

# *In Conversation with Hibi Eden*



Member of Parliament for *Ernakulam Lok Sabha Constituency*

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**Antony:** We initiated this journal in response to a growing concern that many students today are not engaging with politics at a deeper intellectual level. While there are considerable discussion and participation in campaigns, there appears to be insufficient emphasis on rigorous study, analytical writing, and sustained critical reflection. Drawing on your experience working with youth and student movements, do you also perceive this gap? Furthermore, do you believe that platforms such as a student-led political journal can contribute to nurturing more informed, thoughtful, and responsible political leadership among young people?

**Hibi Eden MP:** See, we should not look at this as an isolated issue. There was a time when student politics was extremely vibrant. Presidential-style elections were held in colleges, and participation was high. But things changed over time. Some incidents on campuses were challenged in court, and eventually there was a Kerala High Court verdict that restricted student politics. The presidential model shifted to a parliamentary model. Around the same time, a broader perception started growing in society that politics equals violence. That idea began influencing parents and families. Another major shift happened in the family structure itself. Earlier, we had joint families with many children. If one or two children got involved in politics or student ac-

tivities, it was not seen as a big issue. Today, most families are nuclear. For example, I have only one daughter. Naturally, as a parent, I would want her to focus more on academics. I might say extracurricular activities are fine, but student union politics? I would hesitate. That change in family mindset has created a significant shift. Then there is the continuous media narrative that politics is corrupt and politicians are corrupt. That has also shaped how young people see politics. So gradually, a trend developed on campuses where political participation reduced not necessarily because students lack interest, but because there are social, legal, and psychological barriers. However, whenever I interact with young people whether in colleges or schools, I tell them one simple thing: if you want to change the system, you have to be part of the system. I'm not asking anyone to join Congress or any specific party. Whatever your ideology is, democracy needs your participation.

And participation does not only mean contesting elections. It means being involved in organizations, policy discussions, civic platforms and any space where decisions are shaped. We need more young people in Parliament, in legislative assemblies, in panchayats, and across the political system. Greater youth representation is essential if we want meaningful change. That's the message we consistently try to give.

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**Antony:** In districts like Ernakulam, where large numbers of students are migrating abroad for education, do you think Kerala is facing an intellectual drain? Or could this phase of migration eventually lead to reverse migration and intellectual gain for the state?

**Hibi Eden MP:** This is something that is bound to happen. We are living in a time where technology has made the world extremely accessible. Earlier, going to study in countries like the US or the UK was rare. It required enormous resources and connections. Today, students have access to information about every university, every course, and every opportunity across the globe. There are diversified programs, flexible options, and even educational loans that make studying abroad far more attainable. Practically nothing is restricting them. Take Ernakulam, for example. There was a day when around 15,000 students migrated to Canada through a single educational agency. Fifteen thousand in one day. That shows the scale of aspiration and mobility among our youth. And it is not just Canada, students are going to the UK, the US, and for MBBS to countries like China, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, the Philippines, and Poland. This is not an isolated trend, it is a global pattern of educational migration.

You really cannot stop this, nor should you try to restrict it. This is the nature of the global era. Young people seek exposure, experience, and global networks. The kind of perspective they gain by studying abroad is different, and that exposure cannot be denied. At the same time, we are expanding opportunities here as well. We now have more MBBS seats, new deemed universities, and diversified courses within the state. Over time, this could create conditions for people to stay back. There may even come a phase of reverse migration, where those who gained global exposure return with experience and contribute locally.

But right now, we are in a phase of outward migration. It is the need of the hour, shaped by global realities. There is nothing inherently wrong with it. The key is to

eventually convert this mobility into long-term intellectual and economic gain for our society.

**Gaurav:** Do you think political change eventually happens when people, especially the youth, feel fed up with the existing system?

**Hibi Eden MP:** Whenever there is autocracy or a sense of dictatorship, new leadership will naturally emerge. That has happened across the world. When people begin to feel restricted or dissatisfied, especially the youth, new movements rise over time. Take the example of the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi. It did not emerge because there was no development. Sheila Dikshit served three terms and transformed Delhi with major infrastructure projects like metro connectivity. But after the 2012 Delhi gang rape case, also known as the Nirbhaya case, there was a strong youth-led public movement. That movement shifted public sentiment and created space for new political leadership. So change may not happen immediately, but over time, when people grow frustrated with existing leadership, new forces will rise naturally. It is part of the democratic process.

**Antony:** Like the Gen-Z protests in Nepal and Bangladesh, and even the “Zohran wave” around Zohran Mamdani, show that new youth leadership is already emerging?

**Hibi Eden MP:** Absolutely. Those things happen in every era. I do not think you can stop that. And for that matter, he was, I mean, he was a part of a party, again. He was a Democrat with a different view, a lot of socialistic and democratic thoughts. And again, he had his style and way, and people tend to accept that change. That is what we saw in one of the biggest cities like New York.

**Gaurav:** Social media plays a huge role in shaping young people’s political views today. You spoke in Parliament in 2023 about the need for an ethical framework for AI

governance, but that still seems unclear in India. Since AI can both expand knowledge and spread disinformation, how do you see this balance?

**Hibi Eden MP:** You cannot stop technology. The Communist Party opposed the tractor when it came, then the mobile phone, then the computer. In the course of time, they have accepted everything. AI, of course, has a different set of rules. But with AI, there are a lot of things, even a negative campaign. Regarding AI propaganda, I saw something at a hackathon I recently attended. A startup company developed a project using an AI tool to identify and remove child predators online. It also automatically removes offensive content. It is a software. So, AI has a lot of positives. However, just as people say we are in a 'post-truth' era, if you look at future American election campaigns, there is a high likelihood of many hate campaigns. Instead of projecting oneself to the public, the strategy will often be to tarnish the opponent. So, when AI and technology advance, we must accept that there is a significant downside. However, I think we will understand and adapt to this over time.

**Antony:** In India, despite talking about cooperative federalism, our system is structurally asymmetrical, what we call asymmetrical federalism. Do you think this Centre–State imbalance contributes to political apathy among the youth, making them feel their participation does not really lead to change?

**Hibi Eden MP:** Every generation has its own challenges. I do not necessarily believe this is the problem, nor that it's the solution. When you have political stability, with the same government in the state and the center, it is easier to get things done. However, I have always felt there is discrimination against southern states. They are not given the same importance as other places, despite performing better in literacy, education, healthcare, and infrastructure. They have a system where they have grown with the people. This needs to change, but I do

not think it is the reason people are not voting or getting into politics. That is just an excuse.

**Gaurav:** What about climate change governance? In Kochi, the air quality index is getting worse, and development is bringing its own set of problems. Could Kochi emerge as a model for this? With the sea level rising, Kochi has a lot of climate issues.

**Hibi Eden MP:** Kochi is one of the worst-affected cities by global climate issues, especially being one meter below sea level. Look at London's air quality index, their public transportation is great, and most people use it instead of cars. They have shifted to clean energy and use trams, metros, and tubes. There has to be a shift in technology and towards clean energy. When I spoke to an IAS officer, he said it is a design problem. It is surprising that a crowded city like London has a much better AQI than Kochi. Development is not just about roads and buildings; it is a larger vision that includes climate change and accessibility for everyone, including the differently-abled.

**Gaurav:** Is there any initiative being taken to combat climate change in Kochi? Like using EV-energized systems to limit the impact?

**Hibi Eden MP:** This is not an individual thing; the government and local self-governments should take the initiative. It is not something one person, parliamentarian, or MLA can decide. It has to come from the state, federal, or at least the city level. And the investment needed is quite huge.

**Gaurav:** Sometimes people feel that today's leadership does not resemble the leaders of the past, and that the way history is remembered is also changing. As someone who comes from a public legacy, how do you see these comparisons and the way historical figures are discussed today?

**Hibi Eden MP:** Comparisons are natural, especial-

ly when you come from a family with a public background. I am often compared to my father, and honestly, stepping into those shoes is not easy. But every generation works in a different context. The challenges, expectations, and environment are completely different, so it's not fair to compare leaders from different eras as if everything is the same. At the same time, it is very important that history is understood properly. Over time, narratives can shift, and younger generations might only see fragments of the full story. That is why we need to educate young people with balanced and accurate information about past leaders, their contributions, their decisions, and the context in which they worked. Leadership changes with time, but understanding history responsibly should always remain a priority.