems. Due to certain problems in the State of Manipur, students’ migration has become a part of culture among Manipuri students. One or more siblings from a family happen to migrate from Manipur to outside the State for pursuing higher studies every year. So, “Influence from others who are already studying outside the state” (3.98) was also a major reason for students’ migration.

Major Findings of the Study: The study conducted by the researcher found the present system of higher education in Manipur to be unsatisfactory by the university students as higher education was in a deplorable state. More than fifty percent of students, that is, 35(58.3%) felt that there was breakdown of law and order in the State of Manipur during their study periods. The poor state of higher education in Manipur due to frequent imposition of bandhs and strikes in the State is reflected by students’ perceptions as more than three-fourth of them, that is, 51(85%) felt so. Also, as revealed by more than three-fourth of students, that is, 55(91.7%) felt that frequent economic blockades taking place in Manipur were having an influence on higher education in the state. Interestingly, all the male students, that is, 30(100%) believed so. As a result of all these bandhs, strikes and economic blockades, more than three-fourth of students felt that students from Manipur migrate to other States of India for pursuing higher studies.

Conclusion: The study revealed the overall scenario of political instability in Manipur. Frequent bandhs, strikes and economic blockades have totally crippled the State today. Education, especially higher education sector got the most disastrous effects of all. The need of the hour is to control such political instability as these are having far-reaching consequences in every aspect. Also, due to such phenomenon, many students from Manipur migrate to other states of India to pursue higher studies, careers, jobs opportunities, etc. Students’ migration has brought “brain drain” directly in the long run and a heavy loss to State economy as well. The situation will get worsened in due course of time if timely actions are not taken up by the governments, both Centre as well as the State to control such political instability happening in the State of Manipur. Thus, higher education should be made a conflict-free zone. Let us not put the future of our younger generation at stake by spoiling the education system and let us therefore allow our students to develop to their full

Political Instability and Its Influence on Higher Education: A Study of Students'... Leishangthem Linda Devi potential and make them achieve as much in their life. As Altbach (2008) has also rightly said that “Higher education represents an essential part of a nation’s patrimony and a key to future prosperity”.

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