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Mapping Minds, Changing Maps: Comparative Understanding of the Role of Universities in Societies Undergoing Transformation

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Introduction

Higher education is an amazingly diverse field. On one hand, we have the historical varieties of higher education. Different systems had developed in the ancient worlds of China, India and Greece. Arab scholars in the first five hundred years of the founding of Islam developed knowledge systems in their specific institutional settings for the practice of knowledge. Today the west European university is almost a universal orthodoxy as the knowledge institution.

However, more and more knowledge is being created outside the university – in the research wings of financial institutions on one end and in the grassroots movements of NGOs and various social activist groups on another end of the spectrum. But even within the university system, the liberal arts university is taking a backseat to management schools and knowledge institutions that can further perceived and real economic objectives of the ‘powerstream’ (I do not want to use the word mainstream because it is a cluster of the power elites that determine direction and the bulk of the populations follow this ‘powerstream’). Another point worth bringing into the picture is the relation between knowledge and real life. There are some areas of life where a professional’s ability to gain respect and earn a decent livelihood is almost entirely dependent on the knowledge and degree acquired in the university system and there are professions where the university system’s influence is rather small. It is hard to imagine a self-taught doctor who has learnt to do neuro-surgery without having gone to a medical school. On the other hand, I am yet to come across an accomplished journalist who did a degree in journalism and it is almost inconceivable to think of a politician who studied politics in university.

The role of higher education also varies enormously between innovative societies and imitative ones. The brightest minds of the science and technology labs in the Ivy League campuses play with the frontiers of human knowledge. In contrast, the bright minds of Japanese universities very often try to make a western invention more marketable. Within societies under the same state structure too, university means different things to different people. Some university campuses in northern India act as breeding grounds of the political elite in the Delhi-centric political system and the Indian Institutes of Technology produce nuts and bolts in the western capitalist system at a cheap price that too paid by the Indian taxpayer.

Like the exceedingly limited march of the enlightenment ideals of rationality and progress around the globe, university too has penetrated the world outside western societies through skewed second-rate imitations of the ones that developed and took shape in late medieval and early modern Europe. Buildings have been built, departments have been created; but minds have not got inspired to the creation of humane societies. Universities have dished out degrees and individuals have tried to earn their security in an uncertain world and yet the uncertainty has only increased more than ever before. And, it is not only that the university system in the ‘first world denominated third world’ that has not had the liberating effect on its societies, the social role of universities in the west too have become more and more marginalised by staid economic activity.

In this chaos, can I say something with clarity? Possibly, not. I did most of the interviews relating to my research on university intelligentsia and social

transformations in a period when the western world was gearing up to cope with the attacks on New York and Washington in September, 2001. When my research is drawing to a close a divided answer has been played out. What is interesting to note is that policy makers ignored almost entirely the opinion on the streets of western cities. And, these were young people, many of whom were university students or have been in the recent past. My work on Slovenia, Poland, Bangladesh and India tells me that it is on the university campus – though not so much in the classrooms – that young minds get inspired in political and philosophical directions which shape their later engagement in developing a just society. It's not true of a large majority necessarily but the vocal minority remains to be vocal and active in their lives after university. If one could think of building a mechanism whereby bright minds on campuses will be heard by policy makers in Kremlin, or White House or Tienanmen, we may have less tragedies globally. I heard Rada Ivekovic, a Croatian philosopher, now teaching at the University of Paris 8, a couple of months ago in Calcutta. She told us that the fact that a few generations in Yugoslavia did not have any political agency led to the end of Yugoslavia being so painful and so fraught with upheaval. The world and its constituent societies are at a stage where a similar thing seems to be happening on a much larger scale. The logic of the market is dwarfing the rationale of 'the human condition'. The university is first and foremost about 'the human condition'. Let us try to get that moving once again. On a policy level that would mean greater engagement with society and for each one of us, immediate societies and near and distant ones. Also, getting out of complacency and creating partnerships for knowledge and action, not only between biotech labs and transnational seed companies but also between schools of social thought and protest movements against big dams.

This would also mean purging the university of its unitary philosophical structures of knowledge. Knowledge systems that are unitary will most likely result in unitary Washingtons or unitary Beijings. A multi-polar world can emerge possibly, only if there is a polyphony in knowledge systems that is accepted between societies. So, let's try to implant many voices, sometimes cacophonous, to get the university moving beyond the confines of research monographs, and the world moving beyond the belief that there is one western truth and its concomitant systems for the universal deliverance of man.

My research marks somewhat of a mid-point in a search I began when I started knowing about the student movements of 1960s in various parts of the world. Let me end with the polyphony that I found in a comment relating to those times. In a BBC radio discussion on writers and politics in 1988, the Italian academic – novelist Umberto Eco was asked what he thought was the political role of the intellectual. Eco said that in 1968 when students came to the university, they said that they would not learn mechanics because it was a dirty capitalist trick and it only taught people how to drive airplanes. In 1988, when students were coming to the university, they were only interested in learning mechanics so that they could drive airplanes. So, Eco, says, "In 68, I said, mechanics was not that bad and in 88, I say mechanics is not all that good." This, in Eco's view, was the political role of the professor. This, in my view is the philosophical role of the university. If the university fails to impart that politics to its graduates, it would have failed to justify its existence.

Case Study 1 Bangladesh

“In the days of the Buddhist Revolution, one sees in the Bengali lands an intense revolt against Brahminical practices....

... In the days of Islam’s predominance, the way Bengal greeted its message of individual’s identity, one doesn’t find that anywhere else in Bharatavarsha (India). So, in that moment of clash and synthesis of two civilisations with opposing religious and structural ideals, one hears from the Bengalis the first chants of a religion of man.”¹

Dhaka, the capital city of the present nation state of Bangladesh is a bustling city of skyscrapers, slums and rickshaws. Dhaka is a city of about ten million people. It was not always like this in its history. It used to be a Mughal outpost five hundred years ago, then it became the capital of an independent Nawab (king), later it was a district town in British colonial India with army barracks. In all of this Dhaka got a university along the line in the early 1900s.

The university gradually attracted students from the neighbouring districts of eastern Bengal, it also attracted exceptionally talented professors. For the first decades, upper caste Bengalis from what has been traditionally referred to as the Hindu community came to inhabit the halls (student dormitories) and the professors’ quarters in a leafy green campus of a district town which itself used to be called a university town. After a while Bengali Muslims followed their Hindu upper caste neighbours in the pursuit of western knowledge. When colonial rule ended in 1947, Dhaka was a town of less than a million people and its university was a rare example of coexistence of Muslim and upper caste Hindu minds. Eastern Bengal was a Muslim majority area and so, there was a certain support for the demand of Pakistan, a separate state that was conceived as one for Indian Muslims. That did create tensions in the academic community but did not entirely rip apart the relationship between Hindus and Muslims in the university.

With the creation of a new India and a new Pakistan in 1947, Bengal got divided. Eastern Bengal came to be known as East Pakistan and western Bengal came to be known as the Indian state of West Bengal. Soon after 1947, a substantial portion of the Bengali Muslim middle class started feeling that they were treated as inferior citizens by the Punjabi Muslim dominated west Pakistan and Dhaka University became the nerve centre of a new nationalism of Bengali Muslims. Hindus and Buddhists in East Pakistan too joined hands against the imperial tendencies of West Pakistan. One of the principal demands was that Bengali and Urdu should be national languages of Pakistan and not Urdu alone. During a peaceful procession of students and intellectuals on 21st February, 1952, four students of the Dhaka university were killed by bullets of the Pakistani police. The bhasha andolan (language movement) flared up and became a mass movement. From then on till the creation of the new nation state of Bangladesh, Dhaka University’s campus remained the movement capital of East Pakistani politics. Throughout these decades students in the campus

¹ - Humayun Kabir (Bengali Muslim Minister of Education in independent India’s early central government) in *‘Rabindranath and the Religion of Man’*, Kobita, Rabindra Number, Facsimile Edition, Vikalp, Calcutta, 2003

fought for the rights of themselves and the people of the country, debated ideas and formed social networks that were to create the middle class civil society of the nation state of Bangladesh.

But as much as the large majority of students at the university opposed military rule and the unitary rule of Islamabad, the student movement did not speak with one voice. Like in many post-colonial societies, in East Pakistan of the 1950s and 1960s, Marxism was a potent force. Students were influenced by the appeal of social revolution and a classless society. And, for most of the 1960s, in the run-up to the independence from Pakistan in 1971, Marxists of various hues had a great influence on student minds. Maleka Begum, one of the most important voices in the women's movement of the country, remembers how she under the influence of the communist party tried to unite girl students under the banner of 'Chhatra Union', the student wing of the communist party. But the communists could not remain united. The rift began with the India-China border conflict of 1962. Worldwide communists got divided into two camps – one supported China and one said that India was the better guy because that's what the Soviet Union did. Mahmud Hassan who went to the university in the mid-1960s, laments "Had the Moscow-Beijing rift not occurred, the nature of Bangladesh's freedom and the state since then would have been very different. To start with we would have had more people like Maulana Vasani who were one with the people and not the present lot of politicians who have no past of working with the people." So, as much as the students under the umbrella of the communist party united students in Dhaka University in protest of the Pakistani regime, they also created a fissured opposition. The left voice broke up in a Sino-Soviet cacophony. At a time when cold war was playing out its main games, the left because of its divisiveness could not create a unified strong student movement in Bangladesh.

For much of the 1950s, the left in the country had gained in strength. The student left on the university campus very often went on to form the leadership of the left in the whole of East Pakistan. So, when the rift happened in the left, it affected all sections of the population. In a way it paved way for the unquestionable popularity of the Bengali nationalist leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his party the Awami league which was party of rural and urban middle classes of east Pakistan. But even though Mujib became the unquestioned leader of the Bengali nationalist uprising in East Pakistan, students in Dhaka University kept on being at the forefront of political activities in the country. So, women like Motia Chowdhury who was a prominent minister in the Awami League government between 1996 and 2001, became a popular name as a left student leader in the university in 1960s. One can discern a trend that Dhaka University has remained a breeding ground of future politicians of present-day Bangladesh. Maleka Begum who too became a household name as a leader of the women's movement inspired by the communist party, started her political career as a student organiser.

But as much as one can see the university playing a role as the seedbed of mainstream power politics, the political ferment on the campus sowed the seeds of a pluralistic universe that has continued to question the unitary visions of society in today's Bangladesh. Abdullah Abu Sayid comes from an earlier generation of students at the university. Sayid who runs Vishwa Sahitya Kendra, an NGO devoted to popularising reading culture and liberal humanitarian values among the students and the youth went to the university in mid-1950s. He recalls, " In 1954, the United Front

government was voted to power in the then East Pakistan. It was a moment of great flurry everywhere and so also on the university campus – martial law had ended and we felt that a new government will bring new things for us.” But unfortunately, the government could not deliver so much and then there was another spate of military rule starting in 1958. So, as much as Sayyid and his comrades were imbued with the spirit of bhasha andolan (language movement) and freedom in mid-1950s, the realisation that political democracy and hence cultural assertion was uncertain led them to a path of shunning political choices altogether towards a certain decadent trend in life and literature. They created a “Silent Club” on the campus and earmarked a place as the “Idiot’s Corner” on the campus. But they did not stop in such sublime subversions. But Sayyid and his generation of writers and young intellectuals brought decadence and anarchism on to the table of Bengali cultural expression in East Pakistan. From 1965 for a decade, Sayyid edited Kanthashwar (tr. Voice), a Bengali journal where writers gave vent to a new sensibility. This was one immersed in decadence, one where morality of everyday life in a predominantly Muslim middle class society with deep links to an agrarian Muslim world was turned upside down. Sex came into the pages of literature and so did an outright refusal to believe in any single truth, be that of nation or societal commitment or ethical living. Many of those associated with Kanthaswar - people like Abdul Mannan Sayyid are venerated literary figures in today’s Bangladesh. And, the language that Kanthaswar created was born out of the deep frustration of the here and now that Sayyid and his fellow travellers felt during their university days. So, the university not only nursed the political ambitions of future Bengali leaders, it also was the “idiot’s corner” for the future Dostoyevskys of a fast changing rural-urban middle class.

But that was not all. As Sayyid’s own life trajectory demonstrates – he went on from being a lecturer at Dhaka College to one of the most popular television presenters in 1970s and 1980s and then a harbinger of reading and literary worlds in every corner of the country. And, this flowering of civil society in Bangladesh has been lifelong missions of a good number of Dhaka University graduates. Sultana Kamal who went to the university in late 1960s is executive director of Ain O Shalish Kendra , an NGO that specialises in legal aid for women. She picked up the fervour of political freedom in the university days and has all along been an activist of better legal governance and women’s rights. One can discern that lifelong commitment in others of Sultana’s generation. Ruby Rahman, a poet has continued teaching at a Dhaka college over the past thirty years. And, when the basic ideals of freedom, non-communalism and Bengali cultural assertion have been on uncertain grounds – those that inspired the liberation movement – she has continued her attempt to imbue students with those.

The weakening of the left and the left students’ movement in the 1960s paved way for a centrist nationalist force to gain power in Bangladesh when it came out of Pakistani rule. Over the years, the ideals that the left as well as the nationalists had have weakened. Instead of the idea of a secular Bangladesh, the idea of an Islamic Bangladesh is much more on the horizon today than it was twenty years ago. The process of Islamisation has bred a certain intolerance for liberal values, often dubbed as western import. People who are carrying on the struggle against the closing of minds are almost always from the Dhaka university of 1960s and 1970s. Abul Momen is one of the more prominent names. Momen went to university in 1972-73. He was quite involved in the political movements even before he joined the university. But

the university days were exciting for him because there was a new state at that time. Bangladesh had just come into being and young people were into various experiments. People had seen things when they were in exile in Calcutta and they were trying to do new things in theatre, in literature and generally in the area of cultural expressions. “However, soon there was Bakshal, a period of denial of political freedom and again the country and particularly, Dhaka University’s campus went into political turmoil.” Momen’s illusion with mainstream politics possibly got over at this point. He has remained a journalist and an essayist all his life, working for the media in Bangladesh. He has also tried and is still trying to make primary education more exciting for children and is trying to open up mental frontiers of teachers and students alike. As much as Momen is working to open the minds of children, Muhammad Jahangir who too went to the university in the late 1960s, is working to give media a more politically contested face. He has brought together people of opposing parties and diametrically diverse opinions on his talk shows. Once again, he took the first steps in media as a cub reporter in his student days. He covered divergent viewpoints on the campus and that gave him a grounding in impartial reporting. A supporter of left democratic values in politics, he has tried to shun clear of party politics and has, instead tried to initiate dialogue on important themes among opposing parties.

The left got left behind in the formation of independent Bangladesh. But students on the university campus in 1960s who followed politics keenly and yet did not become part of a left student group, caught up with the realities of Bangladesh much later on. Mahmud Hasan was on the campus in mid-1960s. Whereas Sayyid felt frustrated with politics, Hasan decided to stay clear of student groups but his university years nurtured an intellectual engagement with politics. While his intimate friend Abu Abdullah turned an economist and is presently the director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Hasan has been engaged in an intellectual quest for socially egalitarian political process and structures for most part of his life. He followed campus politics closely as a student and got attracted towards Marxism. Later as a graduate student in London, he worked on “Ecology and Rural Class Relations in Bangladesh” and even did a post-doctoral work on “Landless Mobilisation– Theory and Practice”. His quest finally brought him to start an NGO called Gono Shahajjo Sangstha (Organisation for People’s Aid)which worked towards greater political participation of the rural poor in the existing democratic state structures of Bangladesh. It also created a network of lawyers to provide legal advice on disputes that affected their lives. Hasan visualised a collaboration between the have-nots and the burgeoning middle class and he went a long way to create a vibrant civil society movement in Bangladesh. In 1990s, GSS had a network of civil society actors spanning the entire country and effective bridges were built between the rural poor and the urban educated. The engagement with Marxism and the theoretical understanding of inequalities in societies started in Hasan from his days in the university. He did not take party sides on campus and in later life too his attempt has been to forge broad coalitions. The left became a divided force but it is the leftists who stayed outside the left who went on to shape life in Bangladesh well after the cacophony on the left and had died down.

And while the left divide was within the educated students of Bengali middle class, the class itself was always miles away from the ethnic minorities who inhabit lands within the political state called Bangladesh. And it has taken the energy and

commitment of yet another believer in non-party left to intellectually and politically engage with the cause of ethnic minorities. Mesbah Kamal was in the university in late seventies and early eighties. Whereas Mahmud Hassan laments the break-up in the communist party, Kamal tried to unite student groups loyal to various strands of the left. Kamal kept on working at that in his student days in Dhaka and also during his life in the west as a graduate student. But more importantly, his overarching commitment to human values led him to get concerned with the violation of human rights of ethnic minorities by the Bangladeshi state. He sees that state as representing the interests of the Bengali middle class in his country. And, he asserts, "The protection of rights of hill people and other ethnic minorities should be the moral duty of the politically advanced groups of this Bengali middle class itself." Kamal has been a relentless researcher and campaigner on this issue. As a historian and a history teacher at Dhaka University he lends one of the much needed voices to the plight of ethnic minorities.

If one mulls over the trajectories of these engaged minds who got started on their life trajectories in their student days at the university, some themes come up. First and foremost is a theme of frustration with the political process. In the 1950s, students got united on the campus and demanded democratic governance and the implementation of Bengali as a national language in East Pakistan. Through a series of movements and finally the liberation struggle, the country came out of Pakistan and got Bengali as the national language but the political freedom students aspired for on the campus always eluded them and the larger society of present day Bangladesh. In the East Pakistan times, there was intermittent democracy. In the thirty years since Bangladesh too military rule has kept coming back. And when political democracy has been somewhat in place, Dhaka University has become a chaotic urban space where rival student groups are more engaged in armed conflict rather than a clash of ideas. The battle for turf is what dominates the student politics of today's Dhaka, a far cry from the days when Maleka Begum imbued fellow students with the idea of political freedom and equality for all women and men. So, the ideals of the liberation war of Bangladesh – a secular, democratic, sovereign, Bengali nation - are still not on secure ground. The struggle for some of these continue in today's Bangladesh as much as they did in the former East Pakistan. The fact of remaining as a sovereign state of a Bengali nation will hopefully remain unchallenged but all the other ideals are on shaky ground. But if the party of the left was caught in the Moscow-Beijing trap – which has lost all meaning today – the political and cultural pluralism that the campus nurtured in the 1950s and 1960s gives the sustenance to the struggles of these diverse individuals who share an alma mater.

Sayyid expressed frustration at one point in his youth and now espouses optimism in future generations. That possibly is symptomatic of the entire intelligentsia that Dhaka University produced. They still share the hope of creating a free and better world for Bangladesh is still there but the blind belief in politics and state centred processes that most students had in the 50s and 60s are a thing of the past. The hope finds assertion in the engagement with creation of a vibrant civil society. Abul Momen takes time off from his resident editorship of a daily to create better educational reality for children. Maleka Begum attempts to look at the necessary changes among men in order to better the lives of women. Sultana Kamal tries to offer better legal protection to women. And Mesbah Kamal widens the scope of Bengali democratic politics through an assertion of the political freedom of all citizens of Bangladesh. The

political actors have betrayed the hopes of Bengali middle class in Bangladesh. The inquisitive minds of 1950s and 1960s of the Dhaka University campus are groping for ways to take the society beyond betrayal and are hoping there will be a renewal of hope in civil action and the cultural liberalism of Bengali people will find a way to institutional pluralism. And, as Abul Momen quips, “The game is not yet over”.

University Intelligentsia in the Making of Maps – Old and New

Animals tutor their young ones to learn ways of survival. Humans too engage in this act. From the days of Gurukul learning in India and Sparta’s way of developing its citizenry, societies have always had structures of learning. But nothing more elaborate has existed in human memory than the present developed form of the European university which began in the lay (non-religious) learning centres of, what is today, western Europe in the late 12th and 13th centuries. Ever since, the university has shaped knowledge, armed societies and has acted as an important power centre in them, be it a city state, a nation state, an empire with colonies, a post-colonial nation state, a supra-national state or a state with a global imperial structure. The university today is ‘the knowledge institution’. Like many other ‘achievements’ of western enlightenment, it has successfully displaced any rival in the area of development and transmission of knowledge.

University is as much a knowledge institution as it is a power centre. Not only that knowledge and power are linked, knowledge networks are linked to power networks. When a group of students are going through a university, they forge a language of communication unique to that group. Often, such groups play pivotal role in the making or shaping of structures of societies at large. Nation state is one such societal entity that universities shape once in a while. The last fifty odd years has seen more nation states being born than the preceding three hundred years. They have been mapped out in Africa, Asia and in central and eastern Europe. In this paper, we will look at two nation states, namely, Poland and Slovenia.

Nation states are expressions of identities. In most cases, such identities are structured through memory. What seems to be an integral feature of a nation might well be a social invention not more than fifty years old. In a way, nations are imagined communities. But the identity of a nation is intrinsic to the nation state. And, in case of central eastern Europe, national boundaries have been drawn and redrawn so many times in the last hundred years that it is difficult to ascertain where a central European belongs. As Eric Hobsbawm writes: ‘It is perfectly common for the elderly inhabitant of a central European city to have had, successively, the identity documents of three states.’

In this drawing of maps in this part of the world, ideas in closed campuses have opened up new national universes of communities.

What is Slovenia today was part of Austro-Hungarian Empire in nineteenth century, was in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia between the two European world wars and was in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1991. Slovenia is an eleven-year old nation state ready to go into a supra-national entity called the European Union in less than two years. But in the formation of this new nation state people educated in the

University of Ljubljana have played a critical role. And, this is an ongoing process. Before 1991 – year of Slovenia's independence – and after.

In the 1960s, the Ljubljana University was the only university in Slovenia which was one of the six republics of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was a one party state ruled by communists. In the second half of 1960s, like many campuses in Europe and around the world, the Ljubljana University also witnessed student movements. Ideas that questioned authority and status quo were in circulation. The radical stance among the students was still influenced by marxist thought. Many of them thought that Yugoslavia and most of the communist world was not doing justice to people at large. Among ideas that gained currency was Milovan Djilas' concept of 'the new class'. Djilas argued that the communist regimes in different countries have created a new group of exploiters. The students influenced by marxism were fervently opposed to capitalism. So, for example, when the Yugoslav State liberalised its economy in mid-60s, the students were opposed to such a move.

The Ljubljana University, like many other institutions, was rather conservative. However, there were pockets of wonder. One such place was the comparative literature department where a man called Dusan Pirjevec inspired a couple of generation of students to think differently and question the status quo of ideas. These students, like their counterparts in Paris and the then west Berlin, wanted to create their own dreams – dreams where Sartre and Derrida were dream merchants. The late sixties in Ljubljana were exciting idea times for these students. That fervour rolled into the early seventies and the philosophy faculty of the university was even taken over by student demonstrations. It was a period when the students in Ljubljana started taking an anti-Belgrade stance. One can trace the beginnings of contemporary Slovene nationalism in this process of student activism in the Ljubljana University. Ivo Vajgl, the present Slovene ambassador to Austria and a former foreign minister of independent Slovenia feels, " We (people in public life in Slovenia today) differ a lot and belong to so many political parties and yet we understand each other, because almost all of us were in the university in Ljubljana in the second half of sixties."

The 'Ljubljanesque Slovene language' that was created by some in late sixties and early seventies rolled on into the seventies and eighties. Marxism stayed on in their minds and so did the ideas that came from Western Europe in the sixties. But the broad socialist orientation did not stop them from questioning a self-professed communist party rule. From the mid-sixties, a stream of dissident journals became a feature of Slovene intellectual life. Nova Revija which was started in 1985 is possibly the most important, in its role in the creation of independent Slovenia. Boris A. Novak, professor of comparative literature at Ljubljana University and one of the founding members of Nova Revija feels that their journal, which was preceded by many similar ones, was just a continuation of the trend of dissidence in Slovene intellectual life. And, Peter Vodopivec, professor of history at the Institute for Contemporary History and a founding member of Nova Revija himself, feels it was the activism in their student days in late sixties and later that brought the core group of Nova Revija together. Everyone knew each other from the exciting idea times of the university. Nova Revija was the main platform for dissident ideas all through from 1985 to 1991. In its 57th number published in 1987, Nova Revija brought out a document called 'Contributions to Slovene National Programme'. Students who had known each other from the heady days of sixties were now intellectuals challenging

the Yugoslav regime. Slovene nationalism had found its intellectual assertion.

And, when the academic minds behind Nova Revija were putting their act together, students in the Ljubljana University of the first half of 1980s were also engaged in questioning of the idea status quo in academics. Vlasta Jalusic, director of the Peace Institute, an independent think tank and NGO in Ljubljana, went to university in those years. She feels that the intellectual hangover of 68 was still there. But, in her view, along with intellectual ideas, popular music like rock was galvanising protest against the state. Jani Sever, editor-in-chief of Mladina, Slovenia's most circulated weekly also thinks that popular music and punk movement were catalysts in rocking the state. And, of course, so did his own work as a reporter at Mladina. While Nova Revija was the intellectual voice of dissent, it was the formidable investigative journalism of Sever and his colleagues that gave anti-Yugoslavia ideas a popular base. In 1988, a trial began of three journalists of Mladina in a military court. The trial proceedings were in Serbo-Croat. This triggered off a nationalist sentiment among Slovenes. But even reporters had a link with university. Jani Sever went to the university and did law, dropped out and again studied history and in those years, the teacher whose influence brought him close to democracy and freedom of expression was Peter Vodopivec. One can see the idea chain in function. Democracy, pluralism and language were possibly the foundation of Slovene nationalism. And the explosion of ideas in the minds of students at Ljubljana University in the second half of sixties was in more ways than one the foundation stone. Slovenia, one may argue, is a classic case where a closed campus created a nation state with an open society.

Many of those who were thinking against the grain in the years of Yugoslavia, have played important roles in post-1991 Slovenia. Pavel Zgaga and his colleagues were involved in ideas relating to educational reform all through the eighties. Zgaga has served a long term as education minister. Antone Persak was one of the writers of the Slovene constitution that the Slovene Writers' Association came up with in 1988. Persak has been an M.P. and a very active politician in independent Slovenia. He is still a mayor of a small community. Joze Mencinger, one of the prominent economists pitched against non-market economy of the Yugoslav days served as finance minister and governor of the central bank. He had fought against Yugoslav socialism and he also found himself pitched against American neo-liberals who he says are 'no less of social engineers than the Soviets'. Vlasta Jalusic got indoctrinated in pluralist discourse in her university days and now she works for a just world for women and also towards the creation and sustenance of a vibrant civil society.

But Slovenia's new found nationhood is facing crisis. Jani Sever sees a growing political role of church as a challenge to progressive world-views. There is also the issue of joining NATO and the country is deeply divided on that. Mencinger sees becoming part of the European Union as an emergency exit. Iztok Osojnik, the director of the international literary festival Vilenica, is trying to carry forward his feeling of being a planetary being, a concept he may have picked up from his guru the legendary teacher Dusan Pirjevec. But Slovenes who did not want to break away from Yugoslavia till the last stages, have a nation state today which they are not sure will survive tomorrow. Boris A. Novak feels that it was the existence of a national culture that made Slovenes into Slovenia, and 'now that we have the state, we are ready to

give it (culture) up. The first budgetary cuts are always on cultural fields'. Novak has taken up the cause of Lipizaners, world famous horses found in Lipica, a town in Slovenia near borders with Italy, and is trying to ensure Slovenes do not give up this national symbol. As independent Slovenia inches towards the EU world of Brussels, and becomes possibly a nondescript EU member-state, the minds like Novak's would have moved from dissidence of the high-handed Yugoslav communists to the democratic assertion of Slovenian national culture and on to the protection of 'national identities' as expressed in white horses that are as beautiful as the Alpine land that is Slovenia.

As one travels from Slovenia to Poland, one goes from a small country with a population of two million to the largest country in central eastern Europe with a population of thirty-eight million. Slovenia was till recently part of Yugoslavia but it never felt that it was a colony of Belgrade. Poland, for much of the post-1945 world, was virtually a Soviet colony. In the words of Maria Krystof Byrski, the first ambassador of non-communist Poland to India, "I was the first ambassador to be appointed by sovereign Poland to sovereign India. Before 1947, India was not independent and between 1945 and 1989, Poland was not independent." But as much as Slovene nationalism fed on anti-Belgrade mood, so did Polish nationalism develop an anti-Moscow stance. And like Slovenia's Ljubljana University, in Poland too, the Warsaw University's students from the second half of sixties and later played a key role in the movement against authoritarian rule. But a critical difference in the two stories is the participation and in a way leadership of the workers in the anti-communist movement. Unlike Slovenia, in Poland, workers revolted and the anti-party intelligentsia and the workers' movements joined hands against the communist dictatorship. The Solidarity movement that rocked the communist state, and was perhaps the only major independent workers' movement in the 20th Christian century, owed a lot to the work of a small group of dissident intelligentsia who grew out of the 68 movement in Warsaw University and went on to form KOR – Committee for Protection of Workers. As in Slovenia, here too, a small group of dedicated students went on to become the core of democratic opposition to an authoritarian regime.

Between 1945 and 1989, Poland was an authoritarian communist party state. In that political climate the university was possibly the only institution where some non-conformists, people who did not toe the party line could function. In regimes where free expression is not tolerated, freedom loving independent minds find ways and means to exert their freedom. There was a tendency among some students to choose courses in the natural sciences because there was not much of a party line in those fields. Maria Krystof Byrski who studied Indology at the Warsaw University from 1955 to 1960 because, among other things, it was not a politicised subject in communist Poland, says, "People who liked history read hydro-geology because they wanted to take a subject that was free of politics." This clearly was a way of maintaining distance from the party and thus an ability to nurture dissent.

Like quite a few other European universities Warsaw University too was a centre of student activism in the second half of sixties. There were young Marxist's discussion clubs in the university. These were organised by socialist youth bodies. Two persons,

Kuron and Mozelevski got arrested in 1964 because they were perceived to be against the communist party. This arrest stirred up protest on the Warsaw University campus. They were being tried in disciplinary university court. But, at the same time, an alliance was established between professors and assistants (doctoral students). Jan Lipynski who studied mathematics at Warsaw University between 1963 and 1968 feels, “ Our greatest success was when we collected more than 1000 signatures protesting against the authority’s attempt to malign Adam Michnik.” The disciplinary university court had accused Michnik, who was of Jewish origin of creating disturbances in the university. As the students became more and more politically active between 1964 and 1968, the Polish regime started a campaign against Jews. They tried to single out Jewish students in the university and propagated that they were agents of an Israeli Zionist conspiracy to topple the communist regime in Poland. Anti-Semitism’s appeal was so deep in the Polish national collective that the communist party could use this as a method of suppressing dissent. They tried to clean up Jews all across Poland but the students on the Warsaw University campus were united in protest. 68 in Warsaw was unique in that the students fought against a sinister campaign by the party. But even at this stage the core group of dissident students believed in marxism. They thought of reforming the state, breaking the state or creating a new one on liberal-democratic agenda was a far cry.

But nationalistic feelings and an anti-Moscow stance was rising. Adam Miskewic is one of Poland’s great poets. He died around 1865. In 1968, a drama written by Miskewic was being staged in Warsaw. The communist party wanted to stop it because the drama had a bit of anti-Russian messages. The dissident students took up the cause of this play and popular support was in favour of the students. This was one of the moments of Polish intelligentsia’s assertion of Polish-ness as distinct from being a society under Soviet tutelage.

But, according to Lipynski, ‘68 was a failure.’ It’s true that the student movement did not accomplish much. But it brought together a group of students and professors who were to take a keen and sustained interest in building up democratic opposition to the communist government. Politically motivated students became gradually involved in the workers’ movements. There was a growing realisation in the small dissident intelligentsia that the university world cannot change Poland. They felt that for the change to happen they would need workers. In 1970, workers in the northern port city of Gdansk revolted. The workers went on to break the local communist party headquarters. People from the students’ movement went to Gdansk and tried to talk to the workers. And this was just the beginning. All through the 1970s, there were strikes after strikes by workers in Gdansk, in Radom and many other places. Every where the intelligentsia went to lend political and moral support. In 1976, the KOR – Committee for the Defence of Workers – was formed. There were people like Lipynski who edited a magazine called Robotnik – The Worker, people like Miroslaw Chohecki who ran the publishing house NOWA and many others – all comrades from the student movement in the Warsaw University campus. It was the untiring work of these young intellectuals that helped the workers to mobilise themselves.

And all this finally exploded in the Solidarnosc movement in 1980. Led by Lech Walesa, this legend of workers’ struggle erupted at the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk. The entire port was taken over by the workers. The church and the pope who is Polish came out in support of Solidarnosc. The whole nation was with Solidarnosc. The

communist authorities did not know what to do. But in 1981, the reactionary authorities clamped martial law. The entire period of 1981 to 1989, Poland was under martial law. And in this period the anti-party intelligentsia gave all support to workers of Solidarnosc. There were committees within Solidarnosc that were entirely the brainwork of this small dissident intelligentsia. The students who had protested against anti-Semitism had grown politically to be the intellectual and political bulwark of a popular trade union movement which finally brought down the rulers in Warsaw. In 1987 and 1989, round tables were held between the communist authority and Solidarnosc. And the authorities finally relented and paved way for a non-communist Poland.

The students who had dreamt of democracy in late sixties finally achieved it two decades later. But it is the work of a handful of students who helped nurture and develop strong and determined workers' movement. Poland is a unique case of social activism. The new nation of non-communist Poland is as much the work of workers as it is of the dissident students. Rarely has the intelligentsia and workers worked so closely. In the making of new Polish nationalism, there was an anti-Moscow stance and along with it there was craving for freedom of expression. And, most importantly, the realisation, that the radical intelligentsia has to always extend their support to workers. As Wlodimierz Zagorski-Ostojka, Director of the Institute of Bio-physics and Bio-chemistry recalls, 'We, the people in this institute and elsewhere were always sending help to the workers' families whenever we got to know the state was taking people to jail and so on'. All along the years of communist repression workers and the dissident intelligentsia fought side by side. The new identity of Poland was forged in this struggle for democracy and better life fought by the university workers and factory workers alike.

Poland and Slovenia differ on the ways of anti-authoritarian struggle. In Slovenia intellectual discourse was much more organised and the idea of democratic structure was worked out clearly by the intelligentsia before it gained independence. In Poland, the academic discourse on freedom was not elaborate but the cooperation between the intelligentsia and workers was dense. Both Warsaw University and Ljubljana University acted as seedbeds of non-violent revolutions. The corridors outside classrooms created an idea universe that was to challenge and help in overthrowing systems in corridors of power in two societies that were under communist party rule.