

INDIAN CAMPUSES UNDER SIEGE

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मैंने सुना है,
कि जिनको भुजा है,
वो कहने लगे हैं,
कि पूछना मना है !

JNU तुम संघर्ष करो
इस तुष्टोरे साप है
इनके पास तलवार है
कल्प द्योरे साप है।

A REPORT: PEOPLE'S TRIBUNAL ON ATTACK ON
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

PEOPLE'S COMMISSION ON SHRINKING
DEMOCRATIC SPACE

Indian Campuses Under Siege

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**A Report: People's Tribunal on Attack on Educational
Institutions in India**

People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space

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Convenor's Note

People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space (PCSDS), a national level membership-based body, was formed in the backdrop of the concerns expressed by individuals and civil society organisations on growing intolerance, rapidly shrinking democratic spaces and increasing harassment and criminalisation of human rights defenders in India. Following several meetings involving regional processes, a national convention was organised in New Delhi on May 21 and 22, 2016, when the guiding document of PCSDS was finalised and adopted and the National Working Committee (NWC) was formed. The national convention also mandated that the first two tribunals of PCSDS be held on attacks on educational institutions and attacks on human rights defenders working on issues concerning natural resources, respectively.

At PCSDS's NWC meeting held in August 2017, in Mumbai, the first 'People's Tribunal on Attack on Educational Institutions in India' was announced. Following this, the process for collection of testimonies, identification of experts, identification of members for the jury panel, background research on the thematic issues and preparation work for the tribunal commenced. Over the subsequent months, members of the PCSDS secretariat and NWC connected with students and faculty across the country and visited several campuses to collect testimonies and supporting material for the tribunal. Over 120 written testimonies were collected pre-tribunal in various languages and formats. They were then translated and processed by members of the team. The documented cases were categorised under thematic heads and shared with the members of the jury panel.

The Tribunal was held from April 11-13, 2018 at the Constitution Club of India, New Delhi. In the course of the three days, the esteemed jury panel heard three plenary presentations presenting the challenges to higher education in perspective, 17 expert submissions and 49 student and faculty oral depositionson thematic issues, presenting a powerful account of the situation prevailing in Indian campuses. On the last day of the Tribunal, the jury panel released an interim report of their findings before the general public.

Following the Tribunal, the process of transcription of the oral depositions presented was painstakingly carried out over the coming months by the team members and reviewed by the editing team. The drafts of the testimonies were then sent to the experts, students and faculty for their approval. The process of collating the experiences

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shared through the testimonies and finalisation of the documents forming part of the report was also carried out. About 130 testimonies of students and faculty have been finally received through the tribunal process. The oral depositions from plenary panellists, experts and students form part of this report, which we have attempted to put together as a speaking document which shares the lived experiences in their own words.

The Tribunal process has been one of immense learning and sharing. This is a testament of collective processes and efforts. The highlight of this process is the role played by the younger generation who lead, rejuvenated and pumped in energy into this tremendous effort. The courage, conviction and fortitude displayed by the students' movements and several struggles on campuses is the shining light and hope in these times.

We express our immense gratitude to the jury members, who were extremely patient, generous and receptive through the three laborious days of the Tribunal and in the preparation of the jury report and other documents. We extend our gratitude to the experts who enriched and set the groundwork for the testimonies with their poignant insights into the crisis of education. This Tribunal would not have been possible without the determination and commitment of the students and faculty, who are the real champions of the cause of higher education and the soul of this report.

The NWC members from different states need a special mention for the support in identifying and facilitating the testimony documenting process. This report is the collective effort of the secretariat team, NWC members and volunteers who worked together in the spirit of comradeship and activism throughout the Tribunal while making this report an enriching experience. We hope this report serves as a valuable resource in the future, facilitates discussions inside and outside campuses and contributes towards collectively addressing the grave challenges strangling the higher education system in India.

Finally, we are pained to be faced with the irreplaceable loss of one of our jury members and a luminary in the civil rights movements, Prof Meher Engineer, on April 24, 2019, days before the release of this report. We offer our deepest condolences and miss him tremendously today at the culmination of our collective journey in this tribunal process.

Anil Chaudhary
Convenor, PCSDS

PREFACE

BE A REALIST, DEMAND THE IMPOSSIBLE

'I was twenty. I won't let anyone say those are the best years of your life'.

— Paul Nizan, 'Aden Arabia'

French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre wrote the foreword to this brilliant short book by Paul Nizan, his Sorbonne comrade, who made a kind of triangle of friendship in synthesis with critical theory, sharp radicalism and the politics of liberation with Simone De Beauvoir, inside and outside the campus. The pulsating backdrop of the May 1968 uprising of students and workers in France (and all over campuses in the world) always remains alive as an unseen and expressed narrative of mass and spontaneous resistance and the 'great refusal' of conformist and totalitarian structures of thought, values and social life. It was a hard and protracted struggle which toppled all cliches and stereotypes and created new rainbow coalitions of knowledge and relationships, including the affirmative and collective denial of power. And what was their slogan? Be a realist, Demand the impossible. Nizan is saying precisely the same thing. Being 20 need not always be a rosy dream. It can also become a rough, angry, brave, unprecedented and resilient terrain of infinite struggle and dogged hope, amidst all-round despair and repression.

This book enters the Indian campus landscape carrying the graffiti and oral traditions of this rebellion and this

inheritance whereby the freedom of mind and the idea of justice is in a constant struggle with the cold-blooded and relentless machinery of capitalism, neo-liberalism, fascism and the neo-Nazi family of hydra-headed barbarians backed by the State and its repressive state apparatus. In that sense, every essay and every testimony, in their serious scholarship, meticulous rigour, deep angst and transparent honesty, reflects the immense and intense capacity of both the teacher and the student to explore multiple zones of possibilities, to break the tyranny of fear and mediocrity, to dream about a sublime, just and egalitarian world, and to push the threshold to re-discover and cherish that dream in all its bitter and sweet realism.

Indeed, this is not a 'Report'. It is a ballad of the barricades, a celebration of the classroom where knowledge is liberation, a documentary of contemporary India when our campuses are under siege since 2014 under a fascist-State with their street-vigilantes and mob-lynchers running amok. Surely, life is not elsewhere. It is here, right here, as new scaffoldings are built and new resistance songs are being written. Truly, its time to become a realist and demand the impossible. ★★

Tribunal Jury Panel

Justice (Retd) Hosbet Suresh, Former Judge, Bombay High Court

Justice (Retd) BG Kolse Patil, Former Judge, Bombay High Court

Prof Amit Bhaduri, Former Professor, JNU, New Delhi

Dr Uma Chakravarty, Feminist Historian and Former Professor, DU, New Delhi

Prof TK Oommen, Professor Emeritus, JNU, New Delhi

Prof Vasanthi Devi, Former Vice-Chancellor, Manonamaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli

Prof Ghanshyam Shah, Former Professor, JNU, New Delhi

Prof Meher Engineer, Former Director, Bose Institute, Kolkata

Prof Kalpana Kannabiran, Director, Council for Social Development, Hyderabad

Pamela Philipose, Senior Journalist

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Key Findings

Privatisation and Globalisation

A large number of testimonies presented before the jury by students, faculty and experts at the Tribunal, bore witness to the magnitude of the impact of privatisation and globalisation on education, institutions of learning and its constituents. The depositions also laid bare the brave struggles of the student and teaching community to combat the onslaught of privatisation on higher education in the form of fee hikes, withdrawal of financial aid, scholarship cuts, centralisation of admission processes, discontinuation of non-profit-making courses etc. and the reprisals faced by them on account of their opposition to government policies and decisions. The testimonies also revealed that being the frontrunners in the fight against privatisation and withdrawal of public funding, the students and faculty have often been the only barrier to resist the attacks of the State on the right to education and the dismantling of the public education system in India.

The decay in the education system in India is not recent and its roots lie in the policy framework carried forth from the colonial period. The major decline started in 1986 when the new education policy was formulated. Prof Krishna Kumar highlighted that the eroding of public institutions, withdrawal of funding and

institutional decay, which hit the provincial universities, affiliated colleges and the professional sector earlier in time, has now reached even more insulated universities like Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and Delhi University (DU). Prof Surajit Mazumdar explained that the onset of neo-liberalism gave a fillip to a multi-faceted process of privatisation of Indian higher education – in terms of its institutional mix, the source of its financing, as well as of its content and purpose. According to Prof N Raghuram, during pre-liberalisation, when the Indian economy was not growing so fast, the State was investing a lot more on education than it does presently when India has allegedly the ‘fastest’ economic growth and the number of students seeking education has increased. Inspite of growing demand in higher education, there has been a deliberate abdication by the government of its obligation towards education and stagnation of investment, giving way to privatisation and globalisation of education. He has demonstrated how there has been an actual decline in budgetary spending on education since 2014, while the government has provided impetus to private investment in education by providing land, grants and amenities, the public education system is being divested of funds and is being crippled.

Prof Romila Thapar, while stating that there has been a crisis in education in India for the past 60-65 years, observed that it has never been as bad as the situation today. In particular the social sciences, and universities known for their better teaching of social sciences like JNU, Jadavpur University (JU), Hyderabad Central University (HCU) and Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai, are under attack because they provide a rational analysis of the society in which we live, which aids in creating an educated, thinking citizenry. The central issue with education, including at university level, is that students are not being taught how to question and the importance of questioning, but are instead being taught to uncritically learn the information they are given and not question that. The political agencies and people in power do not want citizens who pose questions or analyse the problems that they are facing.

The attacks on education have intensified during the current regime with the systematically planned erosion of the public education system, to allow unfettered and incentivised privatisation. This is being done in a concerted manner by doing away with all democratic processes, which could prove to be obstacles or annoyances in the path to privatisation. Prof Mazumdar stated that since the 2014 general elections, we have seen a specific confluence of neoliberalism and authoritarianism, together with increased assaults on democracy through the instrumentality of the current

regime and its politics. The attack on educational institutions is part of this process. Prof Nandita Narain, former president of the Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA), shared that atleast when the earlier UPA government, during its second term, pushed its agenda of privatisation through eight Bills, the teaching community was able to depose before the Parliamentary Standing Committee examining the bills, resulting in seven of these Bills being stalled while only one Bill got passed. On the other hand, the current regime is making changes in the laws and Acts enacted by Parliament without even bothering to refer them to the Parliamentary Standing Committee, completely bypassing the process.

Withdrawal of funding in higher education

The funds cuts to educational institutions have resulted in massive fee hikes, withdrawal of financial aid, delay and cancellation of scholarships/fellowships in universities across the country. Karunesh Divedi and Ankit Singh Babu, students of Lucknow University, informed the jury that since 2005 there has been a constant fee hike in their varsity. The fees for some courses, which was Rs 1,400 is now Rs 36,000. Similarly, the fees of other courses have risen from Rs 1,260 to Rs 24,000. A grim picture emerged from the testimony of Ramashish Kumar from NIT Patna, who, following continuous protests by the student community against the

withdrawal of scholarship, received scholarship money for two years but did not receive it for the final year. This has forced students like him to drop out because of their inability to pay the tuition fee. Meanwhile, the tuition fee which was Rs 73,000 per year was increased up to Rs 1,20,000 per year from 2016. Further, due to the introduction of the national scholarship scheme, the scholarship has been reduced to half, and students in any case have to run from pillar to post for the scholarship money due to them.

Prem Kumar, a student of Nilamber-Pitamber University in Jharkhand, informed that the Jharkhand government reduced the amount of scholarship to half throughout the state, thereby completely discarding the ST, SC and OBC students. Relating his own hardships, he stated that he has not received his scholarship and was subjected to corrupt demands and humiliation to receive his rightful dues. He narrated that the delay in receiving money has caused him both mental harassment and economic hardship and he was worried how he would get higher and quality education looking at the state of education.

A similar ordeal resonated from the testimony of Boota Singh from Panjab University, Chandigarh, who reported that in March 2017 the senate body of the university increased the fee ranging from 40% to 1100% for all courses, resulting in students' agitations. For instance, for the BPharma course, the fee was raised from Rs 5,080 to Rs 50,000 and in case of MA Journalism, it was hiked from Rs 5,290 to

Rs 30,000. For the dental course, the hike was from Rs 86,400 to Rs 1.50 lakh. The university's decision to hike the fees of various courses for the 2017-18 session sparked protests in the campus.

Professional institutes which were earlier near and dear to State policy due to their nexus with the neo-liberal development agenda and their distance from critical political thought, have also been facing the wrath of privatisation and globalisation. Tony Kurian, a student of IIT Bombay, stated in his testimony that the fee-hike in IIT Bombay was implemented by the administration without consulting the students, and the student representatives claimed that they got to know of it at the last moment. The fee-hike was in the range of about Rs 8000 to Rs 11000 per semester, which would tantamount to putting any student from marginalised sections out of higher education, and out of the IITs.

The government's move to grant 'autonomy' to universities was also exposed through several testimonies as a move to further the agenda of privatisation of education. Prof Thapar stated that autonomy in this context should not be confused with academic freedom, but, it infact means financial independence by withdrawal of State funding of universities and leaving the universities to find their own means to fund themselves and secure funding from the private sector. Prof Narain said that granting of this financial autonomy is nothing but the government going back on its commitment to provide public-

funded universities for the people of this country, who deserve and have a right to quality and affordable education. Prof Mazumdar stated that privatisation measures are encouraged in the name of 'super autonomy' and 'institutions of eminence' and 'excellence'. The objective of ranking institutions high according to the measures of excellence is to provide rationalisation for this privatisation. Prof Krishna Kumar relayed his concern that the financial starvation of universities by way of graded autonomy would make it untenable for the universities to reflect social diversity of the university. It would deprive those sections of society who do not enjoy privileges in society like adivasis, Dalits, minorities, and the poor who had finally made into the higher education system, from accessing higher education. Prof Mazumdar observed that the neo-liberal process of development of higher education in India has resulted in an increase in enrolment and dramatic change in the social composition of students.

Meanwhile the representation of SC, ST and OBC in the faculty is still less than one third in the educational institutions. Prof Narain stated that the fact that this move is being made when the universities had a greater intake of people from marginalised sections. This is a clear indication that the government is infact seeking to reduce it. This attack is on the character and vision of public-funded universities like JNU, which promotes research and caters to the weaker sections of the society. She questioned the

government for calling those who oppose this move of the government 'anti-national' when infact the government's zeal for nationalism is entirely missing in its policy for graded autonomy. In a telling illustration of this, the government has in the regulation recommended that 20% of teachers and students have to be from outside the country.

Aarti, a PhD student at Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya (MGAHV), Wardha, while explaining why the students started the anti-fee hike movement in April 2015 to protest the move to increase fees at the university, said that most of the students in the university were SC, ST, OBC and women students, who would be forced to discontinue the pursuit of their interests or abandon their aspirations if confronted with the fee hikes.

Many of these educational reforms brought in to promote privatisation and in turn starve public institutions has led to cut down in the intake in public institutions which have fields that generate spirited inquiry, explained Prof Mazumdar. Citing the example of JNU, he said that owing to this, research programmes intake in JNU has fallen from over 1,200 to less than 100 in a year.

The fate of autonomous institutes is evident from the condition of TISS. Laxman and Goumin Lal, students of TISS, presented a grim picture through their testimonies. TISS already functions as an autonomous institution through two realms - the private and the public.

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In the arena of public funds, TISS has witnessed annual fund cuts by UGC going up to Rs 26 crore since the current government took over in 2014. However, even as TISS was complaining of financial crisis and demanding funding from the government in 2012, private funding has poured in with an increasing number of projects coming to TISS from national and international agencies.

Meanwhile, during the same period, new centres were established in Guwahati in 2012 and Hyderabad in 2013. There are centres affiliated to TISS in Patna, Hyderabad, Guwahati and Tuljapur. The 180 ad hoc faculties in TISS are funded by private agencies like the Tata Trust and no reservation has been implemented during their recruitment. Since 2013, the government has asked TISS to raise 30% of the total expenses on their own. As a result, the fee has been hiked up in the last three years by 46% and in some heads by 100%, thus putting the entire burden of financing expenses onto students. Till 2015, the fee for SC, ST, and OBC students was Rs 4500 per semester. This was increased for OBC students to Rs 61,000 per year. With the extension of the fee hikes to SC and ST students, they would have to pay Rs 60,000 per semester, that is Rs 1,20,000 per year. The fee hike has resulted in a drastic increase in drop outs among OBC students which will soon be the case with SC and ST students as well. TISS students have been protesting the fee hikes and withdrawal of financial aid to SC, ST and OBC students.

State of the institutions of higher learning and institutional decay

This systematic fund starvation has led to a pitiful state of education in India, with non-appointment of faculty, ad-hocism, cutting down of social science courses etc. Prof Karen Gabriel reported that in 2017, during the admission process of DU colleges, the government introduced a policy change under the guise of advantages to students allowing them to include courses categorised as 'Vocational Studies' in their best-of-four subjects, in a deliberate move to promote vocational courses over conventional academic courses. This deceptive change is infact motivated to promote privatisation by way of vocationalisation and is part of reforms proposed by the private consultancy firm Ernst & Young, in their *Vision 2030* document, and subsequently adopted by the NITI Aayog. Prof Mazumdar added that the process of decision-making in curriculum has been affected, for example, the choice-based credit system in undergraduate programmes, which is also being extended to post-graduate courses. Prof Hemant Kumar Shah while speaking of the 'Gujarat Model' of development, revealed the pitiful situation that education in Gujarat is faced with. While the number of universities have increased in Gujarat from 15 to more than 50, these universities have no buildings, professors, vice-chancellors (VCs), clerks, registrars, etc. Several of them are said to be in primary government schools or in *teshildhar's* office. Talking of his own

college known to be one of the best arts colleges in Gujarat, the SK Arts College, Prof Shah stated that the shortage of teachers was so bad, that he was asked by his college principal to teach Environmental Science to all the second semester students in the college together in the hall which has a seating capacity of 735 people, since the college didn't have enough teachers to take division-wise class.

Prof Narain stated that the student-teacher ratio, which accounts for 20% of the educational institution's ranking, has been increasing which also means that the quality of education being imparted has been declining. By depriving institutions of funds, the government is destroying the student-teacher ratio and then in a complete irony, hinge the fate of the institutions on their ranking. Prof Apoorvanand shared that although DU has 5000 vacancies, almost all are filled with and operated by ad-hoc teachers. Students of Assam Women's University presented an even more shocking case. The university, being the only women's university in the North-East region, was rendered without mentorship due to non-appointment of a VC and was left out of the budget list altogether. The non-appointment of the VC was used as an excuse to not develop the university, even as the education minister made public statements posing question on the fate of the university and its students, leaving no choice for the students but to protest.

Prof Apoorvanad presented the dismal state of the state universities, which have

been largely ignored in the discourse, with the focus on central universities. Speaking of the college he went to in Bettiah in Bihar, he stated that despite of the college having 12000 students, barely 500 attend classes and most of the departments are locked due to non-appointment of teachers. This is the story of most state universities and colleges across India. He said in these institutions, 'education' does not really happen and students only come for taking credentials.

Mukesh Kumar, a student of Patna University, provides a searing testimony of the institutional decay in state universities. In Patna University, the 24-hour library has been reduced to 12 hours. Exams are being conducted at intervals of 4 to 5 years. It has been reported that Chapra University in Bihar has not had a graduate for 5 to 6 years, and for the Jay Prakash University that number is 7 years. So those who took admission in 2012 have yet to graduate. Ramakanth, a Fine Arts student at the Arts College, Patna University, established in 1939, informed that his university doesn't have any permanent teacher and even the ad-hoc teacher they had has been removed. They are demanding appointment of permanent teachers, better conditions for studies, installing a girl's hostel, etc.

Prof Thapar observed that teachers are kept under control due to their ad-hoc status and lack of job security. Teachers who are supposed to impart the importance of questioning, themselves

fear questioning. Prof Thapar emphasised that it is important for students to be taught how to question existing knowledge so they can start questioning the current system of knowledge to improve it. Prof Abha Dev Habib, Miranda House, DU, explained how the situation has changed drastically for DUTA, who, in 2008, had a large strength with most teachers working on permanent basis, while protesting against the semester system, while now the strength has reduced to reduced considerably with more than 50% teachers working on ad-hoc basis. Prof Kumar said that with the denial of permanent jobs and ad-hocism in the teaching profession, teachers live unhappy lives and many see no career prospects in the profession and leave the profession. Prof Raghuram informed the jury that in 2009, the earlier government had introduced the national skills policy with the aim of skilling 500 million teachers by 2022, but the current regime has revised that target down to 400 million people by 2022 under its famous 'Skill India' campaign, although this fact has been concealed.

Prof Raghuram spoke of the dangers of corporatisation of private school education, with a number of private schools and colleges being owned by the corporate mafia. He questioned how the government has money to write off lakhs and crores of Non Performing Assets (NPAs) but does not have money for education. He stated that the education

industry is growing at a compounded annual growth rate of 10 per cent per annum, which is faster than the economy.

Centralisation of admission process

Anitha's tragic death, a result of state apathy and centralisation of admission processes with the introduction of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) exam, which was made mandatory in 2017 for admission to dental and medical courses, was brought before the jury through her brother Manirathnam. Anitha, daughter of an agricultural labourer coming from the SC community, was a medical science aspirant and a bright student having scored 1176 out of 1200 marks in her 12th standard inspite of great economic hardship. Yet, she was unable to clear the NEET exam, which follows the CBSE syllabus and puts students from marginalised communities and rural areas to serious disadvantage. Anitha was at the forefront of the protest against the compulsory imposition of the NEET exam and also a petitioner in the challenge before the Supreme Court. Despite various attempts and active engagement in protests by Anitha and other students, the Supreme Court declared that Tamil Nadu is not exempted from the NEET exam, leading to Anitha taking the extreme step of ending her own life. In his testimony, Manirathnam stressed that this kind of discriminatory policy of the government affects the most marginalised sections such as SC, ST and OBC communities, which are the most backward.

Changing attitude towards public funding in education and resultant policy changes

Post-globalisation, the thinking of Indian corporates has also completely changed. Prof Narain informed the jury that in the 2000s, while the NDA government was in power the Birla-Ambani report was released, which was a complete blueprint for privatisation. Social sciences and humanities, which build critical thinking in the people and society and are of no use to corporates, were not a part of the government's plans, whose focus was technology. Upon coming into power again, the UPA government continued with the earlier government's agenda by making an offer to World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2005 under the General Agreement Trades & Tariffs (GATT) to make education a tradable commodity and usher in globalisation. Prof Narain observed that while earlier, industrialist families like LalaBanshidhar, Shri Ram, Dharam Veer, who had a stake in education, would stand side by side with the faculty in opposing short-term market-oriented courses and would also make a case for traditional disciplines which develop cognitive abilities and help make a generation of decision-makers, the situation has completely changed. Prof Shah also acknowledged the changing scenario, where industrialist Kasturbalal Bhai donated a huge piece of land for Rs 1 in 1949, which helped in building the largest and finest university in Gujarat. However, now, Nirma's Karsandas Patel and Reliance's Mukesh

Ambani are also starting universities, but with the focus on profit-making, thereby treating education as a commodity.

Prof Narain questioned the objection being raised time and again on tax-payers money being used towards public-funded education. Public-funded universities are meant to bring about genuine democracy so that people can have access to good, quality education. Taxation is to make education available to the poorest of the poor. She reminded that revenue and capital is public money with the government being just a trustee, and it is for the people to decide the manner in which the money is spent. The present central government is in the process of preparing a new national policy on education. She warned that while the government has had to back off earlier, many proposals are being implemented without going into Parliament, an example being the policy on graded autonomy.

Prof Habib stated that the draft New Education Policy 2016, although currently shelved, proposes dangerous reforms to commodify higher education without any regard for its impact on the marginalised sections and recommends setting up of an even more aggressive Public Private Partnership (PPP) model, eroding the existing set-up of public-funded higher education.

Meanwhile, Lokesh Reddy, former students' union president of Osmania University, Hyderabad, shared in his testimony that despite strong objections

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by the Progressive Democratic Students Union (PDSU), on March 28, 2018, the Telangana Assembly passed the Private Universities Bill. This Bill was a blatant move towards privatisation and is contrary to the election promise of free public education for all from KG to PG. The students' union protested against the Telangana Rashtra Samithi's (TRS) Private Universities Bill, although the introduction of the Bill came with a lot of restrictions on the universities like police patrolling in the campuses.

The written testimony submitted by Simone Zoya Khan, vice-president of JNU Students Union (JNUSU), narrates a tale of multiple attacks of privatisation on the varsity, to undermine the democratic spirit of the campus and threaten the diversity of students. In the few months preceding the Tribunal, JNU introduced several policy circulars to effectuate these changes, which were opposed by the student and teaching community in the campus. The JNUSU, JNU Teachers Association (JNTUA) and several schools in the campus protested the introduction of compulsory attendance for students in December 2017 applicable from the winter semester of 2018, inspite of facing severe reprisals. On February 20, 2018, JNUSU also demanded the removal of the VC in a chargesheet presented before the HRD Ministry for his policies like massive seat cut in research, decimation of reservations and deprivation points, scrapping of GSCASH, bid to dismantle integrated BA-MA and integrated MPhil-PhD, tampering of faculty selection

committees and rules for partisan appointments, arbitrary regimentation in the name of 'compulsory attendance'. The move of the UGC on March 20, 2018 to grant full autonomy to 60 higher education institutions, and the move to grant institutes such as JNU greater autonomy to start new courses, plan their own syllabi and collaborate with foreign institutions, was strongly criticised by JNUSU on the ground that it was a policy to promote commercialisation and privatisation.

All India Students Association (AISA) president and former president of JNUSU, Sucheta De revealed the intent behind the cancellation of the non-NET fellowships in 2015, which signaled the 'Occupy UGC' movement. She said that this move happened at the time when WTO's 10th ministerial conference was going to be held where the Indian government was going to agree to make higher education into a tradable service in a world market, which would mean the government will not spend on education. Rakesh Vishvakarma, a student of MGAHV, Wardha, stated that their university was the first to protest this move on October 21, 2015. However, despite a sustained country-wide campaign, the attacks by way of funding cuts continued and in 2016, a regulation came regarding seat cuts, thereby reducing the admissions itself.

The resistance of the students and faculty to such anti-education and anti-people policies is crucial to arrest this onslaught on higher education. Prof Kumar spoke

of the crisis felt by students in DU, where the resistance against the poorly conceptualised Four Year Undergraduate Programme resulted in it being rolled back on account of political pressure. However, in the case of the sudden imposition of the semester system, all the teachers, including their union, DUTA, opposed it. Yet, it was implemented causing irreparable damage. Talking of this damage, Prof Narain stated that the quality of education being imparted in DU is now abysmal compared to what it used to be.

The effects of privatisation of education have already started showing. Prof Raghuram said that the abdication of responsibility by the government is reflected in the stagnation of the growth rate of literacy at 75%, with the growth rate in this decade being only 5%. In 2014-

2015, there has been a decline in enrolment in elementary school education. In terms of the number of universities in higher education, the government's presence has been reduced to less than one third of the total and only government universities have affiliated colleges under them.

Kanhaiya Kumar contextualised what is happening in the name of privatisation as the privatisation of profit and the socialisation of loss. Prof Kumar stated that there is a need not only for recovery but reconstruction of the education system so that it can resist the kind of decay that has set in. He warned that the policy discourse that the privatisation model should be extended to public higher education is dangerous. It is the duty of the State to fund entire education.

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Distortion of History, Syllabus and Saffronisation of Education

A disturbing trend that emerged from the testimonies presented at the Tribunal is the increasing communalisation of campuses, distortion of history in textbooks, removal of secular truths through syllabi changes, and the loss of autonomy of universities due to institutional takeover by the Right-wing government to execute its project of saffronisation of education. A crucial aspect that was also borne out through the testimonies was the interconnectedness of all the issues plaguing the education system. If we are talking about taking society onwards,

about changing society, about modernising society, education is crucial. In this context, the dangerous unfolding of saffronisation of education and distortion of history and syllabus signals a major crisis in society.

Spread of Hindutva and takeover of secular cultures

At the outset, both Kanhaiya and Prof Apoorvanand rejected the use of the word saffronisation, the former claiming it to be a misrepresentation of what is really communalisation of education, while the latter claiming it to be

inadequate to represent the extent of vulgarisation, what he termed '*ghatiyakaran*' (degradation) of our education.

In his testimony, Prof Akhil Ranjan Datta discussed the economic, social and political context of the transition to the fundamentalist regime of today. He observed that the discourse on saffronisation is the result of the pursuit of exclusionary and reformist policies that facilitated the growth and consolidation of the Right-wing forces. He informed the jury of how Assamese icon Shankaradev has been appropriated into the Hindutva fold in Assam, by the establishment of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh(RSS) run schools such as Shankaradev Shishu Niketans. Students Debabrata Saikia from Gauhati University and Bidyut Saikia from Dibrugarh University added that in these schools, primary stage children are taught about caste and religion.

After coming to power in Assam in 2016, the BJP government passed a proposal granting Rs 10 lakh to every Shankardev school, although these schools were actually being run by the RSS, the ideological wing of the ruling party. The RSS has also been trying to impose the Hindutva philosophy by establishing colleges in the name of Deendayal Upadhyaya, its original ideologue. These colleges reportedly started courses without even applying for affiliation with Gauhati University. The students have put up strong protests against this move to establish colleges in the name of a communal icon.

A professor at the Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda (MSU), submitted an anonymous written testimony out of fear of reprisals reporting that the symbolism and energy of rising Hindutva is strong in their campus, with the coming up of statues of Vivekananda, Dharmatma and Saraswati, and small signs such as putting a saffron ribbon in the diary. An RSS song has been included in the university diary, while there are talks of withdrawing *Jana Gana Mana* and replacing it with *Vande Mataram*, because they believe it is a celebration of the British rule.

Changes in curriculum and syllabus as a part of the communalisation project

Prof Gabriel informed the jury that during the admission process in 2017 for DU colleges, the government, under the guise of advantages to the students, introduced a policy change incentivising Sanskrit language as an optional language as against other Modern Indian Languages. She reported that the previous BJP-led NDA regime had already started the process of saffronisation by changing the schoolbooks and by introducing courses like (Hindu) *Paurohitya* (clergy specialising in rituals) and *Karmakand* (rituals) along with the romanticisation of Vedic knowledge through courses like *Jyotirvidya* (Vedic astrology). The Right-wing social forces continued to grow in strength and influence, even after the BJP's ouster, evident from the dropping of AK Ramanujan's essay, '*300 Ramayanas*' from the DU History syllabus

in 2011. In November 2014, the government declared that German language would no longer be taught as a third language in Kendriya Vidyalayas, effectively making Sanskrit compulsory since it was the only other option being offered in these schools.

Prof Gabriel connected the move to communalise the syllabi with the agenda of privatisation of education, stating that the structural changes that privatisation demands needs the obfuscating and mystifying discourses of the Hindutva nationalist educational agenda to curb the resulting resistance.

Prof Thapar revealed that the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), which produces textbooks and is hence crucial for imparting ideologies and giving direction to people's thinking, is influenced by the government and consequently the textbooks change depending on the government in power. She said that instead of making universities autonomous, it is NCERT and councils in the various subjects, like the Council for Historical Research, the Council for Social Science Research, the Council for Philosophical Research that should be made autonomous.

The communalisation of education is being done with the specific purpose of removing secular truths from the syllabus to further communal propaganda. Prof Shah reported that there are content changes both in school text and in higher education, particularly in subjects like

Sociology, Economics and Literature, etc, with a view to promote communalisation. There is a general hesitance to question against these changes on account of the repercussions that follow. He reported how his role in the Economics Curriculum Formation Committee of the Gujarat State Textbook Board for Schools was put to an abrupt end for being a vocal critic of the government.

In his written testimony, Prof Rohit Shukla, retired faculty of Economics at the Sardar Patel Institute of Economic and Social Research, Ahmedabad, stated that instead of developing a spirit of inquiry, logic, scientific temper, in a completely backward move, the education system in Gujarat promotes mysticism, mythology and non-modernity. This is completely different from what goes on globally, where people have moved on from the old mythologies and are concentrating on realities and modern values. In his written testimony, Prof Sanjay Shripad Bhave, Associate Professor, Shri H.K. Arts College, Ahmedabad stated that education should be taking a lead in sensitising people against saffronisation and communal sentiments, instead, education is getting co-opted.

Loss of autonomy of universities and institutional takeover by placing loyalists

Prof Apoorvanand observed that the universities have been losing their autonomy from the manner in which the leadership is appointed. These chosen leaders themselves surrender the

autonomy of the universities to the UGC, MHRD, and to their political masters. Harishankar Nachimutthu, former president, FTII Students' Union, spoke of the appointment of Gajendra Chauhan as the chairperson of FTII, in what was seen as an attempt of the government to saffronise the institution by inserting its loyalists. Prof Sandeep Pandey, who was an ex-faculty on contract for three terms at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Banaras Hindu University (BHU) campus, reported that after the BJP came to power in the centre, Girish Chandra Tripathi was appointed as VC of BHU and chairperson of IIT-BHU by the MHRD, despite his name missing in the five names sent by the IIT panel.

The MSU professor who submitted the anonymous written testimony stated that the influence of the BJP-government on the state university and its highest decision-making body, including the syndicate, is widely known and publicly covered. Another professor at the Gujarat University, Ahmedabad, preferring to remain anonymous, shared in his written testimony that the education council of the university is controlled by the Sangh parivar and recruitment of teachers in the university is also conducted and directed by them, who appoint teachers who support the Sangh ideology or come from the party background. It was also reported that the appointed VCs are from RSS background, blatantly and clandestinely.

Rohin Kumar, former student, Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC),

New Delhi reported that in their campus only Right-wing intellectuals are called for talks and that people directly affiliated with the BJP, Swapan Dasgupta, Chandan Mitra, people belonging to the RSS, including Rambahadur Rai, have taught them about matters such as the independence of media. An institute as prestigious as IIMC, which should be concerned about fake news, now teaches that 'Narad' was the first journalist. In April 2017, the Inspector General of Chhattisgarh, SRP Kalluri, was invited to deliver a lecture on the independence of media though he had reportedly harassed many journalists, and hence they protested against this. He further reported that RTI officers were changed in the campus thrice to avoid giving information on the issue raised by students and that the IIMC administration is organising programmes in collaboration with an RSS 'think-tank', the Vivekananda Foundation.

Rise of Hindutva forces within campuses and suppression of dissenting voices

Prof Apoorvanand noted that the Akhil BharatiyaVidyaarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student wing of the RSS and the central government are creating 'disruptions' in the classrooms, which have been making the news. The real purpose of these disruptions is to create so much instability and insecurity within the university that there is no possibility for other conversations, except syllabus and classrooms.

Karunesh Divedi and Ankit Singh Babu, Lucknow University, Lucknow mentioned that their major protest was against the utilisation of Rs 25 lakh from the Students Welfare Fund to organise a programme, 'Hindavi Swaraj Diwas 2017' for BJP in the university on July 7, 2017, which was attended by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Similarly, testimonies from Ramjas College, JNU and other campuses, show the increasing presence of and power wielded by ABVP in the campuses with the backing of the State, which directly resulted in clashes and incidents reported in the testimonies.

Dr Snehsata Manav, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Central University of Haryana (CUH), Mahendragarh, Haryana, presented a painful testimony demonstrating the curbs on free speech and expression on

campus, harassment from students affiliated to ABVP and RSS as well as reprisals faced by her for their play based on Mahasweta Devi's story 'Draupadi' which confronted the issue of sexual violence on women by the army. In another case of harassment arising from increasingly intolerant Right-wing presence in the campus, Prof Navdeep Mathur, from the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad, reported that an anonymous complaint was filed against him on the nature of his courses while making allegations against him of taking an anti-national stance on developmental conflict in India and an anti-State stance on Kashmir, although the complaint was closed pursuant to two rounds of appreciative and positive feedback received from students and a rare case of departmental support. ★★

Students' Unions and Elections

The testimonies received at the Tribunal on student elections demonstrated the increasing subversion of democratic spaces and processes within the campus by a weakening of democratic student politics and introducing a multitude of restrictions in student elections.

Sucheta De informed the jury that the Birla-Ambani report had targeted student unions perceiving them to be roadblocks to the WTO agenda and against fee hikes and commercialisation of institutions. This report was followed by the Lyngdoh Committee's recommendations,

formulated in a manner to weaken democratic student politics by introducing several restrictions.

It was reported through testimonies how the whole process of elections is influenced in favour of student unions like ABVP and rules only apply to other contesting students and not ABVP. The whole election process is conducted in an unfair and undemocratic fashion. FIRs are lodged against students to disqualify them from contesting elections. Relying on this rule, in Bihar, only the nomination of ABVP candidates was finalised and declared valid. In JP University, in the

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Sivan-Chhapra area, the VC, while sitting with a BJP member, did a students' conference before the elections. In Tilka Manjhi University in Bhagalpur, during 'chhat', which is a big festival in Bihar, they demanded 75% attendance. Meanwhile elections were conducted with ABVP in full swing since the whole panel belonged to ABVP.

In another case in Patna University, a contestant was not even shown the ballot paper and without showing anything the result was declared, with ABVP and those belonging to their lobby winning. Mukesh Kumar, a student of Patna University, informed the jury that there were no students' union elections in Bihar for five years, and in 2018, for the first time, a student union was formed after 2012, while the election before that took place 28 years back. 12 universities of Bihar conducted students' union elections. Prem Kumar informed the jury that in Nilamber Pitamber University, Jharkhand, in 2016-2017, the ABVP won the college elections. After the election result, the students came to know that the ABVP candidate, who won the election, was an ex-student and he had re-joined the college for contesting the elections.

Tony Kurian, a student with 100% vision loss in IIT-Bombay, narrated the hardships, discrimination and unfair practices faced by him while contesting the elections and the undemocratic manner in which elections are conducted in the institute. In IIT, the whole election process is controlled by the administration, especially through the

imposition of rules restricting campaigning and the interference of the outgoing student council. The process is bureaucratic, and in one sense, highly impotent and farcical. He reported that after he submitted his form, former office bearers tried to dissuade him on the ground of his disability. Many rules concerning the elections are undemocratic like the one requiring every candidate to get their manifesto reviewed and edited for 'feasibility' by the panel of former student secretaries, in what is called as the 'black box'. Several of his election points were edited or entirely taken out by the panel stating that they were not feasible. Due to the pressure mounted on him to not contest due to his differing viewpoints, he finally withdrew his nomination, although he was the only candidate at that point and so victory was certain. He said that the entire election process was a farce and students were not interested in contesting for the elections. He quoted a former secretary to capture the attitude, "The post I enjoy as academic secretary is delegated by the director. And I am a secretary to that."

Institutes like IITs and IIMs don't have effective student unions. Questions are even raised on the formation and recognition of student organisations that take up uncomfortable issues. In 2014, when the Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle (APSC) was formed in IIT Madras, it was called 'anti-national'. Ambedkar Periyar Phule Study Circle (APPSC) in IIT-Bombay has not been granted recognition as a student body till date inspite of

several demands being made and their Constitution being forwarded to the director, reported Paankhi Agrawal, a student and member of APPSC through her written testimony. The recognition of another student body, SAATHI, which deals with queer issues within campus, was also held up. Meeran Hyder, a student of Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi, submitted a written testimony narrating the ordeals faced by the students to form a students' union and

hold elections in the university following its ban. First banned in 1996, the election of Jamia Students' Union were held again in December 2005. However, a few months after the new student union was elected, it was dissolved. Between 2006 and 2017, constant efforts were made by the students to lift this ban through demonstrations in front of the VC's office and the UGC, including filing litigation before the high court.

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Crackdown on Dissent and Criminalisation

Most of the student testimonies received at the Tribunal are tales of reprisals and indicate the recent trend of increasing clampdown on student protests and voices of dissent in campuses across the country. Students have been at the forefront of struggles against privatisation of education and growing saffronisation of campuses and have accordingly borne the brunt for their activism. Ranging from threats, intimidation, disciplinary proceedings, suspensions, expulsions, impact on their courses, degrees and education, delays in scholarships and fellowships; right up to brutal assaults, use of excessive force, criminalisation, arrests and disappearances, the testimonies reveal that the attacks on students have been nothing short of vitriolic and frighteningly commonplace. Faculty protesting against privatisation measures, contractualisation, and exercising their democratic rights within the campus,

have also been at the receiving end from the government. One of the startling aspects revealed through some of the testimonies was the role of the unethical corporate media and its nexus with the government in labelling, persecution and vilification of students and teachers, causing them irreparable damage and putting them at grave risk.

Prof Majumdar elucidated how the crackdown on dissent is a part of the systemic process of privatisation which reflects a larger process of attack on Indian democracy itself. That is the reason why the destruction of Indian higher education evokes so little protest from corporate bigwigs who might otherwise complain of the shortage of 'skills'. The crackdown has a variety of agents acting in tandem - governments, regulatory bodies like the UGC as well as university administrations, with sections of the media playing a supporting role. It covers teachers, students and non-teaching staff

in these institutions. Criminalisation of dissent and taking punitive action through the police and courts and through administrative actions follows logically and the recourse to such measures is rampant. This is accompanied by the curbing of democratic rights like banning/restricting political and union activity, including bans on unions and restrictions on the right to protest, to hold meetings, etc. Teachers and other employees are sought to be brought into a 'disciplinary' framework with imposition of restrictive codes of conduct, coercive application of 'no-work no pay' principle, bio-metric attendance, etc.

Prof Raghuram said that nationalism has been suddenly discovered in university campuses like JNU, DU, JU, FTII and the attacks on education institutions, which are branded, without an iota of evidence, as hot-beds of 'anti-nationalism', lacking patriotic feeling or indulging in 'sedition'. Prof Mazumdar observed that this propagation of the idea that protests in higher education institutions are conspiracies driven by dangerous forces inimical to the interests of the nation, serves the dual purpose of legitimising the crackdown and delegitimising the 'dissenters' in addition to producing a climate which itself is coercive in nature.

Use of legal mechanisms to curb students' protests

The Constitution covers the right of students to protest and express dissent under Article 19 (1) (a), which talks about

freedom of Speech and Expression; second is Article 19 (1) (b), which talks about the Right of People to Assemble, and the third is Art 19 (1) (c), which allows citizens to form unions and associations. Senior Advocate Mihir Desai emphasised that under these provisions the students' right to freely speak, express, assemble peacefully, demonstrate, agitate and form unions, are fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution. Hence, all these protests which have been discussed at the Tribunal are justified and legitimate protests and constitutionally protected.

In addition to this, Article 51A of the Constitution speaks of the fundamental duty of all citizens to generate scientific temper and spirit of enquiry. This and other provisions of the Constitution not only permit but encourage healthy disagreement and promote critical thinking in academic institutions. Dissent is a core component of democracy. If you look at the students' protests or any other form of protest, it is an overt articulation of dissent. It can be individual, it can be collective, peaceful, etc. If you are not going to allow dissent, you obviously cannot allow protest. However, in the environment today, across the country, and not just in academic institutions, dissent itself is seen as 'anti-national'.

Advocate Vrinda Grover observed that criminal law is being used to demonise the individual, vilify the institution, engineer and orchestrate hate and to create the feeling of being under surveillance. The crucial agenda is not

even prosecuting cases but to create a ‘chilling effect’ by naming in the FIRs. She emphasised that by doing this, boundaries are being drawn on free speech and the speech that will not glorify their version of the nation-state or the armed forces.

Mihir Desai observed that the common feature across the country since 2014 is that wherever there are protests the authorities are cracking down. While legally and constitutionally people are fully justified to carry out agitations, to express dissent against the government or anybody else, the law is being used against protests. Institutions initiate disciplinary action by holding an inquiry against the person who is protesting, suspending him or her, imposing fines, possibly this is followed by rustication. Students are taken to court to stop them from protesting, like they have done with TISS students in March 2018. Criminal law is being increasingly used to suppress struggles. FIRs are filed that ‘you are rioting... you are disturbing... you are unlawfully assembling...’

The most shocking has been the imposition of the sedition law against students, when the law itself should be repealed. The Supreme Court has held that you can charge a person with sedition only if the statements made by a person leads to violence. The use of police brutality, whether it is lathi-charge or the use of casteist and communal language to subjugate students, has also increased in the last two years. It is not just police brutality at the time of stopping a

demonstration through a lathi-charge, the brutality continues in police custody.

Surveillance, censorship and fear of reprisals

Prof Shah exposed a pitiful state of unfreedoms in Gujarat. He reported that across the state there is an atmosphere of fear; school teachers and university/ college professors have all been sensing it. The present government does not allow anyone to speak or write. Doing so means getting restricted and these restrictions applies in other aspects of life. Citing his own example, he told the jury that he used to write a column in the second largest daily newspaper in Gujarat, '*Sandesh*', however his column was blocked on the instructions given by then state home minister, who is now the BJP president. He said that he had basically written that universities are for students and teachers and not for the government, which prompted this censorship.

Shedding light on the situation in institutes of higher learning like the IITs, IIMs, IISERs, IISc etc., centres under central agencies such as CSIR, DBT, DST and DAE and centres under the various autonomous councils such as ICHR and ICSSR, Prof Parthasarthy Ray said that unlike universities, these institutes were designed to be authoritarian when they were established, under the pretext of efficiency and productivity defined by the requirements of the market, and for the ruling dispensations. Dissent has been curbed by way of structural processes in-

built into the system of these institutes by rules, regulations and practices. However, the important phenomenon over the last few years is that alongside these existing structures, dissent has been crushed and the process accelerated due to the environment of fear, which has been created all over the country. Despite this student organisations have come up in a very repressive atmosphere and that is commendable. These student organisations have formed a body called 'Coordination of Science and Technological Institutional Students Associations' (COSTISA), which is now trying to face this repressive atmosphere in a united manner.

Use of criminal mechanisms and disciplinary action on students

The state and university managements have been using criminal law mechanisms to target protesting students and students' union leaders in order to intimidate, harass and silence protests and dissenting voices opposing their policies and actions. Meanwhile, the increasing violence by Right-wing extremists within the campuses is going on unchecked. Testimonies of several students narrate this ordeal.

Boota Singh presented a testimony of police intimidation and criminalisation faced by him, following his participation in the students' protest against exorbitant fee hike at Panjab University. It paints a horrific picture of the brutal force used by the Chandigarh police on protesting students both in the campus and outside

it, following the university bandh jointly called by student bodies on April 11, 2017.

Karunesh Divedi and Ankit Singh Babu informed the jury about their criminalisation in the 'Kala jhanda' case in Lucknow. A criminal case was registered against 11 students and they were arrested for 23 days, during which period they were beaten, tortured, harassed and threatened repeatedly.

Writwik Saikia, general secretary, Democratic Students Forum of Assam and North-East India (DSF), Gauhati University, conveyed his experience of repeated reprisals before the jury, for being a dissenting voice against privatisation, corruption and for raising social justice issues within the campus.

Debrata Sakia, a student of Gauhati University and Bidyut Sakia, a student of Dibrugarh University reported that a case was filed against them for protesting against the establishment of colleges in the name of communal icon Deendayal Upadhyaya and on the charge of putting black paint on the name of Deendayal Upadhyaya in three colleges of Assam.

In a written testimony received from a student of Gauhati University, in 2014, students protesting against the VC regarding alleged charges of corruption against him faced disciplinary action and were in turn charged with false allegations and suspended. In another written testimony from Gauhati University, incident on April 20, 2015, when students sought early re-evaluation of answer scripts of undergraduate

students and thereby allowing them to appear in the next semester examinations, police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel stopped them and brutally lathi-charged them.

Deborshi Chakraborty, Presidency University, Kolkata, narrated the horrors of the attacks and incarceration in the campus. On April 10, 2013, Trinamool Chhatra Parishad (TCP) cadre ransacked the campus and beat up students. Deborshi's nose was broken and was run over by 10 people. Female students and female teachers were allegedly issued rape threats by goons, who also entered the heritage building laboratory and ransacked the laboratory and classrooms.

Shraman Guha, Jadavpur University, Kolkata elaborated on the crackdown in JU. He reported how since 2012, there has been a massive presence of Intelligence Bureau (IB) and special branch officials monitoring students' activities in the campus. Students associated with the '*Hokkolorob*' movement and students who tried to stand in solidarity with them have faced major clampdown.

Prof Habib and Sucheta De reminded the jury members of the false charges of sedition slapped against the students' union president and other leading student activists in 2016 for 'anti-national' sloganeering in the infamous "JNU Sedition Case". The testimony submitted by Rama Naga, the General Secretary of JNUSU in the same period 2015-2016, narrated the details of the harassment and disciplinary action faced by him and others.

Roshan Pandey, a student of BHU, reported that after coming to power, the new regime appointed its own VC who closed down the library facilities. Inspite of doing signature campaigns, adopting other democratic measures, including writing a letter so that their concerns may reach the higher authorities they got no response, leading the students to go on protests. The students sat on a peaceful hunger strike for nine days, but nine students were suspended for protesting on the campus and also barred from giving their exams. Students who participated in a movement regarding sexual harassment in BHU in September 2017, had to face criminal charges again. During a peaceful protest, the police did a 'lathi-charge'. After suffering the police action, they were given a notice stating that they have made attempts to murder, kept weapons and explosives, conducted riots, etc.

Harishankar Nachimutthusaid that things started getting bad in the FTII campus before the strike itself, after they had invited 'Kabir Kala Manch' to the campus. Following the strike in August 2015, the students were criminalised under Section 143, 147, 149, 323, 341, 353, 506 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 and other criminal charges. Some of the students included were not even present at the time of the alleged incident since they were out on a shoot. He spoke of how the union and student unity has been destroyed following the crackdown on FTII.

Richa Singh, former president, Allahabad

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University Students Union (AUSU) presented a strong case on the gender discrimination and challenges faced by her as the first woman president of the AUSU, and the reprisals faced by her for breaking gender norms and raising questions within the campus. Adeel Hamza Sahil, former vice-president, AUSU, reported a serious case of communal discrimination and reprisals faced by him for being a Muslim and for protesting on student concerns and issues. Adeel was banned from the university campus till August 15, 2017 and suspension notice was served on him on June 14, 2017, which has been extended to five years.

Lokesh Reddy informed that when three students committed suicide, PDSU protested and demanded justice. As a result, students' union leaders were arrested, detained and charged with false cases. He informed that students who are raising their voice are also targeted in their course work, for instance, by not declaring or by suspending the date of submission or viva of PhD, thereby causing academic losses.

Sannaki Munna, president, Ambedkar Students' Association (ASA), HCU presented the struggles faced by the ASA and students at HCU, in challenging the actions of the administration, even as their fight against these oppressive measures continue. He reported that the administration has removed the North-East, J&K and union territory reservation quotas. There is no proper implementation of the reservation policy

in the HCU for students, faculty and employees. ASA filed a petition in the high court last year. However, till date, no judgement has come. The victimisation has mainly affected MPhil and PhD students with the ratio of students from downtrodden backgrounds decreasing considerably. Drawing inspiration from Rohith Vemula, who, while expressing that he was deeply sad about our society, made out a case for the rejection of "victimhood", Sannakai Munna reiterated that inspite of the atmosphere of fear, the students are not scared and shall continue to raise these concerns and collectively work in solidarity with struggles in different universities across the country.

Fahad Ahmed, former president, TISS Students' Union, observed that we are going through a state of unannounced emergency, and for those who do not still believe it, once they ask difficult questions to the government or fight for their fundamental rights, they will realise it.

Ajmal Khan, a student of TISS and integral part of the Joint Action Committee for Social Justice, which was formed following the institutional murder of Rohith Vemula, spoke of two ways in which he understands crackdown on dissent takes place. One being through the state mechanisms and institutional process and the other, through political forces and non-state actors such as ABVP and RSS.

Rohin Kumar was suspended for 15 days from IIMC on January 9, 2017, two days

after writing an article in the 'Newslaundry' about the unhealthy atmosphere on campus.

Written testimonies were received from several other students reporting their criminalisation at the hands of the university administrations. The written testimony submitted by Kawalpreet Kaur, president of the Delhi University, AISA, DU bears testament to the increasing presence and power of groups such as ABVP within campuses and the role of non-state actors in the disruption of activities and clampdown in campuses. Kawalpreet reported that she was attacked by members of the ABVP in New Delhi on February 22, 2018 in the auditorium of Satyawati College where she had been invited to speak about her own experiences of being harassed online. Kawalpreet says that she was shielded from the mob by the college faculty and co-panelists even as two professors were physically attacked. The police were called and a human chain formed to get her safely off the Satyawati College premises, pursuant to which she filed an FIR at the Bharat Nagar police station. Even earlier on a previous occasion she was accosted by ABVP members at Satyawati College in August 2017 and had filed a complaint with the police at that time as well. Meanwhile, ABVP spokesperson started a slander campaign alleging that they had only a verbal altercation because they had objected to Kawalpreet being invited to the college after having been allegedly banned from the campus in 2017

following the incident. Kawalpreet further reported that although she had filed the police complaint against ABVP immediately following the incident on February 22, 2018, the police registered it only in the night after investigation, while ABVP's counter complaint to her FIR was filed at 5 p.m., demonstrating the support that ABVP enjoys from the police when they resort to abuse and violence.

A written testimony submitted in the case reported from Maharaja Sayajirao University narrated the tale of an ex-fine arts students who suffered persecution for 11 years for having displayed his paintings in an exhibition on campus. An FIR was lodged against him under Section 153 (A) for promoting religious enmity and hurting religious sentiments with nefarious intentions like creating riots, following which he was arrested and sent to jail. He was denied his educational certificates for 11 years, leading to utter despair and frustration.

A student of the Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti Urdu, Arabi-Farsi University, Lucknow, narrated in his written testimony, the incident of arbitrary action against him in violation of principles of natural justice, by cancellation of his hostel allotment without attributing any reason except calling him and his department 'anti-national'. Another student from the Kamla Nehru Institute of Physical and Social Sciences (KNIPSS), Sultanpur, reported in his written testimony how following an altercation between him and another student, he was brutally assaulted, abused and was

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forcefully taken away and confined in the room by the proctor. While students came in support and filed a complaint regarding the incident, the same had to be withdrawn due to the mounting pressure put on the students by the administration.

Two students from Burdwan University (BU) in their written testimony reported the reprisals that followed a protest against the delay in the publication of results on March 31, 2015, when around 500 students gathered at the administrative building of Rajabati campus where the office of the VC and Registrar are located. Students' representatives from JU, Presidency University and Rabindra Bharati University (RBU) supported the students of BU and participated in the agitation. After this peaceful demonstration, the administration declared prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the CrPC prohibiting an assembly of more than four people in an area. On April 17, 2015, students staged another protest at Golapbagh campus, where Students from JU and Presidency University also joined the protests. Seeing students distributing pamphlets on campus, a mob of TMC supporters entered the campus and started beating them. A few moments later, TMC supporters called police to the campus who arrested 11 students under IPC sections 341, 143, 506 and 323.

In another written testimony by a student of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (BBAU), Lucknow, it was reported that peaceful protests were

called on May 3, 2016 by all the SC/ST students of Lucknow demanding the suspension of proctor and 22 teachers of the university for forming a committee called Pichhda Jan Kalyan Samiti and filing a petition for scrapping of 50% reservation in admission to SC/ST community. The protesting students were lathi-charged by the police and a false FIR was filed against 19 Dalit students. Disciplinary proceedings using the excuse of the pending FIR were used to debar students, including the deponent who had topped the BBAU entrance exam. He reported other instances when students were criminalised in the university for reporting violations.

In a written testimony received from a student of Kamla Nehru Vidhi Sansthan (Law College) of the KNIPSS, the student reported that a show cause notice was issued against him making allegations that he had appeared in the examination hall without wearing a uniform, abused the invigilators and created a ruckus. He reported that he was falsely targetted on account of his involvement in a protest against the college administration for the delay in conducting semester examinations and for obtaining an order from the Lucknow High Court against the college for re-evaluation of answersheets.

A student of Pondicherry University submitted a written testimony reporting how he was illegally detained along with other students on April 15, 2017, for protesting the visit of Tarun Vijay, former BJP MP, who was invited as a chief guest to commemorate the birth anniversary of

Dr B.R. Ambedkar by the ABVP. Students of Jamia Millia Islamia University also submitted a written testimony narrating crackdown on students' protest against the visit of Indresh Kumar, RSS leader and patron on June 5, 2017, when students were beaten up and detained.

Use of brute force against students and faculty

Protesting students are being vilified and criminalised in the campuses for expressing dissent. The legal mechanisms and police administration have failed to protect students and faculty from attacks, victimisation and crimes against them, and the perpetrators are enjoying State impunity, with the police often aiding these attacks. Through his testimony, Umar Khalid revealed the disturbing and shocking case of the disappearance of Najeeb Ahmed since October 15, 2016 from the university campus after being publicly beaten, and the failure of the police to conduct proper investigations into the case. Vrinda Grover spoke of the day of the attack on Kanhaiya Kumar in the Patiala House court premises and the manner in which the attacker was allowed to freely walk despite the looming security threat and directions of the Supreme Court towards ensuring security arrangements.

Prof Mukul Manglik provided a seething and painful testimony on the attacks on February 21 and 22, 2017, at Ramjas College, DU. Abhinash, a student of Ramjas complained how a public narrative is created against the students,

while sharing his experience from one of the hearings in the Tees Hazari Court, where he faced open animosity when he tried to strike a conversation with a person who had nothing to do with the case. Mukesh Kumar reported on how students in Patna suffered lathi-charge, 13 students got injured and were admitted to the hospital.

Aarti, a PhD scholar at the MGAHV, Wardha, reported disciplinary actions against her and clampdown in the university. On March 18, 2017, when the students decided to hold a seminar on '*Pratirodh ki Rajniti*', they were not granted permission. Rakesh Vishwakarma, another student, reported that after the government changed in Delhi, the ABVP and RSS became dominating. The VC reportedly spent Rs 1.5 lakh for the programmes of the RSS but no permission was given when other students wanted to organise programmes on Babasaheb Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh, Jyotiba Phule, etc, they were instead branded Naxalites and anti-nationals.

Reprisals faced by faculty members

Reprisals faced by Prof Pandey of IIT BHU, Dr Mathur of IIM, Ahmedabad, Prof Shah, Dr Manav of CUH and others speaks volumes of the hounding out of rational, brilliant and dissenting voices who are extremely popular with the students. Rohin Kumar brought to the attention of the jury the dismal situation in IIMC. He shared a case of another faculty member, Naren Singh Rao's employment being terminated, for

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reporting a case of rape of a Dalit woman sweeper on campus to the media, and the harassment faced by him.

In her written testimony, Advocate Sanober Keshwaar, ad-hoc lecturer on contract at TISS Mumbai, since 2010, but whose contract was renewed on an yearly basis, informed how the atmosphere in TISS Mumbai, started changing after the BJP government came to power in 2014. Within months of the new government assuming office, an emissary of the director approached her and informed that four teachers with political views opposed to those of the current dispensation were 'under surveillance' on campus, including her, and she was advised to keep a 'low profile'.

In October 2014, the School of Globalisation and Labour arranged a lecture by a labour researcher from Geneva, called Yvonne Zimmerman, who worked for a trade union-funded research organisation called Solifonds which documents human rights violations by MNCs registered in Switzerland, especially in third world countries. Sanober stated that although she had not organised the talk and had only forwarded the invite to students and faculty if they were interested using her TISS email ID, she was questioned by the director's office and informed that some people from 'the Union home ministry' had come to meet the director with a print-out of the email forwarded by her. She was informed that the officers had also asked for a transcript of

Zimmerman's talk and the names of each and every student and teacher who had attended the programme. Later, she was told that they were IB officers posted in TISS to keep a watch on the activities of students and teachers.

Another incident took place on campus, involving a clampdown following protracted discrimination and surveillance on a Kashmiri professor, whose name is withheld at request, and who subsequently resigned on account of the harassment. Following these two incidents, Sanober raised concerns with the remaining faculty, who, although sympathetic, were fearful of raising their voice, leaving her to raise the issue at the faculty meeting. However, the clampdown on campus continued. There were also students' protests following Rohith Vemula's death.

Sensing the worsening situation, Sanober and other members of the faculty decided to form a teachers' union and started calling meetings to initiate the process. Sanober reported that her contract for that year was not renewed, as was being done every year, and her services were abruptly terminated in May 2016 when she received a mail from deputy registrar saying that she had been relieved of her services. Her telephone and email were immediately disconnected. Upon enquiry she was told that her services had been terminated for political reasons and not due to financial constraints. Students issued an open letter demanding her reinstatement. She also addressed a letter to the director. No action was taken to

reinstate her. She was advised by her lawyers that it would be fruitless to pursue legal action, since her contract had expired and renewal would be at the discretion of the administration.

Meanwhile another professor, being one of the four teachers under surveillance, was also similarly relieved of her duties after the expiry of her contract in June 2016.

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Structural Marginalisation

Testimonies presented by students and faculty before the jury revealed a socially exclusive and unjust system prevailing in the higher education institutions, designed to replicate the marginalisations in society. As revealed from the testimonies in the earlier section, the attacks of privatisation and authoritarianism in the campuses has changed the social composition of students in campus, directly impacting the marginalised sections of society, in particular the SC, ST and OBC. Coupled with this, the educational institutions have failed to address the systems of oppression and discrimination faced by students both inside and outside the campus on the basis of caste, language, gender, sexuality, religion and region.

Caste discrimination

In his expert testimony, Prof Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd explained the implications of casteism in higher education under the BJP government. Post the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations, and by the time the 2014 elections were underway, the biggest expansion of Dalit, OBC, and adivasi in higher education, as well as the largest expansion of higher

education institutions were taking place. However, he estimated that under five years of the NDA rule their presence will reduce by 10-15%, since the drop-out rate is increasing owing to the changes that have come in. He spoke of the biases entrenched within selection committees with Left liberals on their panel that did not find SC, ST or OBC candidates eligible and did not fill backlog positions in universities. He said that in this manner any land-tiller, cattle-rearing person, pot-maker, shoe-maker, coming from SC, ST or OBC communities, who make the nation, are found unsuitable for education and labelled 'anti-national'.

Abhay Flavian Xaxa from the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights in his expert testimony spoke of the 'intellectual lynching' of ST, SC and OBC students under the current BJP-led regime. According to him this is happening in three ways – physical discrimination, fiscal discrimination and barriers put up against the policies meant for the educational development of ST, SC and OBC students. Xaxa explained that while the physical discrimination of students from these communities is well known, fiscal discrimination is being implemented through the banking

system and privatisation. In order to rejuvenate the banking structure which has been under collapse, the government is trying introduce a new source of income for the banks by creating a market for student loans for higher education. Since SC, ST and OBC students were not availing student loans from the market because they were getting scholarships from the government, the government is targeting scholarships and introducing schemes for student loans. In June 2017, the Bihar government issued a notice regarding not awarding scholarships to Dalit and adivasi students where the fees is beyond Rs 15,000 per year. These students are expected to take the student credit cards through which they can pay the fees, but they will have to re-pay it back after finishing the courses.

Xaxa also reported that under a new directive on reservation for faculties, in the Indira Gandhi Tribal National University at Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh, they advertised 52 positions for professor, assistant professor and associate professor. However, not a single post has been given to ST and SC candidates.

Ajay Kumar, former student, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (BBAU), Lucknow, Fellow, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla informed the jury of his confrontation with caste discrimination at the very first step of introduction into the education as a five-year-old, when the panditji running the village school said, "Since you are a Dalit you cannot study even if your forefathers

come back on earth." He said in this context Ambedkar University, which was established in 1996 and is the first university in the country to have 50% seats reserved for SC and ST in admission, is extremely important for students like him. Since 50% of the seats are reserved for SC and ST students, these students are being provided with fellowships. There are no reservations in faculty recruitment. He said that since the administration cannot directly remove the reservation system, it has been introducing policies to force students to drop out, like forcing the students, who mainly come from small towns and backward districts, to go through examinations conducted in English language, including the entrance exam, thereby dissuading and excluding the students and then making an excuse that the reservation policy exists but the students are not coming. The other issue he reported was that of giving less marks in papers during evaluation in exams because of the brand of caste. He said that there have been a lot of protests due to the anti-SC/ST student policies of the VC.

In an anonymous testimony from West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences (NUJS), Kolkata, a student reported the subtle, implicit and explicit caste discrimination faced by her on campus, being the only Dalit student in her class and as a woman. She reported that adivasi, queer and Dalit students, who have a lot of intersectional marginal identities, face very rampant form of structural discrimination over the years in the national law schools. She spoke of

the casteist, sexist and classist remarks flung at her by male students for being vocal, including being called a “Dalit slut” and how she has faced discrimination at the hands of the teachers and VC.

Megha, a MA student of TISS Mumbai, reported that the community she comes from has been denied education. She said she was inspired to take higher education, inspite of the nagging worry of discrimination and employment, following the death of Rohith Vemula. She had to fight within her home as the first girl child and first generation learner to enter higher education in her family. She spoke of how her expectation of the freedom and inclusivity in a campus like TISS was crushed. After joining the social work course, she realised that their pedagogy is very discriminative. As instances, she stated that in group work which formed part of the course, groups were formed invariably on the basis of caste and class. She said that upper class students hangout among their upper class circles, while her own friends are all from her ‘category’. She also said that under case work they are taught to solve people’s problems through charity approach, thereby excluding Dalits, adivasis and Muslims by making them subjects. Even while the institute talks of social justice, students from marginalised communities are failed in subjects even after writing a good paper. By imposing fees of Rs 31,000 per semester on families, which earn Rs 20,000 annually, the institute is excluding students, which is

caste discrimination. She said that it is for this reason that students are agitating to ensure access to education for the upcoming generations by following what Babasaheb Ambedkar had said – ‘educate, agitate, and organise’.

Sri Ramulu Munavat, a student from the German Department of the English and Foreign Language University (EFLU), Hyderabad, faced caste discrimination and reprisals for raising uncomfortable questions on the implementation of reservations and facilities to students from SC, ST and OBC communities within the campus. He reported that apart from the German Department, other departments do not get scholarships. Whenever students demanded remedial coaching classes, coaching for NET, which are supposed to be provided under the UGC coaching schemes, EFLU came up with excuses that they don’t have enough funds and that teachers do not have extra time to spend for the remedial classes.

Boota Singh, a student of Panjab University, Chandigarh, also reported the severe caste discrimination faced by him and casteist and communal slurs hurled at him by the police following his arrest during a students protest, where he was singled out and tortured by the police on account of being a Dalit and called ‘chamar’ repeatedly while being beaten.

In a written testimony received from a student of IIT-Bombay and member of the APPSC, caste discrimination in technical institutes of higher learning such as IIT

was borne out. This discrimination is not often through overt acts but takes plays in subtle and covert ways like by asking students their IIT-JEE (Joint Entrance Test) ranks, often by the faculty itself, which becomes a caste marker. Once it is known that certain students have come through reservation, different groups are formed and the students who have come through reservation are excluded. The caste discrimination can be seen in labs across campus; a lab headed by a faculty coming from a certain caste would have maximum students from the same caste and also the students the faculty would choose to guide. There are less than 10 SC/ST teaching faculty in the IIT-Bombay campus. When enquired on why there is not enough representation of SC/ST faculty in teaching, the administration maintained that the normal reservation policy does not operate in IIT, which is governed by its own statute.

Through the testimony, the tragic suicide of a Dalit student, Aniket Ambore, in 2014, was reported. In conversations with his parents before his suicide, he had expressed his desire to withdraw his admission from IIT and give the IIT-JEE again and come back in the general category, on account of the caste discrimination faced by him. At that time, the head of department had openly made a comment that IIT is a chocolate not everyone can have, to indicate that students coming from the reserved category cannot cope with IIT. Following the suicide, the administration refused to acknowledge it as a suicide but claimed

it could be an accidental fall (prompted by a strong wind) and termed as an 'unfortunate death'. After several calls from civil society and within the campus, a three-member committee was set up by IIT-Bombay to inquire into Aniket's death and the problem faced by SC/ST students on campus. The committee, however, while conducting the inquiry and in their report did not come to any conclusion on the social circumstances surrounding Aniket's death, while putting much emphasis on Aniket's (medical) history of depression. As far as the issue of discrimination on campus, instead of taking and relying on actual interviews of students on campus and looking into the prevailing campus environment, incidents and structures, the committee prepared a broad-based report, relying mainly on institutional statistics.

Gender and Sexuality

Prof Vinita Chandra from Ramjas College, DU, in her expert testimony stated that gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment are pervasive in all aspects of women's life from the privacy of their homes to the public spaces they inhabit. She explained that in the university spaces, in order to access these spaces and interact equally and intellectually, mentally, emotionally, or even physically, women need to let their guard down and the intrinsic patriarchy that defines all gender identities and gender roles inevitably makes them vulnerable to experience the trauma of gender discrimination and sexual

harassment. She said that gender discrimination also comes from the format of classroom teaching in the university and the inequality of power relations in a classroom between the professor and student. She said that there are situations where some male professors create a hostile environment for female students. To be able to think freely women must feel safe as soon as they enter the campus. She stated that apart from students, it is very important to talk about the systematic sexual harassment of women teachers, which has increased in the last seven to eight years with the increase of 'contractualisation'.

In her powerful testimony being a testament of the role higher education plays in gender empowerment, Mineshi Mishra, a student of BHU, who was residing in the girls hostel, spoke of the gender discrimination faced by the girl students in the hostel at the hands of the hostel authorities and in the BHU campus.

Sangeetha, a student of Osmania University, Hyderabad, spoke of her journey and struggles to enter the higher education system as a girl from a tribal village in the backward area of Utkal, where educating girls is considered a crime. She informed the jury that she was determined to study law and felt victorious when she got admission in Osmania University. However, in Osmania University, harassment takes place both for being a woman and for belonging to a particular caste/tribe. She

reported that she was also discriminated upon due to her education in Telugu language, her caste location being from ST community, and other students refused to speak to her saying she came from a Naxalite area. She reported gender discrimination both in the village she came from where girls are not given access to higher education and also gender discrimination in the campus where curfew for women's hostel is 7.30 p.m. and food in women's hostel is worse than men's hostel.

Ditilekha, a student of TISS Mumbai narrated the struggles of the TISS Queer Collective and their fight to create a gender neutral space in the campus. They had managed to get gender neutral hostels and had also made a demand for gender neutral toilets. In 2014, the Supreme Court had passed the NALSA judgement giving citizenship rights to transpersons and the Right to Self Determination of Gender. NALSA judgment also mandated that the government should facilitate the access and accessibility of transgender people in educational spaces. Transgender persons are pushed out of education at a very young age and even though some have access to these educational spaces owing to their privilege, they have been highly invisibilised. They felt that to make this space more accessible for transpersons, it is essential to radicalise the understanding of gender itself. They believe that creation of exclusive transgender spaces were likely to make a space more inaccessible for transpersons

who are going through transphobia, stigma and discrimination and a lot of people would have to face immense targeted violence and discrimination within the campus. They maintained that segregation is a Brahminical, heteropatriarchal agenda and hence, their demand for gender neutral spaces.

Sarbani Chakrabarty, a JNU student, stated that she is the student representative of highly successful and credible GSCASH (Gender Sensitization Committee Against Sexual Harassment), which was first formed in JNU. She reported that recently the democratic decision-making process at JNU has been scrapped by the VC. After its dissolution, the GSCASH was sought to be replaced by the ICC (Internal Complaints Committee). In violation of the Shaksham Committee recommendations which provide that institutions like ICC have to be divorced from any position of power, the chief proctor was made the chairperson. The students of JNU did not have any faith in ICC and thus against the mandate of the administration they went ahead to conduct election for GSCASH. Even though the GCASH was contested in court legally, the JNU community at large still largely accept the GSCASH. She reported one incident of sexual harassment which got leaked on social media and media, following which several complainants facing sexual harassment for 4-5 years decided to come to the GCASH and not the ICC. Together they got eight FIRs filed at Vasant Kunj Police Station. After protest, the police

were forced to file eight separate FIRs and took 164 statements, although the police showed no interest in conducting investigation. In a completely illegal move, the administration called all the complainants informally and asked them to submit whatever evidence they have to the administration and the administration will decide whether the accused is guilty or not. Although the complainants, students' union, GSCASH and teachers have demanded suspension of the accused, it was not done and Sarbani was served a notice from the administration.

In a written testimony submitted by an assistant professor at TISS Guwahati, the failure of the authorities to take action on a sexual harassment complaint submitted to the ICC of TISS in 2017, was reported. She was bullied on social media and subjected to rape threats by the accused through a fake account, causing her mental harassment. She filed an FIR with the police, the accused was granted anticipatory bail.

A written testimony was received on a sexual harassment complaint filed by a female student against a senior professor of KNIPSS, Sultanpur for using abusive language against her. Although the professor apologised for his behaviour, no inquiry was conducted or action of misconduct pursued against him.

In another written testimony a case of denial of access to the library to undergraduate female students of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) was

reported. Undergraduate women students are allowed to access the library only on Sundays when all the reading stacks of the library are closed and they are not able to borrow books as per their requirements. The main reason is that the administration does not want to address the issue of restricted access. Undergraduate women are not allowed to go out of their college for six days and are only allowed an outing on a Sunday. Rest of the girl students, those enrolled in various post-graduate and professional courses, are allowed a seven day outing but their timings are limited to 6:30 pm in the evening in summer and 5:30 pm in the evening in winters. Thus, even now, the main library remains a largely male space, specially after 6:30 pm. The unequal access to public spaces like the library remains a big issue and a cause of struggle for women students in AMU.

In another written testimony on harassment and moral policing of women students at Sai Ram Engineering College, Chennai, a student reported that female students are regular victims of verbal abuse and moral policing in the college. In one instance a female student was subjected to moral policing by the administration after she was caught with a phone. The administration fined her of Rs 10,000 and called her parents. They alleged that she has too many sexual partners in the college on the basis of a Facebook photo with one of her childhood male friends.

In a written testimony from Paankhi Agrawal the issue of gender

discrimination, sexual harassment and low representation of women on the IIT Bombay campus was raised. It was reported that a Gender Sensitisation Committee was formed among students to identify and look into the area of gender discrimination within the campus. An issue reported was concerning sexist or derogatory comments made by male students against women students at a farewell programme organised each year for outgoing students, where students are required to share comments on each of the outgoing students. Inspite of several objections having been raised by women students to the faculty and administration from time to time, no action has been taken against the offending students. In this manner this tradition has not only continued but has been implicitly promoted.

On the issue of sexual harassment on campus, the Women's Cell was started in IIT Bombay in 2012. However, the composition and character of the cell is entirely controlled by the administration which exercises influence in its functioning, as there is no election process. The Women's Cell sends complaints received by it to the ICC, which is not an autonomous body and there is no transparency on how the complaints mechanism work. The Women's Cell is basically acting as a gatekeeper. Even the ICC is not a standing body and lacks transparency in its functioning. It only makes a recommendation in a particular case and

the Director has a veto power over the decision of the ICC. Accordingly, the entire complaints and grievance redressal mechanism lacks seriousness and neutrality, and fails to inspire confidence. For instance, third party harassment on campus is not taken up by IIT Bombay. In December 2017, a project staff faced sexual harassment on the campus at the hands of an outside faculty who had been invited for a training, but the Women's Cell did not take it up.

Region

Gertrude Lamare, former assistant professor, Shivaji College, DU, said that the North-East identity is an imposed one and although she was depositing under the broad theme of region, their experiences are more of racialised forms of discrimination. She reported that in 2016, the JNU administration passed a dossier directed towards the students from Kashmir and North-East – for their alleged 'anti-Indian' activities. The administration also alleged that there were 'anti-Indian elements' from the North-East and Kashmir staying on campus, eating beef etc. She said that although historically structures of discrimination had been in place for a very long time in the city, it is more pronounced in the current regime. The most common one is on the difference in eating habits and language. She cited her own example of how she was forced to learn Hindi and alter her accent. She spoke of segregation in classrooms. Speaking about the attitude of teachers, she said that some colleagues stated in a

meeting organised by the North-East cell that in order to deal with racism in Delhi one has to really 'assimilate' and not assert one's regional or ethnic identity. She reported that even spaces like JNU are not inclusive in terms of representation of North-East students.

Debojit Gogoi, a DU student, spoke of the racial discrimination faced by him and his friends at the hands of 'Mainstream India' and within the campus. He and his friends faced strong hate comments on their food, 'confused nationalities' and judgments, starting from the day of orientation. He was treated like a foreigner and reported the segregation in class. Through the university space, he was introduced to the hateful, sexist and alienating attitude and mindsets of people across India. He also realised the strong misconceptions and prejudices harboured by them and hurled at him.

Shenganglu Kamei, a student of Ambedkar University, New Delhi, narrated her experience of discrimination faced in Miranda House where she did her graduation, which tainted her experience of her time there. Her testimony also revealed the strong groupism of 'Mainland' students in the campus, where North-East students were left out and had no choice but to stay segregated in their own group. She spoke of her unique experience at Ambedkar University, where she felt judged and subjected to stares for her choice of clothes. She reported that when discussions on power or hierarchy in the Indian context take place, the issue of

North-East is never discussed and the discussions are limited to caste, *savarna*, Dalit oppression, etc.

Written testimonies were received from Kashmiri students studying in New Delhi, names of whom are withheld. They spoke of the explicit and implicit discrimination faced by Kashmiri Muslims. Due to the growing conflict, insecurity and lack of education in the region, Kashmiris need to come to places like Delhi to have quality education. However, when they enter universities like DU, JNU etc, with hope for quality education, they are looked at differently by the other students and faculty. This is on account of the growing sentiment of prejudice in India whereby Kashmir is looked as a segregated conflict zone. Several instances were narrated from colleges in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana where Kashmiri students were dragged out of the campus and accused of being 'anti-national'. Holding were put up that all Kashmiris should leave the state. Students from Kashmir staying in Delhi felt segregated after the JNU incident in February 2016. Incidents were also reported from different colleges where Kashmiri students were forced to shout slogans like 'Vande Mataram' by their fellow students. Another student who had studied in Bangalore and Delhi stated that the discrimination was far lesser in South India.

Narrating experiences ranging from difficulty in finding accommodation, to discussions on Kashmir turning violent and abusive in classrooms and a complete

throttling of freedom of speech and democratic expression. The student conveyed the palpable fear felt by Kashmiri students while studying in the higher education space in the country. A Kashmiri professor who was teaching at one of the best social sciences campuses in the country, submitted an anonymous testimony narrating the targeting, vilification, humiliation and branding faced by him in the campus since the arrival of the current regime. His testimony narrated a tale of complete 'othering' in the campus, where, inspite of being a permanent staff, he was denied teaching courses, opportunities and was humiliated before faculty and students. He was treated with suspicion and singled out at each stage because of his Kashmiri Muslim identity. He was forced to provide undertakings on his character and allegiance to the nation. It got to a point that he was compelled to resign and completely give up the prospect of teaching in higher education institutions in the country.

Religion

Umar Khalid, a student of JNU presented a painful testimony of the communal discrimination, branding, media trial and criminalisation faced by him following the JNU sedition case in 2016. The plight felt by him instigated by the rising communalism under the current regime, was conveyed through his question of whether Muslims are a part of the nation. He stated that people coming to study in the university from different minorities and labouring classes, who are already

low in number, are being thrown out from the universities. Today, the extreme forms of violence on Muslims do not allow demands to rise for citizenship issues like public education. Right now, the focus of most groups working among minorities is on ensuring security from communal violence and lynchings, forcing them towards further backwardness. Speaking of the deep internal communal prejudices that made the witch-hunt against him possible, he reported that even though Kanhaiya and Anirban were also arrested, the distinct kind of communal hostility shown against him, by the police, media and which became part of the public narrative, was palpable. The police, because of his religious identity, branded him an 'anti-national' and even communicated that he could be 'encountered'

Adeel Hamza Sahil, former vice-president, Allahabad University Students' Union, shared his experience of communalism and religious targeting for being a Muslim within the campus. He stated that he was made aware of his Muslim identity when he was dissuaded

by his friends from contesting in the students' elections. Even after becoming the first Muslim vice-president of the students' union, he was targeted and singled out in the protests against the administration, even after being jailed along with other students. He was the only student to receive a show cause notice and face inquiry on the alleged charge of burning an effigy of the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath by some students, although he was not even present. Following this, he was banned from the Allahabad University campus till August 15, 2017, and suspended and served a notice on June 14, 2017. His suspension was extended and he was removed for five years, and his degree was kept on hold. He stated that the quantum of punishment awarded to him is exemplary and no other protesting student in the university has faced such punishment. He expressed his disappointment at the manner in which professors and administration discriminate against students on the basis of religion and caste for their own personal interests.

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Jury Report

The People's Tribunal on Attack on Educational Institutions was held at the Constitution Club of India, New Delhi, from April 11 to 13, 2018. It was organised by the People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space (PCSDS). Its jury comprised Justice (Retd) Hosbet Suresh, Justice (Retd) BG Kolse Patil, Prof Amit Bhaduri, Dr Uma Chakravarty, Prof TK Oommen, Prof Vasanthi Devi, Prof Ghanshyam Shah, Prof Meher Engineer, Prof Kalpana Kannabiran and Ms Pamela Philipose.

The testimonies of about 130 students and teachers from approximately 50 institutions and universities spread across 17 states were considered by the jury panel; 49 testimonies were deposed orally at the tribunal. Along with these testimonies, there were 17 expert submissions on all thematic issues, viz. impact of privatisation and globalisation on education, distortion of history, syllabus and 'saffronisation' of education, student unions and elections on campuses, criminalisation of dissent, and structural marginalisation in educational institutions based on caste, gender and sexuality, religion and region.

The centrality of higher education for the survival of Indian democracy was the major theme of the Tribunal's deliberations. The focus was on the extreme and manifold crisis in higher education which has grown over the last few decades in India, and has got

accentuated in the last four years. Testimonies presented to the jury provided ample evidence of this trend which poses a serious threat to Indian democracy. Recognition also emerged from the deliberations that retrieving and rejuvenating higher education in consonance with constitutional values need to be one of the topmost priorities of the country.

Institutions dedicated to the teaching of the social sciences have been particularly affected by the present crisis. The reason for this is not difficult to understand, given that the teaching of the social sciences is so critically linked to providing a deeper understanding of society and its functioning. What came through forcefully during the Tribunal's hearings was the sense that the crisis of education is not simply a crisis of education alone but a crisis of society itself, since education is one of the major resources that enable societies to exist as cohesive units. An educated citizenry, that can put questions to those who rule, is essential for the furthering and deepening of democracy.

Having heard the depositions made by students, teachers and experts, the jury concludes that there has indeed been a systematic onslaught on the very idea of higher education in India, and that understanding the larger political economy that undergirds this crisis is essential for identifying the forces that are

negatively affecting the education sector today.

The final observations of the jury can be divided in four broad themes: Privatisation and Commercialisation of Education; Saffronisation of Education; Criminalisation of Dissent and Crackdown on Democratic Spaces in Higher Educational Institutions; and, finally, Structural Marginalisation Based on Caste, Gender, Religion and Region.

Privatisation and Commercialisation of Education

The money that comes from the government in the form of taxes from the country's citizens, including from the poorest of the poor, is meant to enhance democracy. Education is central to this endeavour.

Ever since the liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1991, governments across the spectrum have encouraged the privatisation of education. The years earlier to the present era had seen a process of decline of public education set in, with state universities in several states functioning without a proper faculty and even basic infrastructure. They had, in fact, been turned for the most part into mere examination boards. But privatisation of education introduced another dynamic as well, one that was based on the principle that the maximizing of profit was the sole rationale for the existence of institutions of higher learning.

These trends, which deepened in the post-liberalisation period, got

consolidated under the present NDA regime. So-called 'education reforms' actively promoted the privatisation of higher education, and state funding to this sector was deliberately curtailed, resulting in shrinking budgets and restrictions in terms of student access. Privatisation is a complex process. When public education is privatised, there is a sharp rise in ad-hocism, with private actors being allowed to conduct courses that bring in the maximum profits, with self-financing courses becoming the norm. In a scenario where the aspiration for higher education is growing rapidly, privatisation has led to a massive expansion of enrolment, with a concomitant rise in the ethos of conformism and conservatism. Neoliberalism in the education sector has, in other words, only gone to strengthen regressive attitudes and life choices.

Gross enrolment in higher education has increased from 11 per cent a quarter of a century ago to over 25 per cent today. The percentage of the female student population currently stands at 46 per cent. The demographic profile of students has also changed drastically, even if that of the faculty has not.

It is against this backdrop that the rise in the spirit of rebellion among students has to be seen and understood.

The pattern of funding for universities is very unequal and, in turn, consolidates social inequalities. Central universities today get four times more funding than state universities. In the process, smaller universities – with students who are not

just poorer but who come from far-flung regions –are rendered unable to provide good quality education to their students. This has ensured that higher education continues to remain available only to the rich and privileged and that a resource that should have been extended to the poor and marginalised, is now ironically being increasingly taken away from them. In the process, higher education instead of contributing to the amelioration of social problems has become increasingly insulated from the realities of ordinary people. The Birla Ambani report of the late 1990s provided a blueprint on privatising higher education and curtailing scholarships for poor students. It led to the mushrooming of private institutions and unfair practices. Many of these institutions are steeped in corruption, right from the initial process of gaining licences to operate. Madhya Pradesh's Vyapam scam is a good example of the consequences of such a reality. Ironically, when the state had a lower growth rate, it is forced to spend more on education. Today across the country, with the government abdicating its constitutional responsibility of funding education, big businesses and corporates have entered the sector in a significant way. The negative social impacts of this are many and it could be a contributing factor for the country's literacy level remaining stagnant at 75 per cent.

The self-financing of courses has resulted in teaching staff being left in a state of perpetual limbo, gripped by the fear of losing their jobs. This is affecting the very heart of the system. The rising ad-hocism

in the recruitment of teaching staff has not only created widespread trauma among teachers, it has severely undermined the capacity of both staff and students for critical thinking and questioning.

The jury listened to testimonies that pointed out that “universities” were being set up in small schools without adequate staff and infrastructure. In other words, they exist only in name. In some instances, the model associated with Delhi Public School – where a “popular brand” is franchised to the highest bidder – has been adopted. Commerce, then, is what has come to drive education, not the needs of local communities or society in general.

The other trend the jury notes is that, apart from the greater privatisation and commercialisation of education, there has been a greater centralisation as well. Until the Emergency (1975), education was on the Union List. After 1975, it was added to the concurrent list. Today, the central government has come to exercise complete control in shaping the contours of higher education, reflecting a wider loss of democratic authority and the rise of an autocratic order.

This trend has manifested itself in different ways, including in the imposition by the Central government of certain entrance models, which have worked against the interests of local students. A case in point is that of the brilliant Dalit student, Anitha, from rural Tamil Nadu, who was very keen on studying medicine but could not do so because of the imposition of NEET, a new

model of entrance test. The introduction of entrance examinations of this kind, even as they undermine the country's federal polity, are deliberate attempts to homogenise the cohort that can access higher education in a way that disproportionately and negatively impacts SC, ST and OBC students. In this case Anitha filed a case in the Supreme Court but, on losing it, committed suicide. The jury agrees that in sectors like education, state governments should be given more freedom and autonomy to design their pedagogy, curricula and education policies, so that they are more in sync with local requirements. Anitha's tragic death reflects the dangers of centralised policy making in education.

In the name of autonomy, managements are now being given a free hand in controlling admissions and deciding on curricula and textbooks, often with very negative consequences, even while the autonomy of teachers to set syllabi is being increasingly taken away from them. Another negative fall-out of the cutting of funding for higher education has been the dwindling number of scholarships available to students, even as the government encourages them to take educational loans. It is the SC/ST and OBC students who are the worst affected as a consequence and there has been a decline in the proportion of students in this cohort receiving government scholarships.

Delays in the disbursal of scholarships are also affecting the most vulnerable students disproportionately. A study of

bottlenecks in the disbursal of scholarships conducted across the whole network of campuses of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences clearly establishes that the non-transfer of funds in a timely fashion impacted the SC/ST and OBC students the most, and the hardships they faced have increased dramatically as a result.

In this context, one of the depositions made before the jury was particularly appalling. A student from the SC category in a medical college in Bihar, was forced to give up his studies because the scholarship money due to him did not come in time. He had to give up on his dream of becoming a doctor and take up NREGA work in order to support himself and his family.

Scholarship polices are today being linked to new fiscal policies and it is very clear that the banking sector is being encouraged to provide loans to students who have been deprived of scholarships and thus benefitting at their cost. As the number of scholarships decline, and the disbursal of funds become more erratic, students are more or less forced to seek bank loans to finance their education. While eager representatives of the banking sector chase them and offer them seemingly attractive deals, the experience of many young people who have availed of such facilities has been disastrous. In several instances, these loans left them literally enslaved, with many being forced to take up ill-paying jobs in order to pay back their dues.

'Saffronisation' of Education

Along with privatisation, there has been a rise in socio-cultural conservatism. Cultural beliefs and resources are being appropriated by the forces of Hindutva in order to buttress their own presence in local educational institutions. For instance, in Assam, there are 500 schools, accessed by 1.6 lakh students, which are being run by Hindu religious fundamentalists in the name of Assam's saint-scholar, Shankardev. These Shankardev Shishu Niketans inculcate Hindutva values and have furthered a deeply conservative, conformist and an academic culture oriented towards the Right-wing.

Sanskrit has been introduced in many school syllabi. While the jury recognises it is not the teaching of Sanskrit that is the concern – there is a place for the teaching of classical languages in any educational system – exceptionalising it and linking it to the Hindutva project is extremely problematic. In the Right-wing drive to transform education to make it conform to the Hindutva mould, many schools across the country have been forced to use textbooks that are complete distortions of history, if not absolute fiction. This is an extremely worrying development, because India's future is being shaped in the classrooms. In the attempt to project a 'resurgent' India, classroom teaching often presents a distorted idea of the country. Attempts are also being made by the Central government and the forces of Hindutva to systematically 'saffronise' higher education and exercise thought control.

Universities and institutions of higher learning must be forums where the freedom to discuss contentious issues – such as the nature of the state and of Indian secularism – is preserved and protected. This freedom of thought and expression is today being deliberately curtailed by educational authorities in order to conform to governmental directives.

Criminalisation of Dissent and Crackdown on Democratic Spaces in Higher Educational Institutions

From the testimonies presented to the jury, it became clear that suppression of dissent has assumed various forms. Both teachers and students have faced legal action, disciplinary crackdowns, coercion within the classroom and the campus because they were seen to be dissenters. Many instances of students, teachers and select institutions and departments being denied their due entitlements in a targetted way by the authorities came up before the jury. Students were particularly vulnerable to such arbitrary and authoritarian steps taken against them. All this is being done with the deliberate intent to create an atmosphere of uncertainty, fear and anxiety among the student and academic community. Show causes notices have been issued to students on the mere charge that they were 'talking' to each other. Even in earlier times, victimisation – such as by cancelling PhD registrations – has taken place, and there have been several attempts by politicians to control university systems and their governing

bodies. But what is conspicuous today is the wide extent and repressive nature of the attempts being made to curtail dissenting voices. Just for participating in protests, students have had access to their scholarships blocked and the authorities have even sought court interventions to punish them. In fact, the systematic use of criminal law on campuses has become the new normal. There has also been a distinct increase in incidents of college and university authorities targeting Dalit and minority students who participated in protests or had publicly voiced their criticism. Often their caste and religion were cited in the FIRs filed against them.

What was the most disconcerting aspect of this trend is the pre-meditated manner in which this has been achieved. Often systematic and organised violence by supporters of the ruling party and its affiliates has been unleashed. Such displays of viciousness, hate and fury have forced students to lie low or go underground, disrupting their scholastic careers. High-voltage campaigns, marked by caste and communal hatred, and celebrations of assaults on dissenters, are today common on campuses, with the police remaining silent spectators or playing a partisan role in favour of the assaulters. In some instances, Right-wing violence is being systematically used to control students and campuses. What are being eroded in the process are constitutional values. Disturbingly, campuses, which should be sites where discussion and deliberation take place, are today becoming spaces of thought control and repression.

From 2016 onwards, there has been an alarming tendency on the part of the authorities to take recourse to legal provisions in order to isolate and penalise individuals and institutions. This seems to be driven by the realisation that it is possible to achieve popular consensus on authoritarian moves through court pronouncements. The label of 'anti-nationalism' is being deployed not just to stereotype students but to stigmatise them and destroy their educational prospects. Sometimes the mere expression of views critical of the authorities is taken as evidence of 'anti-nationalism'. A telling example of this was the manner in which JNU, in its entirety, was framed as being a breeding ground for anti-nationals. Noting these disturbing and dangerous developments, the jury concludes that the role that the media played in furthering such a malicious project was particularly pernicious. In the case of JNU, a section of the mainstream media put out viciously biased content that dubbed the protesting students as "traitors". Given the reach of the media, this view quickly emerged as the dominant viewpoint among the local public. It is ironic that JNU, rated as one of the country's top institutions of higher learning, is now seen as a site of "anti-nationalism", rather than as a space where critical thinking is nurtured in order to enhance a democratic culture.

Such an approach to quell dissent has long-term repercussions that are exceedingly harmful for the country as a whole. In many instances, Muslim and

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Dalit students, or those from Kashmir or the North-East, get framed as ‘the Other’. Kashmiri students, for instance, are invariably stigmatised as “terrorists”, and hatred against Kashmiris gets manifested even at the school level.

There are three broad categories of institutions of higher learning in India today:

1. Universities and colleges – which have historically been largely democratic in their functioning.
2. IITs and IIMs – developed on a top-down, authoritarian model with very little space for dissent.
3. Research institutes – autonomous or state-run – where some space for democratic functioning may be available depending on the authorities who run them.

IITs and IIMs typically are structured for control. They do not have students’ unions that function in a democratic manner. For instance, elections to student bodies are often not held, and representation is achieved largely through the nomination route. Such bodies do not represent students to the authorities, but rather the authorities to the students. They certainly need to be reformed if they are to help further genuine student representation.

The urgent need to defend the right to dissent, the right to think, the right to differ, the right to be who you are, came up in every single testimony submitted to the jury. What was heartening for the jury to observe was that the students who

presented their testimonies exhibited a spirit of democratic resistance and a refusal to unthinkingly conform to authoritarian pressure. They also demonstrated the capacity to critically engage with the issues of the day.

What also emerged clearly was that the crackdown on democratic spaces within the universities was meant to facilitate neoliberal and communal agendas. Also evident was the attempt on the part of the authorities to control development of curricula, selection of syllabi, faculty recruitment, and general decision making on administrative affairs. By appointing men and women aligned to their ideology and political persuasion, the authorities are now able to get their diktats executed, whether it is to crack down on dissenting students and professors, propagate Hindutva, or expedite privatisation. Because critical thinking poses a serious challenge to such a project, the effort is to destroy the capacity of students to engage with issues independently. This has been accompanied by restrictions on student elections, even as no effort is spared in ensuring that partisan student unions come to power. This jury is of the opinion that, in the name of autonomy, there should be no change in the process of selecting vice-chancellors. Similarly, there should be no attempt to re-structure systems of governance within institutions that could result in a more controlled environment.

The jury notes how academics have been subjected not only to physical assaults, humiliations and discriminatory actions taken by the authorities, but also to

extensive surveillance inside and outside the campus. The criminal justice system is being used against not just students but teachers as well, and their fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution are being systematically violated. Any kind of non-conformity is being criminalised under the pretext of defending Indian nationalism. It is not just students who are being labeled as “anti-nationals”, teachers too are subjected to such abuse.

The struggle to save democratic spaces in higher educational institution should not be confined only to the country’s capital, but across the country, even in far flung areas. The jury is of the opinion that the collective understanding gleaned from educational institutions located in urban spaces should be taken to the rural hinterland, where students and teachers face even greater challenges. The jury is also of the opinion that it is imperative for students to be made more aware of criminal law and their custodial rights. The innovative ways in which students’ organisations have been fighting back against authoritarian trends could help in fashioning future strategies to protect shrinking democratic spaces within the educational sphere.

Structural Marginalisation based on Caste, Gender, Religion and Region

The jury observes that there has been intensification in the marginalisation of students and teachers belonging to the Dalit and tribal communities, and to those from religious minorities, the Northeast

and Kashmir. There is also a lot of evidence of gender-based discrimination and harassment, including against persons belonging to the LGBTQI community.

As has already been noted, there has been a huge democratic transformation in the composition of students in institutions of higher education, which has led to potential situations of conflict with entrenched interests. Many of the changes within the university system, especially in terms of the enrolment and social composition of students, are taking place in public universities. But it is in these very campuses that students are being targeted on the basis of their identity. The recent decision by the Union Ministry of Human Resource and Development to grant autonomy to public institutions is an example of how the State is seeking to ensure that students from poor and backward communities are driven to the periphery and denied access to equal, quality and affordable education. In many cases, the police and intelligence agencies specifically target vulnerable students, whether they are women, or come from Muslim, Dalit and economically marginalised backgrounds. This approach sometimes amounts to “intellectual lynching” through physical and fiscal discrimination. Dalit and tribal students are being denied equal access to institutions of higher education, including to hostel facilities. They are also often subjected to humiliation based on their identities within the campuses and action against the perpetrators of such attacks is rarely taken.

Many elite institutions, which had evolved into lively, vibrant and equal spaces through measures like scholarships for Dalit and OBC students, are now witnessing a sharp reversal of this trend with the introduction of exorbitantly high fees. Both the concerned governments and university administrations have failed to address the issue. As a consequence, institutions that once had a fairly substantial representation of SC, ST and OBC students, are now – with the introduction of new and unaffordable fee structures – in danger of lapsing back into being the elite institutions they once were. The testimonies of students from many of these institutions, the jury finds, indicated that they were in a state of desperation and depression.

Since students from Scheduled Tribes have been bracketed with those from the Scheduled Castes, as the 'SCs/STs' category, the specific problems of tribal students have tended to be ignored, or neglected. This is not something that happened just over the last four years, it has marked the educational system for decades. This issue needs to be understood in terms of demographic spread. While the SCs are present across the length and breadth of the country, STs tend to be located in specific pockets. For instance, an estimated 54 per cent of India's tribal population is located in Central India, historically known as Chota Nagpur, while another 13 per cent is located in the North-East. The remaining tribal population, constituting roughly 33 per cent, is spread all over the

country. Unless policies are very finely attuned to this reality, it is very likely that many belonging to the tribal population would find themselves deprived of access to higher education, since it is usually only those who come within a 300 to 400 kilometre radius of an institution who would make the cut.

A few years ago, the Government of India began setting up Central Universities, with some of them being located in regions that constitute the inner tribal belt. But it will take several more decades for the country's tribal students to achieve parity with their counterparts in urban areas as far as access to institutions of higher learning is concerned. Apart from physical location, the other major barrier is language. Despite the constitutional right of every Indian child to universal, compulsory education in her or his mother tongue, the State has failed the tribal population on this score. Correcting this anomaly should be a priority for the State, but so far there are no signs of this concern being addressed.

A disadvantage that students from both SC and ST backgrounds face is the time it takes them to gain a PhD. Most of them are in their late 20s before they get admission into a PhD courses. This makes them overage and therefore ineligible to participate in student elections. In the process, they also stand deprived of a chance to influence policy as student representatives.

Similarly, the jury recognises that there is a kind of 'ghettoisation' of minority students that is taking place. The system

appears to push them into groups comprised only of their fellow religionists. Deprived of the cosmopolitan culture that should mark institutions of higher learning, there is a higher likelihood of these students embracing conservative values. Since education is one of the important pathways to achieving a modern, secular outlook, the jury believes that the educational system ought to have enabled a broader representation of Muslims in campuses across the country. It considers the isolation of minority students as reflecting a serious failure of the system.

Dalits have faced a double discrimination. While everyday prejudices remain, there have also been decreases in the number of fellowships coming their way. Women Dalit students face the additional discrimination of being female. Through the denial of reservations and scholarships, these categories are being systematically deprived of access to the educational system. The jury finds it outrageous that educational funds and scholarships meant for marginalised sections of the country's population are today being used as political tools for political and electoral gains.

The widespread prevalence of sexual harassment and discrimination in institutional spaces because of patriarchal and gender insensitive practices and norms, was a major concern that was raised before the jury. On the one hand, there have been cases where the authorities have failed to take action against faculty members accused of sexual harassment because they happen

to be aligned to those in power. On the other, a highly controlled environment on the campus has prevented many women students from participating in campus activities or availing fully of campus facilities and achieving the educational outcomes they seek. Restrictive timings of hostels have been an extremely contentious issue for women students and have led to agitations in several campuses across the country. The breakdown of internal mechanisms such as Internal Complaints Committees and Sexual Harassment Committees has led students to seek redressal through extra-institutional mechanisms, like filing cases in courts of law. It is also the case that women students who participate in public protests are often targets of verbal, physical and police attacks, because they are seen as social 'deviants'.

All-female institutions have often been at the receiving end of the discriminatory attitudes of the authorities. A striking case came up before the jury of a women's university (Assam Women University) being slated for derecognition over a minor bureaucratic anomaly, despite the fact that several women students had already been enrolled in the institution for several years and were keen to carry on with their education within it. The jury was of the opinion that this situation would never have arisen if proper guidelines for the establishment of such institutions were followed, and that derecognising them once enrolments have taken place, would be patently unfair to the enrollees.

Personal testimonies from Kashmiri

students and teachers presented to the jury indicated how this section is facing multiple discriminations, being stigmatised both as Muslims and as Kashmiris. Kashmiri students and teachers revealed how they were often dubbed as 'anti-nationals', 'Islamist terrorists', 'Pakistani agents', and so on. The systematic and racist targeting of students from north eastern states in public seems to also be on the rise. Student and teachers from the community described how alienated they have been made because of their tribal identity. They described the manner in which they often became the subject of slurs and ugly comments about their food habits and dressing styles, all of which indicated an inherent and disturbing racism.

A paradox evident in the classroom is the fact that while the faculty in most institutions of higher education is overwhelmingly upper caste, the profile of the students is far more mixed, as noted earlier. In many classrooms, teachers continue to privilege a majoritarian ideology in their teaching, failing to adopt an inclusive pedagogy that their students could relate to, leading to alienation in the classroom. The authorities appear indifferent to such anomalies and have done little to address them. Higher

education, in an egalitarian society, must necessarily be diverse and reflective of the realities of various sections of society, particularly of those who have been marginalised in multiple ways.

Arenas of higher education, where the freedom to think, explore, discuss and dissent should have been protected and furthered, have today become forums to exercise control on young minds and shape them in a way that conforms to the majoritarian agendas of the ruling forces. The jury has no hesitation in acknowledging that there has, over the last four years, been a sharp decline in the standards of higher education and the values that govern it. Various dimensions of this decline came across in the testimonies presented before it. These included the negative impacts of privatisation; the assaults on freedom of expression; the dumbing down and 'saffronisation' of curricula; and the marginalisation of a broad spectrum of students, from women and transgenders to students from Dalit backgrounds or from minority communities to students from Kashmir and the North-East. Taken together these multiple crises, unless addressed, pose a profound danger not just to higher education in India but to the very fabric of Indian democracy. ★★

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Testimonies

The Perspective

**Prof Krishna Kumar, former director, NCERT, Professor,
Department of Education, Delhi University**

'These are the first crop of the expansion in elementary education and it includes the girl child, the adivasi child, the Dalit child, the minorities, the vast number of people who do not enjoy the privileges of society'

I will try to describe the state of higher education in India. The present state has its roots in history. And I am not merely talking about the period following independence. The roots lie in the policy framework that was devised during the colonial period.

It's a crisis that reminds us of the state of our system, its institutional decay and the enormity of the scale at which institutional recovery has to be imagined. Let alone the scale at which the collective mind and will have to be assembled in order to initiate a new process of recovery. Recovery is probably a wrong word because there is no point in recovering the system as it was, say 30 years ago, because that system had decayed so much and in such a short period of time. It tells us that there have been serious problems with the system. Therefore, it's not merely a question of recovery, but, also, reconstruction.

We need higher education that suits our country, that is less vulnerable to the kind

of decay that has set in and the weaknesses that has permeated in, owing to the attacks that we have seen in the recent past. I can't think of a better time when the young, in my university, Delhi University, till quite recently, should have felt restless, suffocated and fed up enough to virtually sit on the streets to protest against something which was awfully wrong and which brought a sense of crisis. It was something close to every young man and woman's heart. I am talking about the sudden start of the Four Year Undergraduate Programme which the Delhi University started and then had to be rolled back due to political pressure.

I, as a teacher, at that point of time, felt that it would bring rapport among the students, and, yes, it was able to build rapport among the various political factions in which the student community of Delhi University was and is divided. These street actions registered the crisis caused by a very, very poorly conceptualised Four Year Undergraduate

Programme at a different pace, so they never really came together. Similarly, in case of the sudden imposition of the semester system for which no one was prepared, and all the teachers, including their union – the Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) – opposed it. Everyone was up in arms against it, and, yet, it was implemented and now irreparable damage has been done.

Let us look beyond the university. When Rohith Vemula committed suicide, this will be marked as a watershed moment in the history of higher education. Perhaps tens of thousands of young men and women came to believe that this system stinks.

A young man with such a wonderful vision about what education is, what its transformative potential is all about, decides to end his life and that too in the beautiful campus of a central university: the Hyderabad Central University. Then, everyone thought that this system can't grow like this and it has to be reformed before it takes anyone else's life.

I thought that the university would come to a standstill after Rohith Vemula's suicide, but, things again become normal after a few protests and that too in Hyderabad, not in other campuses. Similarly, when JNU went through this phenomenon which I call the 'Kanhaiya Kumar phenomena' and how he was oppressed in the court premises and subsequently in various situations, the crisis was registered, and, yet, things came to a pass.

The sense of institutional decay in the crisis was not felt sufficiently by the various people involved to take note of the situation and thereby declare that something has to be done. Let me talk about my university where out of a total of 8,000 teachers in the 75 colleges, more than 4,000 have been living on the edge for may be 15 years. Those many teachers have no permanent jobs and they are called ad-hocs.

I want the youngsters to know how unhappy lives their teachers are living; they see no prospects in their career, with many of them being saturated with frustration. Many of the best minds which could have gone to teaching have perhaps left, some have gone abroad, while numerous others have gone to other fields like the corporate sector or NGOs, giving up their desire to serve the profession of teaching where they can ignite minds.

Look at the University of Mumbai where thousands of answer sheets were first scanned so that they could be examined as soft copies and in that process the declaration of examination results were delayed by several months. Similarly, think of other poorly executed and planned administrative reforms – take the example of the installation of CCTV cameras or getting first the non-teaching and then the teaching staff to give biometric attendance on a daily basis. What could be more demeaning to teachers? It first started with the schools, then, it started in the colleges. Now, it's starting in the universities.

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I would say that the University Grants Commission probably has a leading role in this because it has put together a package, involving all of us – me too. Yes, we ought to have cooperation with the academic world, but the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was not this: the rankings, the idea of quantifying the academic standard of the campuses.

The ranking system was introduced because we were nowhere in the global ranking, so the government thought that let us better start a national ranking. All of us should look somewhere and all of us would find a place somewhere. One of the former presidents felt bad that the universities were nowhere in the top 200 ranks of the world. Interestingly, the UGC kept talking about making global class universities, despite very clear evidence that you don't make global class universities by first starving, by first making all Indian universities marginalised, by making youth starved of good teaching, of libraries and of facilities, that every good university should have. You don't start like that. However, that is how they have started.

They have started every innovation, every so called innovation of the last 20 years, by first making the teachers angry, by marginalising any voice of dissent, by not listening to them, and by ensuring that everyone adheres to their norms that someone has created. Yes, perhaps, one may like to think that the Union Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) is the villain in this case, whose

representatives have forced the UGC to take certain measures at certain times, so on and so forth.

So, who destroyed our autonomy as academia? We are an autonomous set of institutions. Who destroyed our autonomy? In the background of the crisis, we will have to go back.

We have to look at the state of autonomy in the state universities run by the state governments. In these places there is no meaning of autonomy. This difference between a provincial university and the central universities has been growing for a very long time. We already knew this was going to happen 65 years ago, when the funds sanctioned for a central university were four times more than the funds sanctioned for a state university. If we were egalitarian then we ought to have protested against that and we ought to have protested a lot, but we forgot to protest. If we go a level down and look at the affiliated colleges, which have been a very strong pillar, geographically diverse and socially hierarchical, a pillar of higher education since the 19th century – its decay started first.

I taught in an affiliated college for a few months and I can tell you that its library was one of the best in the year that I am talking about, 1970, and it was robbed off in the year 1985. There have been no appointments since 1988 and yet the college functions. It functions with just 50 permanent teachers out of the total 665, while the rest are all contractual, ad-hoc workers. These contract workers work on

varying daily wages, varying from Rs 250 to Rs 900 and working for 15-20 days in a month and some of them have been working like that up to the age of 50 to 55. This is the state of affiliated colleges.

If you look at the report of the National Knowledge Commission or the other reports of the UGC, you will find them talking that these affiliated colleges have brought the standards down. While the reality is that these colleges have been instrumental in allowing first generation learners to enter higher education for the last eight to ten generations. These institutions have been instrumental in making Indian democracy deeper.

This is where I would like to come to the crux of the issue. The higher education system, which was designed during the colonial period, continues unreformed more or less, despite the fact that you had imaginative and enduring islands like JNU and Delhi University, which are under decay now. The thrust of the system was such that it could never serve a hierarchically organised social order.

For a long time the crisis was not felt because the dropout rates at the primary levels were very high. In 1970, there was one report which stated how for every 100 students enrolled in Class 1, only 30 remained in the system by the time they reached Grade 5. Thereby, in rural India – which at that time was 90 per cent of the whole of India – only 1 out of 100 were able to make it to the doors of higher education.

This meant that higher education was in the control of the elite with English being the medium of instruction. Most of these institutions remained isolated from society.

The IITs, or, other such premier institutions, built as part of nation-building, had nothing to do with the society outside them. These institutions were insulated from the larger society. In the IITs, for instance, students come to get trained in the laboratories and they go out as qualified engineers, without even realising how that knowledge could be put into action in sites just outside their gates.

However, elementary education in India started undergoing vast changes from the 1990s. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) started in 2002 and the Right to Education (RTE) was passed in 2009. A vast change has occurred in Indian higher education.

Today, for the first time in India's long history of civilisation those sections are reaching higher education who could have never dreamt of reaching there earlier. Lakhs of students are accessing higher education somewhere – at least in some university-affiliated college. These are the first crop of the expansion in elementary education and it includes the girl child, the adivasi child, the Dalit child, the minorities, the vast number of people who do not enjoy the privileges of society.

However, this has also been the period when the State has officially declared that universities must mobilise their own

financial resources. Universities are being starved of funds. This makes the whole situation complex. While students' intake inside the universities has started reflecting social diversity, the financial starvation makes it untenable for the universities to support this diversity in the long run. The recent announcement of grade autonomy makes the situation even more challenging and complex.

However, this is not new at all. The Birla-Ambani report in the late 1990s had outlined in great detail that while it is the duty of the government to support elementary education, higher education ought to be privatised and given financial autonomy to whatever extent possible. We have already arrived at a situation wherein 65 per cent of those enrolled in higher education are coming from private educational institutions. The figures for the professional educational sector are even higher.

In fact, the privatisation of the professional sector started gaining pace from 1986 itself. In the 1970s and 80s, professional education was marred by what came to be known as capitation fees. In the post-1986 scenario, what has been witnessed is massive corruption in the Indian Medical Council (IMC), All India Council for Technical Education and other such councils responsible for granting licenses to professional educational institutions. Licenses were being given to private institutions with no check on the fees charged by them, or the facilities offered by them. A situation came when generations of students

would come out from these institutions without proper education with parents being forced to spend lakhs to ensure their education. There might be exceptions, but the privatisation of professional education has largely meant commercialisation and exploitation.

Despite all this, it is being argued in the policy discourse that the privatisation model should be extended to public higher education too. There is talk of generating funds by starting self-financing courses, by linking with industry, or, by starting off-shore campuses, so on and so forth. We have come at a point where the system can't go ahead with the privatisation model in place. We need to think of ways as to how this can be done. We need to think how we can come out of this financial starvation. When 90% of the staff in the universities is working on contract and leading vulnerable lives, you cannot expect privatisation to solve the crisis. It is the duty of the government to fund education, entire education – this whole distinction between elementary and higher education does not really make any sense.

Higher education is at the heart of the system. What does heart do in a body? It takes the impure blood and pumps pure blood to the entire body. Higher education too has a similar function in the system. It nourishes the entire system through fresh knowledge. If the heart is dead, then the body too is dead. Similarly, if higher education is dead, then the entire system will be dead.

There is no better time than a crisis to understand this fact. I wish you all the best for the exercise that is being

undertaken to understand the crisis, and to come out of it.



Kanhaiya Kumar, former president, JNU Students' Union (JNUSU)

'Education ceased to be a political question when the elite of this country stopped sending their children to public schools'

First of all, I welcome all of you. This is my humble request to the honourable jury and participants to allow me to speak in Hindi.

Friends, today is the birthday of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. And, today, we are discussing the crisis in education. The attack on educational institutions is mounting and this tribunal is going to discuss that. I don't have any particular deposition. However, I want to highlight a few points.

Jyotiba Phule made his wife a student. That is how the journey of female education in this country starts. When Savitri Bai Phule started going to school, many people used to throw mud at her. Hence, she carried a pair of sarees with her; the other one to wear when the first one became muddy.

Another name that props up with her name is that of Fatima Sheikh. However, why am I citing these names?

This is because we are talking about the tradition that deter all powerless from education. Today, we have reached a

situation where no one is allowed to progress. The crisis that is mounting in JNU, DU or HCU is already going on in the state universities since the 1980s. In my state, Bihar, a vice-chancellor wrote a book in Hindi, '*Bihar me Dhaalte Viswavidyalaya*' (The Collapsing Universities in Bihar). The issues we are addressing in the current scenario were stated by him 25 years back. The crisis in educational institutes in our country in 2018 actually started a quarter of a century back. It took some time to reach our generation. That is because in Delhi good people, like the present jury, were holding commanding positions, though Prof Krishna Kumar has said that we are not in the list of 200 top academic institutes in the world.

Therefore, we need to address two points. Allow me to talk about my own life a bit to join the dots.

I did not come to study in Delhi. I came in search of a job. Somehow, I landed in JNU and saw an opportunity to study at very affordable cost. Thereby, I thought, okay, let's study. At least some education

is going on here and I am getting a chance to study. In Bihar, there is hardly any 'study' happening. Students take admission to participate in examinations only. To merely fulfil the basic qualification criteria. It is as if one needs a graduation degree to fill up the form for bank recruitment. So pick up admission in any college.

However, there is hardly any quality education going on in most colleges. Eventually, there are no questions asked regarding the number of teachers, libraries or funding. The only crucial question for them is how to prepare for competitive exams. Magazines for such competitive exams are available in the market, and there are various test series that the students join. Almost 20 lakh people apply for 200 seats, expecting to somehow grab at least one seat.

I have seen this crisis from that vantage point because, you (the jury) had legitimacy in Delhi's civil society. People like you were respected. When you walk on the road, people recognised you. In Bihar, people know only 'Goondas'. "This person was in jail for that number of months... that person has this number of murder charges... that person owns a number of trucks or buses, and so on..."

There is hardly any respect for educationists in Bihar. How did this depressing scenario emerge? When did all this start?

I don't want to blame only the BJP for all these ills. Or, only Narendra Modi. All of us, whichever political affiliations we

claim to come from, we must all take the blame. Show me one resolution, at least one, either by the Congress, Left or Samajawadis, that is exclusively on education. One resolution that is on fund allocation to education, on student-teacher-ratio!

When did this whole discourse change? These are the questions we are facing in contemporary times. I am facing them, or Rohith Vemula faced these questions; when, did things start deteriorating to this extent? When has studying become a crime? What is the logic behind the claim that after 30 one should not study? How come the meaning of higher education and research has been branded as wasting the tax-payer's money? How has such a situation emerged that you have to listen to abuses that you should be ashamed of yourself for doing PhD at the age of 30 when children are winning medals for the country at the age of 16? How did things acquire such social contours?

If this is a rational argument, then all politicians of the country should be hanged when they reach the age of 23, since Bhagat Singh too was hanged when he was just 23!

So why does a primary school teacher, who goes to work on a cycle, take a loan to give donation for the admission of his son into an engineering college, even though as a teacher he knows that his son does not have the aptitude to study engineering? He knows that if his son does not become an engineer, then he

won't get a job and he won't be able to get married either. Why did this school teacher begin to think in this pattern, while remaining stuck in this morality, with his cycle? Why didn't he too, like others, sell off the benches of his school? Why didn't he too, like others, write speeches for the contractor, so that he could become his PS when the contractor would become an MLA? This suspension of morality is the biggest root of our crisis.

Education is a political question. It is not only a political question today, it has been that since the time of the '*Mahabharata*'. Who decided that Eklavya is not fit to learn archery from Dronacharya and Arjun is fit to learn? It was the court of Dhritarashtra that decided it. The armies of Kauravas and Pandavas didn't comprise only of Kshatriyas, there were Bhils too. It is obvious that they knew archery – but they were not fit to learn archery from Dronacharya.

Education ceased to be a political question when the elite of this country stopped sending their children to public schools. The destruction of the public school system happened when people stopped sending their children to these schools. If I have money I will send my children to New York. Why will I care about what's happening in Delhi University? If I have money, I will send my children to a costly private school. Why will I care whether the school run by the Delhi government has benches or not? The budgetary allocation on education ceased to be a political question when this process started happening in a big scale.

I remember my first day in college. A protest was going on, seeking 6% of the GDP on education. I remember the slogans even today. What were the slogans?

*'Rashtrapati ho ya ho chaprasi ki santaan, sabko shiksha ho ek samaan...' (Whether it is the child of the president or the peon, everyone should get equal education). '*Shiksha par jo kharcha ho, budget ka daswan hissan ho...*' (The spending on education should be 10% of the budget). '*Kothari commission ki sifarishein lagoo karo*' (Implement the recommendations of the Kothari Commission). And, what is being said today? "Why are you studying? Why are you wasting the tax-payer's money?"*

Education is important to propagate the relevance of the State. For political parties it is important, so as to propagate their ideology. If we agree that there is an attack on education then it is happening at three levels. First, centralisation. In this tribunal also there will be only talk of Delhi University, JNU and Jamia Millia Islamia. I earnestly hope that the condition of colleges in remote parts of Bihar will also be discussed.

The second is privatisation. What is happening in the name of privatisation is nothing but privatisation of profit and the socialisation of loss. Nirav Modi is allowed to fly away with crores while the government has no money to fund education. There is a private hospital near JNU where all the teaching and non-teaching staff can avail of medical facilities. This hospital charges lakhs as

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fees, while the staff can't avail medical benefits in a government hospital. So what is happening is that crores of public money is transferred to the private hospital.

A narrative is being created that all things private are good while everything public is bad. SBI is bad and its employees are lazy, while ICICI is good – this is the narrative. While it is the ICICI, whose CEO reportedly transferred the bank's money to a businessman through her husband. Despite this narrative, the IITs are the best engineering colleges in the country and JNU is the best university. Surely, the richest will even now go to AIIMS if they have some serious disease.

The third is – and I won't call it saffronisation, I will call it communalisation. This is because I don't want them to appropriate the saffron colour in the same manner they have appropriated Vivekananda. Irrationality and unscientific approach is necessary if communalisation of education has to be pushed. Hence, you see a former judge saying that the female peacock gets pregnant when tears from the eyes of the male fall in its eyes. Hence, you see the Union HRD Minister of State claiming that Darwin's theory of evolution is wrong. You also get to hear that Einstein's theory of relativity was already present in the *Vedas*.

I can't tell whether society is really secular or not, but I can surely tell that our syllabus has been secular. Even if one

studied merely to pass the exam, the impact of what we learnt in history textbooks remain. We know that Hindus too used to eat cow's meat at one point of time in history. We know that Akbar started Din-e-Illahi. We know that Akbar's court didn't comprise only of Muslims, there were Hindus too. We know all these facts from our history textbooks. That is why there are attempts to communalise education.

We heard about graded autonomy a little while ago. Actually, there can be no meaning of grades in education. There might be a school that teaches dairy farming – should there be no place for that school in the education system? What graded autonomy will do is simple. They will claim that if a university is the 'best', then the 'best' students would be studying there, which would mean that their parents too would be the 'best'. Thereby, the government will tell this 'best' university to take the 'best' fees from the students.

It is my firm belief that the struggle to save education and JNU can't be fought only through such exercises in the Constitution Club in Delhi. These exercises will have to be undertaken in the villages of Bihar and Chhattisgarh. People in these places will have to know that the son of an Anganwadi worker can study for just Rs 120 a year in JNU and can also come and address a meeting in the Constitution Club.

The importance of education and social consciousness associated with it has to be

percolated among the masses. The attack is serious since it is three pronged – of the market, centralisation and communalisation. Take the example of JNU – located in 1,000 acres of land near Vasant Kunj. Any mall owner would want JNU to be closed and instead get a mall opened in its place. This is what we are witnessing with other public universities and schools as well.

I see this exercise as a part of a pressure group. Our task should be to ensure that all political parties – Left, Right and Centre – should commit to spend 6% of the GDP on education in their manifestos for the next elections. However, this struggle will become realistic only when such tribunals can move out from the confines of the Constitution Club and reach that village of Bihar where electricity hasn't reached till now. ★★

Prof Romila Thapar, Eminent Historian and Professor Emerita, Jawaharlal Nehru University

'The purpose of education, and, certainly, the purpose of university education, is to acquire knowledge, but, at the same time, learn to question knowledge'

I will be very brief, because I am in broad agreement with what has been said so far this morning and I don't have to reiterate what has been said earlier. We are in a crisis. We are in a deep crisis in many ways and education is one of those. The crisis in education hasn't been quite so bad for a while, but it has existed over the last 60-65 years.

In a sense, it has existed because education has never really received the deep, serious, central attention that it should have in a society that was being recreated, reconstructed, after independence. There was a tendency to let things carry on as they had before and to use the same kind of institutions and the same structures. I say this not because I was involved in the educational

profession, but also because I was part of an experiment in trying to change the educational system, at least in one university. One of the departures that took place in the 1970s was when JNU was established. This was a breakthrough as we had a rather different approach towards a very special segment of education and that is social sciences.

Why do I say that social sciences are a special segment?

Today, there is an attack particularly on those universities that are known for their better, if not excellent teaching, of social sciences. Social sciences are under attack because they give you a rational analysis of the society in which you live. That is something which people are not very

anxious to hear because it counters too many of their pet theories about the kind of society that we are. Our crisis, I think, has largely been because there has been, I suspect, a tendency of fear on the part of many political agencies of having an educated, thinking citizenry. It's always safer for politicians to deal with, for example, citizens who are not questioning, who are not analysing, and who are not putting forward difficult queries about the kind of problems that we are facing. That is what I think a good social science education does – it enables you to ask questions. And, that is something that JNU, Jadavpur University, Hyderabad Central University and TISS in Mumbai have been doing.

These are all the institutions that are currently under attack. They are also the institutions that have been picked up for pursuing what is called autonomy. Much has been said and written about autonomy. For most of us it means the freedom to think, write and speak as autonomous persons. We all know that this perspective is different from the perspective which some, such as the government, might have. Autonomy here seems to mean something different; it is being suggested as a way out to finance these institutions. As has been made clear in the two presentations this morning, financing is not the main issue – the main issue is making education available to the large number of Indians who for various reasons are unable to avail themselves of the kind of education that they wish to have.

It is curious that autonomy is being pushed down the throats of some universities who did not want it for various reasons; but, they are being told that they must accept autonomy, which means that they need to go begging to the private sector for finances to fund whatever they need. Where it should exist, in the institutions where it is crucial, autonomy is completely absent.

The National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) produces textbooks, and it has been said textbooks are crucial in projecting ideologies and for giving a certain direction to people's thinking that could be either positive or negative. Therefore, every government is anxious to have full control of the textbooks. In fact, the joke in this country is that every time the political party running the government changes, the textbooks change. So, if you are sitting for a state examination, you have to ask which government is in power in order to give the right answers in accordance with the right context.

The NCERT should be autonomous, fully autonomous, run by professionals who are concerned with the production of those textbooks; but it has never been so. It has never been so under any government, and it is least likely to be under the current government.

We should issue a challenge. If the government is so keen on autonomy, then it should make the NCERT autonomous, make the councils in the various subjects autonomous – the Council for Historical

Research, the Council for Social Science Research, the Council for Philosophical Research – make them all autonomous. Let them be run by the professional academics concerned with the disciplines. Why are they controlled by whichever government that happens to be in power?

We have the recent example of the Council for Philosophical Research running into problems for organising a conference on a theme that did not meet the approval of those in the authority. Autonomy is politically flexible, and one has to look for the reasons that may be political, as to why it is being offered currently in a particular fashion.

Admission policy is something about which much has been said already and is something on which much of the agitations in the universities are going on – for example in JNU. We all know the situation there. It is perfectly legitimate to argue that whatever may be the admission policy in the best of the universities – even if they don't meet up with international standards – it must be such that those who qualify and those who aspire for education, should not be held back. This is the function, the essential function, of the education policy.

The equally essential function is the content of education. We haven't come to a real confrontation on that, but I suspect, that is going to be the next confrontation. What is it that you are going to be teaching at every level of education? That is crucial and very important. Why is it crucial? Why is it important?

The purpose of education, and, certainly, the purpose of university education, is to acquire knowledge, but, at the same time, learn to question knowledge. You have to teach students how to question and why it is important to do so. This is way beyond the dreams of the majority of the students of the country. Far from being taught how to question, they are simply being taught to learn the information that they are given and not question that. This is a very central issue.

You teach students how to question, and students start questioning the current system of knowledge in order to improve it. There is a method and process of questioning, and there are methods and processes of putting the questions in a framework leading to the logic of questioning. It is a rational process of questioning, which not only gives you answers, different answers, but also pushes knowledge forward. We all know that knowledge cannot be pushed forward unless it is questioned. So, it is necessary for every student to be taught how to question the existing knowledge. And, that is not being done.

The obvious reason is that people in power do not like other people questioning. This is because they are always afraid that they are going to be questioned and that they will have to provide answers that may not have, or do not wish to give. That is one of the reasons. The other reason is that the teacher herself has not been taught how to question and cannot therefore teach that to the students. Why? This is because there is a fear of questioning.

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The teacher is kept under control as has been said this morning - by ad-hoc jobs. If the majority of teachers do not have the security of permanent jobs and are holding ad-hoc jobs, then, they are going to be harassed, they are going to be forced to do things, say things which the authorities want them to say.

Hence, all these issues are interconnected. In talking about knowledge, the area of knowledge, one is not saying that it is not connected with the admission process, the rights of teachers, the right to teach what they think is adequate in the given syllabus - all these are interconnected. The crisis of education today is not a simple crisis of knowledge, or of teaching in separate compartments. It is the crisis

of the total system of imparting knowledge.

As has been again rightly said this morning, education is the heartthrob of a society and if we are talking about taking society onwards, about changing society, about modernising society, whatever it is, education is crucial. It is equally important even if we are keeping society static, if not turning it backwards. Hence, it is important that all of us who are involved in the educational processes realise what the educational policies are intending to do, and ensure that the intentions are really what we want from the educational policy - and, perhaps, not what some other people may want.



Privatisation and Globalisation

Prof N Raghuram, former president, Indraprastha University Teachers Association (INPUTA) and Dean, School of Biotechnology, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi

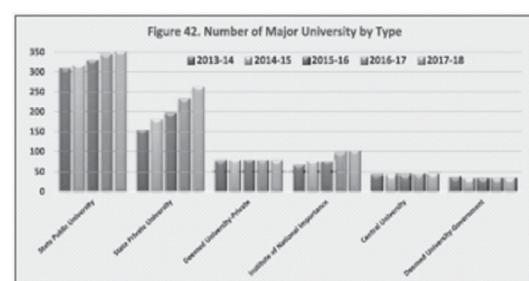
'Privatisation of education is a conscious government policy facilitated by abdication of the government's obligation'

There is rampant privatisation being caused by the governments of the day to cover up for the abdication of its responsibility and failure to meet the growing demand for quality education at all levels. You just have to look at the RBI documents, All India Survey of Higher Education, Union MHRD annual reports, and the annual reports of the UGC and Union MHRD. This is not a pretension of helplessness because there is not enough money to be invested in education. If one of the world's largest, longest and now the fastest growing economies doesn't have money for education, who does? This pretence is also gone now.

In the last three to four years, there has been actual decline in the budgetary spending on education by the government of India. The states have always been doing it and the Centre has followed now. The grave cause for concern is that governments can get away with all of this. My arguments are

mostly based on government's data and not manufactured by me. The nuances within the data will reveal a lot more – facts which are hidden behind the data.

The percentage of total Union government expenditure on education has gone down from the peak of 4% of the GDP only 5 years ago to 3.48% of the GDP in the current budget (2018-19), which has been sold as a great budget. The data on the budget expenditure on education shows that funding in schools have declined over the last four years, while higher education is in a stagnating situation.



Education cess used to be collected by the government which was additional tax

levied to meet the expenditures on education. In the current budget, it has been renamed as education and health cess. Hence, the cess levied on us in the form of additional tax on education will be split between education and health, and anything can be added to this in the future. There has been a consistent, continuous and deliberate decline in government expenditure in terms of the share of GDP or overall government expenditure. The growth in absolute terms is misleading, as it does not take into account inflation and the demand-supply gap.

From the data on the long-term trends in expenditure on education, it can be easily inferred that prior to liberalisation, when the Indian economy was not growing as fast and when the total size of the economy was much smaller, the government was investing a lot more in education, before it stagnated and started falling in the last couple of decades. Now, when we have allegedly the 'fastest' economic growth, the highest GDP growth, the expenditure on education has declined.

Post-liberalisation, as the number of students seeking education has increased, the expenditure per capita, amount of money spent per child, is decreasing, despite ostensible increase in the total budget. Despite enacting the law on Right to Education, the competitive abdication of responsibility from education is stark in both the central and state governments. The only notable exceptions to this trend are some states like Sikkim and Delhi,

which have been doing extremely well in the last three years. Delhi has shown an exceptionally stellar performance in public investments in education. There has been capacity addition in colleges and universities, many government schools have got better buildings, new teachers have been appointed and given proper training.

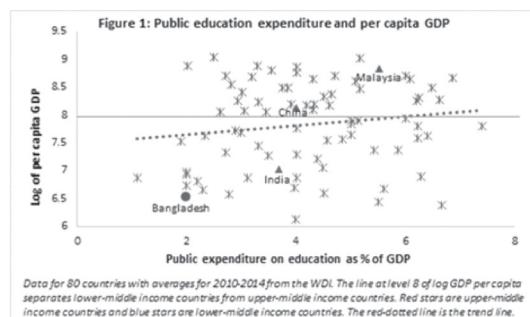
As in the graph denoting state expenditure on education, some states like Sikkim and Delhi have been doing extremely well in the last three years. In the last three years, Delhi has shown an exceptionally stellar performance in public investments in education. In spite of the trouble created by the Union Home Ministry and the central government, many government schools have got better buildings, new teachers have been appointed and given proper training.

Social indicators are showing obvious results that states that consistently received government investments in education like Sikkim, Delhi and Kerala are doing extremely well. Therefore, there is no excuse or escape for the decline in expenditure on education by the central and other state governments. The central government should get back to the Kothari Commission Report which stipulated that 6 per cent should be invested in education as a whole. However, we have never ever touched that figure and are nowhere close to it.

A developed country like the United States, which is the biggest preacher of privatisation in education, spends twice

the share of GDP than what the government of India is spending. Many other countries are spending more on education than our country such as China, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Brazil and South Africa. It is interesting that what Sri Lanka spends on education is equivalent to what it spends on defence (8%), whereas India spends less than one third in education of what it spends on defence. We are creating poorly educated soldiers willing to die for an exaggerated notion of 'nationalism' or the notion of 'security' of an insecure State.

On a global scale, India is falling far below the trendline in public education, going by this graph that depicts the position of countries with respect to global average investment in education.



It is not just privatisation of school education that has been moved to a point of no return, but what has been achieved in the last two decades is corporatisation of private school education. Recently, in Hyderabad, a school student committed suicide leaving behind a note because the school management had sent her back from the examination hall accusing her that her parents had not paid Rs 2,000 as school fee. Till date, no deterrent has

been established against such practices of the school managements.

Such is the state of affairs of private schools in the country. How many children have to commit suicide before we sit up and take notice? Private schools are not just independent small managements running a small affair, they are now corporatised and organised. They even have franchises. Half of the DPS schools in Delhi do not belong to the main management. More than two third of schools run by DPS in the country do not belong to the DPS management. Same goes for Goenka, Heritage and many of these groups.

The worst thing is that schools are now being run by media houses or their investors or promoters. Media will not give you any fair coverage of adverse events in private schools anymore. I have tried and failed miserably. Every media house is selling software for school education, running children's supplements for corporate schools, holding placement events, and providing event management services for private universities. The nexus between private educational institutions and media houses has reached alarming proportions in the last two decades. I can say this with reasonable confidence.

This requires to be probed by a joint parliamentary committee, CBI or a retired judge. The danger of this corporate-school and corporate-media unholy alliance is that even if you struggle against privatisation, there won't be anybody to report against it.

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Considering the decadal growth rate, in the last couple of decades, the growth rate of literacy has not been straight. It is gradually tapering off towards stagnation at around 75%. Despite the fact that until four to five decades after independence, we maintained an average of 30% growth rate per decade, in the last decade we had 10% and in this decade it is almost half of that. The telling effect of the government's abdication of responsibility towards education is already beginning to show in terms of the stagnation of growth rates of literacy across the country.

The enrolment in elementary schools has stagnated below 200 million throughout this decade. In 2014-15, not only has there been stagnation but also decline in enrolment in elementary school education by over a million. This would have further come down in the last couple of years, because, without investment, new enrolments cannot be sustained. Out of all the enrolled children, a lot of them drop out before finishing their elementary school and/or high school. The number of children who actually reach higher education is less than 25% (gross enrolment ratio), that too mostly to private colleges/universities with exorbitant fees, clearly hiding the economic exclusions of far higher percentages. Even basic entry level access to education is not provided out of sheer, deliberate abdication of government responsibility, making a total mockery of the Right to Education.

The teacher-student ratio is falling because of lack of recruitment of teachers in most states. In 2009, the then government launched the national skills policy with the aim of skilling 500 million teachers by 2022, but the current regime has revised that target down to 400 million people by 2022. The Skill India campaign is popular among the public but the fact that Skill India has revised the target downwards has been kept concealed.

The neglect of the government school infrastructure has only made them the last choice for anyone who can barely afford private schools. Government schools have become an abuse largely because of the government's own, deliberate neglect of infrastructure, teacher recruitment, training and governance. There is absolutely no escape from this fact and politicians linked to private managements have been pressurising governments to increase the pass percentage or reduce the standards of evaluation so that there are enough students coming out of 10+2 to join their engineering colleges, management, law and B.Ed. colleges. This trend is evident in states like Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

Actually, state governments had to reduce the evaluation standards because in some states in the south, as the supply of higher education by private colleges/universities has suddenly exceeded demand. Unless more people pass out of school, their seats remain vacant. How

do they pass unless you improve teaching or reduce the pass marks?

In his excellent articles in the *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, the late Dr K Balagopal asked, "Who are these private managements who are running schools and colleges? Delving into their corporate history, often, it is quite possible to discover their linkages with the liquor mafia, builder mafia, hotel mafia, mining mafia and coal mafia, etc, who are also running educational private institutions. Builders like JP and Ansal too are running private educational institutions and universitie."

Many of them are linked to NPAs in our banks. The government, which can write off lakhs and crores of NPAs, does not have enough money for education. Government data shows that the education industry is growing at a compounded annual growth rate of 10 per cent per annum, which is faster than the economy, despite demonetisation.

Expenditure on children, whether it is on health, or education, has gone down or stagnated. Pratham, an NGO that conducts all India surveys on outcomes of education, has shown that the educational outcomes are actually declining alarmingly because private schools and even government schools are not being properly governed and regulated by the government. Students, who have completed the 5th standard, are not able to recognise alphabets or do basic addition or multiplication. Their data shows that the situation requires serious intervention.

I found an advertisement on the internet by a private tuition institute which is vying for market investment in their coaching classes. They were trying to woo investors by mentioning that investment in coaching classes as in pre-primary schools and vocational education is not regulated at all, as compared to investments in schools which are highly regulated. Hence, it is advantageous to invest here and retrieve high returns.

The gross enrolment in higher education has not been growing beyond 25% despite the fact that the number of colleges have been growing. About half the colleges are only one-degree colleges offering B.Ed, BBA or MBA. Today, of the 900 universities we have, less than 300 are government universities.

In terms of number of universities in higher education, the government's presence is reduced to less than one third of the total and only government universities have affiliated colleges under them. No private university has affiliated colleges under them. But, government universities have private affiliated colleges under them.

The total scenario has reached a flash-point. The government is seriously facing a challenge from young voters who can determine the electoral success or failure of political parties. If they can ensure the confidence of young voters, they have better chances of electoral victory, but they are unable to create more jobs. That is why, nationalism has suddenly been discovered in university campuses. That

is the reason for what is happening in JNU, Jadavpur University, FTII and elsewhere.

Hence, the attack on education institutions, which are branded, without an iota of evidence, as hot-beds of 'anti-nationalism', lacking patriotic feeling or indulging in 'sedition'. This is where the new polarisations are going to happen.

Universities are the last bastions of democracy. If you lose them, you lose everything. Students' union and teachers' union, even in universities like JNU, are

struggling for representations. Public universities have been reduced to the state of private fiefdoms of chosen vice-chancellors who are no better than pets of the ruling party in power. Once anyone critical of them gets labelled as an 'anti-national' and is targeted for incarceration with blatant misuse of State power, they have to keep struggling for life, to even get bail, a hearing, an appeal or social approval.

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(The views in this article are personal and do not represent any institution or organisation.)

Prof Nandita Narain, former president, Delhi University Teachers' Association, and Professor, Department of Mathematics, St Stephen's College, Delhi University, New Delhi

'It is important to globalise this resistance at the national and global level with our allies'

There is a huge crisis today in higher education in India. It has existed since a long time and is not a new situation. I will share my personal understanding on what has been the role of privatisation and globalisation.

In any society, where entrenched western interests are present, whoever has power, it is the natural human tendency to keep holding power. They, thereby, will make all efforts to keep that asset. This is the way a society is constructed. Today, we are witnessing how global capital has become dominant on governments of different countries. These countries do play an independent role in formulating

their policies, but these policies are dictated in a manner in which globally-entrenched western interests can raise their capital. We are hearing that very soon the top 1 per cent population of rich people will control 70 per cent of the total wealth of the world. How do they operate and how did they have such great coordination after globalisation? How do they exploit the fault-lines of different democracies, be it white supremacists in America or the upper-class in our own country?

We have a feudal structure. There are inequalities due to regional disparities. There is inequality and exploitation. Our

country became independent and a great Constitution was drafted. Despite this, why is it that the tool of education, the basic tool of empowerment through which our society could head towards equality, (without it, there is no point in democracy), was highly neglected? Now, we have reached a position where it is about to be finished.

This resembles the same scenario that was under the East India Company. We talked about imperial colonialism and its different identities like neo-colonialism and neo-liberal forces. The words that they use today and their intentions, happens to be exactly the opposite. For example, liberal means to oppose the conservative right-wing. Today, autonomy basically means how to completely make academic institutions a slave.

It is important to connect the dots and we will have to globalise our resistance. The resistance that is taking place globally is completely absent in our country. Former JNUSU president Kanhaiya Kumar made a valid point that this fight cannot be fought only from Delhi; but, it will be important to fight for it from Delhi as well. We cannot undermine Delhi, but it is important to globalise this resistance at the national and global level with our allies.

Around 64 universities are on strike in the Great Britain because teachers' pension was demolished. Even in the US, where the unions are very weak, the teachers' strike began in West Virginia for a mere

increase of 5 per cent in the salary. Be it the struggles that are spreading across different states in India, or, in other countries like Greece, against this international onslaught, we need to join them and globalise this struggle by coordinating with them.

The manner in which in different ways, despite providing so-called 'political freedom', the colonial powers left their agents, must be taken note of. (Indeed, I count myself among those agents who considered themselves rulers after learning English while taking full advantage of the country's resources during the formulation of policies.) For example, in terms of public institutions in education, after coming to power, we became complicit and joined them ourselves, while they did not allow the rest of the people to move forward. Along with this, there was external and overt pressure through the international loans that we took from the World Bank and the IMF.

I agree that many people among us, the elite, don't enrol our children in government schools. Kanhaiya Kumar is telling the right thing. Government schools were intentionally weakened. The international loans that were taken also had a condition to lower the fiscal deficit. Why do you need so many teachers in a school? Just make do with two. You make do with one teacher and finally things are going on with zero teachers in lakhs of schools. Why does the government want to intrude in teacher's training? Let it be privatised and it will expand more! As

Indian Campuses Under Siege

Prof Krishna Kumar stated, 80 per cent teacher-training is privatised and that has led to complete decline in quality and all kinds of corruption.

Look at the condition of government schools. It is true that government schools are established on our country's land. The targeting of land is a fact – lakhs of schools are in talks to be given into private hands. Even now, the so-called 'new education policy' is secretly being formulated. They had to back off many times earlier, but many proposals are being implemented without going into Parliament.

It is true that their vision is determined by privatisation. Students have to take loans and study. Schools will have to be rationalised, that is, to be merged, because schools are not running properly! Why will they run properly? Noam Chomsky has said that first they will destroy them, and then they will claim that schools are not running properly. It is pretty evident that they will not run. Who is to be blamed for this?

Our governments forget that it is not their private property; the revenue and capital is the public's money. They are just a trustee. The country's public decides and they should decide the manner in which way that money should be spent. People should empower themselves.

In terms of public-funded education, they object by saying that the tax-payer's money is being used. I would like to ask that how much tax do these people pay? Major chunk of the tax is indirect. Taxation is when the poorest of the poor

buy anything in the market, be it soap or oil. That is the government's revenue and by snatching away the citizenship and agency of that dispossessed citizen, you decide about who robs it among the Ambanis, Adani, Nirav Modi– the list is long.

What we have witnessed regarding higher education in our country is a result of the vision of our founding fathers. I am not saying they were perfect, but, yes, they did try hard. In 1948, the Dr Radhakrishnan Commission, which was very far-sighted, recognised that public-funded universities are essential and they did not divide education into higher and tertiary versus primary. The Dr Radhakrishnan Commission recognised that public-funded institutions are meant to bring about genuine democracy – which we don't have – so that people can have access to good, quality higher education.

In 1964, the Kothari Commission furthered that idea. He gave a vision for bringing into implementation the idea that public-funded institutions are the place where you empower Indian citizens. There were other legislations and recommendations that followed in the 1970s. The Sen Committee report talked about service conditions of teachers. Without good service conditions you cannot attract talent, or, deliver quality education. Service conditions also include the atmosphere whereby you can freely write, read and teach. Without that freedom of expression, without that

fearlessness, you cannot instill in your students the courage of conviction.

Creating knowledge is important; but most important is the courage of your convictions which is the most important virtue without which no other virtue can be practiced. Forget about fearless students if the teachers are completely enslaved and afraid and there is no space where you can freely express yourself, whether its dissent, debate or criticism of government policies.

After 1986, when the ‘new education policy’ was formulated, we started seeing the decline. In the 1990s, the same attempt was made, even during the time of the United Front government. They argued: Why do we spend on tertiary education? It should pay for itself! Whoever wants to study should be able to pay for it!

At that time, certain people holding positions of power like Prof Desai (I am deeply indebted to her, she was in the UGC at that time), came forward. Prof Upendra Bakshi was the vice-chancellor of Delhi University; he spoke out against these policies. Prof Bakshi resigned as vice-chancellor against the fund-cut that was sought to be imposed. They argued that higher education is not a non-merit good – it’s a public good. It is a poverty-alleviation programme where there is minimum leakage, because the money is deposited directly in the bank accounts of the teachers in terms of their salaries. We need to give teachers good service conditions because we need to promote quality. We need to get the best and retain them.

Even at that time there were conflicting forces. However, some eminent people spoke up in defense of higher education and against the pressures exerted through the international loan agencies on the governments, while the governments were falling in line to push the agenda. We opposed it like the Hospitals and Other Institution’s Bill, whereby hospitals and other institutional services were being declared essential and employees who belonged to these institutions did not have the right to go to a court of law with their grievances. In ‘other’ institutions, universities were included. We fought against that and it was taken back.

Many of the terms used have opposite meanings. The idea of ‘skilling’ is not only what India is facing, it’s happening all over the world. It is important to bring ‘vocationalisation’ in the university. This was the thinking of the government in the 1990s. In Delhi University, for example, I was the Academic Counsellor at that time. There were committees for the university’s interactions with the industry set-up. Let’s say you will bring a fashion designing course, or a mechanical course. I have great regard for these disciplines. However, the emphasis has to be on cognitive thinking, learning and traditional disciplines, which can grow. So we were against this form of vocationalisation being thrust on us and we went prepared to these committee meetings – ready to fight.

Besides, what is the role of Indian corporates – the big corporate? The big

companies, and the families which lead them? Some of them have set up these large institutions without putting conditions on it like the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, and we are grateful that they took the initiative to set up these institutions. In the committees we were the elected members of the university community and there were bureaucrats, ministry officials and so on. The third were the industrialists.

We all came with our papers – the industrialists were saying exactly what we were saying. Lala Banshidhar, Shri Ram, Dharam Veer, they or their immediate family members, were there. They supported us. They said that they have brought their papers and please do not introduce these short-term market-oriented courses in the university at this stage; focus on traditional disciplines through which you can develop cognitive abilities. We want leaders in industry, we don't want followers. We don't want people to be trained in these skills which are outdated every few years. We want people who will be decision-makers.

The thinking has completely changed – post-globalisation. Even the local and national corporate organisations have lost their freedom because their business is tied up with global business. They do not have the freedom to say that this policy is not in the interest of our country and we will not follow it. Or else, we will speak out against it! You don't find that happening anymore. That is the difference.

In the 2000s, the NDA government was in power, and the Birla-Ambani report was released. As if they are great experts on education! It was a complete blue-print for privatisation. This report was commissioned by the Planning Commission under then prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Then they brought a Model Act for the UGC again, in which there was a blue-print for privatisation along with a uniform syllabi.

Cutting the wings of the students' union is necessary for them because they can thereby force these anti-people measures inside campuses. Curb dissent! So unions have to be curbed, elected representations in these statutory bodies have to be reduced. Autonomous colleges are there, so there are separate entities too. It's difficult to fight when you are fragmented. All these measures came at that time. And, of course, the focus is on technology.

Their contention: Social Sciences and Humanities are of no use. We must only have information technology. There was a boom in IT, so that was the primary target, the focus of that Model Act. We fought against the Model Act. In fact, a small group of us had formed the 'Bhajpa Harao Andolan Committee'; people laughed at us that how can you defeat the 'Bhajpa', they have brought 'Shining India'.

They had to suffer a defeat in 2004 not only because of us, but because of the economic policies they were following. In 2005, the agenda that had been set up by

the previous government had actually been followed up by the UPA government when they made an offer to the WTO. Global capital was coming in via various forms. The WTO was used in a big way. Finally, policies were not run by the governments, but by global capital, which was controlling different governments. It was like a faceless corporation which would dictate terms.

The offer was made on that under GATT (General Agreement Trades & Tariffs), higher education will be offered as a tradable commodity. This was shocking. There was no consensus among the different chief ministers who advised the government that come what may do not let this happen. That offer was never withdrawn. We came to know about this later through WikiLeaks, that there were different initiatives like the Trade and Service Agreement, etc, whereby a group of countries were forcing other countries to come together and not even allow their Parliament to know what is happening. There were secrecy clauses inserted. That is why we never came to know about all this until the investigative exposure by WikiLeaks.

This is what was happening over a period of time. Due to the kind of commitment or offer we made to the WTO at that time, we were bound by the clauses. One of the clauses was the 'Level Playing Field Clause', under which if 140 countries and private players are signing the agreement, then any one from them can come to your country and practice free trade and you have to give them equal environment.

This implied that the local subsidies that are being provided inside the country will either have to be stopped or everyone else will have to be provided with the same subsidies.

Broadly speaking, what happened in agriculture was that our subsidy was taken away and so on. In education, it meant that they would have to reduce the subsidy to zero. Therefore, the march towards privatisation had started, and, it is very close to conclusion. We found that out in our own university.

The government and the university authorities took no interest in any kind of reform for years. We would fight for 20 years and argue that please count the subsidies. Even that was not done. Five committees would be formed and the report would end up in the dustbin. Suddenly, they were very interested in reforms because the UGC has said that there needs to be a semester system. Every semester you will have a university examination like a board examination. I am sorry to say that they show their agenda in bits and pieces so that people don't understand what is happening. Even my friends in JNU said that why is Delhi University so negative about the semester system – it has been going on in JNU since years!

We argued that everything that is good for you may not be good for us. Here, it will destroy us. It has destroyed us. The quality of education being imparted in Delhi University now is abysmal, compared to what it used to be. It's covered up because after every

examination teachers are holding their heads; even students who get zero are given high marks. The marks are given by the administration after the teachers have finished marking. So, parents, students – nobody knows what is their real level. Everyone is scoring 75/75/90 per cent in English Literature, Philosophy, etc. It's a complete farce that is going on, and not only in Delhi University.

I have traveled all around the country. This seems to be happening everywhere. Under CBCS, through RUSA, students who were given a zero were given an A+ at the end of semester. Teachers told me about this all over the country. This was the ploy to keep the decline hidden, disguised. To prevent a huge resistance from building up.

This is what we call the 'precariat' – this is the term used all over the world. We are increasingly pushing people into a state called 'precariat'. And then they want to deliver quality education!

The student-teacher ratio has been increasing in a sense that quality is continuously falling. This is one of the reasons why I don't have faith in the rankings. In the rankings, 20 per cent is based on the student-teacher ratio. They destroy the student-teacher ratio and then they say, let's rank. Where will we rank from? Subsequently, you had FYUP because our vice-chancellor became very ambitious. He said I can make anything happen. He brought in FYUP which was resisted by the university. Students came out on the streets. And that is the way

forward. If students come out on the streets and the general public is aware of what's happening, then alone can we take this fight forward.

The earlier party in power was not able to push the agenda of the globalised process, so globalised forces and capital, under the current regime, shifted their attention. They are now pumping money into the new party which is thereby able to decimate dissent much more easily. They have a weapon which the earlier government did not have, though they tried to use it from time to time, as in 1984. This weapon is known as 'communal poison'. They are able to poison the society in a manner in which people will remain divided and will not be able to put up a resistance. The latest version, as Prof Romila Thapar said, is the so-called 'graded autonomy'.

The UPA government, in its second form, had Kapil Sibal as the education minister and it's not a coincidence. He was stated to be the most favoured minister for education by the US, according to WikiLeaks. Certainly, he went out of his way to push privatisation in higher education through eight bills in Parliament. Only one got passed and that was the Central University's Bill which became an Act in 2009. None of the others were passed because we were able to depose before the Parliamentary Standing Committee.

At that time, they, at least, had the fig-leaf of the Parliamentary Standing Committee examining those bills. The new BJP-led government has not even

bothered to refer some of these announcements to the Parliamentary Standing Committee, although they are making changes in laws and Acts enacted by Parliament. All our universities are under the Parliament Acts and the Acts ensure that the public-funded universities have a certain character and vision. For instance, JNU's vision of promoting research and catering to the weaker sections of the society; it is the common purpose behind all public funded-universities, whether enacted through Parliament or state assemblies. However, that has been completely forgotten and they are clearly implementing this agenda in a great hurry.

They have to quickly implement that agenda through 'graded autonomy' which will take away whatever little is left of our 'genuine autonomy'. It was taken away by the CBCS which laid down the syllabi; teachers in our university are not allowed to make the syllabi anymore. There is a syllabi which you will be ashamed of teaching. They have imposed it on us. We don't have control on our examination system and the semester system has also been imposed on us. What is this autonomy then?

This autonomy is that 'we will kick you out of the wagon of public-funded institutions, or raise your own funds'. That is the kind of autonomy - financial autonomy.

This basically means that you are going back on your commitment to have public-funded universities, on your commitment

to the people of this country who deserve and have a right to quality and affordable education.

I need to mention it here that while this was going on we also had a greater intake in our institutions of people from marginalised sections. They are seeking to reduce it.

We have Rohith Vemula and dozens of such cases. There is also a completely new reservation policy which will reduce the reservation of posts for teachers to a very small number which will not fulfill the constitutional mandate of 15/7.5 per cent. Hence, the outcry.

Today, we are trying to nationalise our resistance. They talk about the so-called 'national agenda'. However, in this graded autonomy, if you insist that 20 per cent of the teachers and students have to be from outside the country, then what is this great nationalism that you are talking about?

This is the most anti-national agenda that one can possibly think of - a '*deshdrohi*' agenda. Therefore, the country has to rise against it. We have to play a role, because we are in it, and we can see what is happening. We need to tell the public at large.

I think this is an important step, this particular tribunal, in taking this to the country. So that people can rise and defend their freedoms, whatever kind of freedom we have, and actually take it further and convert it into a genuine freedom of democracy.



Prof Hemant Kumar Shah, Gujarat University

'When I wrote a column in the second largest daily newspaper in 'Gujarat Sandesh', that column itself was blocked by instructions given by then state home minister, who is now heading BJP at the national level'

Since I am from Gujarat, I will talk about the Gujarat Model. The present education system is a matter of great concern. There is an increase in the establishment of universities since 2001. Currently, there are more than 50 universities, whereas in 2001 the count was only 15. The concern with these newly established universities is their affiliation as private universities. The largest and the oldest university in Gujarat is the Gujarat University, established in 1949. Presently, accumulation of colleges has happened which was then bifurcated in different areas and regions during 1949 to establish new universities. With this new initiative of the government opening their own universities, there has been bifurcation. In reality, several of these universities have no buildings, professors, vice-chancellors, clerks, registrars, etc. Several of them are said to be in primary government schools or in the *teshildhar's* office. After some years, a budget of Rs 10-15 crore was allocated for infrastructure. The question arises: how did this privatisation occur?

According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), 28% of primary schools are private schools in Gujarat. The standard fee for a first standard student is between the range of

Rs 15,000 to Rs 1,10,000 per month. Around five months before the last state Assembly elections in Gujarat, the Assembly passed a law in response to a movement started by parents of students regarding the high fees structure in private schools. However, the implementation of this law is far from reality. The education minister himself has gone on record asking parents to submit their children's fees in time while promising to attend to their concerns later.

A problem with regard to the democratic space in educational institutions has also come to the forefront in recent years. In late 2012, the Assembly passed a bill which is known as the Gujarat Higher Education Council Bill. As per this Act, the Gujarat Education Council was to be established under the chairmanship of the chief minister. In response, many professors confronted the bill and a petition was filed before the governor. Despite this, the Act got the approval of the governor for the council to be formed.

It raises the question: what is in this council? Under Section 15(a) of the Act, there are 32 members, 15 are government officials. The head of the council is the chief minister himself while the education minister and state level education minister will be the deputy chairmen. All

the appointments for the post of VC etc. will be done by the government. The VC or pro-VC have a minimum role and are restricted to put forward their concerns. Under Section 15, the chief minister can recommend anybody, but he/she may not even recommend. Section 22 denies the right of seeking constitutional remedy. Section 22 specifies that no citizen, either affected or non-affected, residing in Gujarat, can approach the court for the decisions taken by the council.

Another provision says that any professor, she or he might be from any government, private or aided university, can be recommended to other universities. This Act is draconian as speaking or writing against the government can lead to transfer.

The Gujarat government has formed an institution called the Knowledge Consortium of Gujarat (KCG). Instead of getting into the quality of its staff, I would like to shed some light on one of the functions of KCG. KCG conducts training which is higher in number than what the existing colleges do and doesn't engage with the academic staff of colleges in Gujarat University. Beside, KCG only conducts training of those professors who don't speak out against the government.

Apart from structural changes in the educational system, there are content changes both in school text and in higher education, particularly in subjects like Sociology, Economics and Literature, etc. These changes, in a way, are promoting

communalisation. There is a general hesitance to question against these changes arising out of the repercussions which follow. When I was there in the Economics Curriculum Formation Committee of the Gujarat State Textbook Board for Schools, I was kicked out when they came to know that I am the one who has been speaking out against the government. This is the usual tendency in every level of the education structure in Gujarat.

In Gujarat, the most important thing is that there exists the 'Mahajan culture'. Kasturbalal Bhai, the great industrialist, donated a huge piece of land for just for Rs 1 in 1949. This initiative was made possible for the establishment of the largest and first university in Gujarat. On the contrary, Nirma's Karsandas Patel and Reliance's Mukesh Ambani are also starting universities – with the focus on profit-making. This means education is a commodity just like a piece of soap from which profit can be extracted.

The culture of investing for education among the industrialists has almost changed. Now, former Supreme Court Justice P.N. Bhagwati's Gujarat Law Society and even Kasturbalal Bhai Ahmeda Education Society are private universities. The Assembly enacted separate Acts for them and they are running self-financing courses. This high fee self-financing course excludes several key areas.

In my own college which is one of the best arts colleges in Gujarat, the SK Arts

College, the principal urged me to take Environmental Science classes. I asked him as to where should I hold the class; this is also a compulsory subject for all the students in the second semester. The principal suggested that we could use the hall which has a seating capacity of 735 people. One class, all students and the technical requirements are met for the compulsory subject! I objected saying that it will be a *sabha* (community gathering) rather than a class. The principal supported his stand by mentioning that the college doesn't have enough professors to take division-wise class. This is the agony students and teachers are faced with in several colleges and universities across Gujarat.

In the current scenario, the condition of a principal or vice chancellor is reduced to that of a clerk. In a meeting with higher education commissioner, I said, "What is left with a university now? First, you decide how many classes are to be taken in which stream, how many classes are to be taken in Chemistry, Hindi and Economics etc. Second, you decide how to appoint professors and also how much to be taught to students. No value of university is left anymore. So, the higher education commissioner can put their own stamp and distribute certificates."

This point is important because the higher education commissioner and education minister in Gujarat has sent circulars to all the colleges mentioning various ministers' itinerary and expecting the presence of the students for the same. In this aspect, the work of the NSS project officers become restrictive and specific. This is happening even at the national level and is named as 'development in education'. Education today is being used for political benefits by the political class in colleges and universities, and among students and teachers there is very little or no room to dissent.

In Gujarat, across the state there is an atmosphere of fear; schools, colleges, school teachers and university/college professors are all sensing it. The present State doesn't allow anyone to speak or write. Doing so means getting restricted – and these restrictions applies in other aspects of life. For instance, when I wrote a column in the second largest daily newspaper in Gujarat, '*Sandesh*', that column itself was blocked by instructions given by then state home minister, who is now heading BJP at the national level. I had basically written that universities are for students and teachers and not for the government.

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Laxman and T. Gourmin, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai

'Historically, the institutes of education in India have remained an *Agrahara*, dominated by upper caste students'

Laxman

The Union HRD minister recently released a list of universities proposed to be autonomous. TISS functions as an autonomous institution in this era of autonomy through two realms – the private and the public. In the public realm, we have witnessed annual fund cuts by UGC going up to Rs 26 crore since the current government took over in 2014. Additionally, we have witnessed the poor implementation of scholarship schemes, both in BJP and Congress governments. While the Kerala government provides Rs 40,000 as scholarship, Bihar only gives Rs 7,000. So, we can understand the drastic differences in the implementation of scholarship schemes.

On the side of the private realm we are witnessing increasing number of projects coming to TISS funded by national and international agencies. Multiple centres are being established affiliated to TISS in Patna, Hyderabad, Guwahati and Tuljapur. The 180 ad hoc faculties in TISS are funded by private agencies like the TATA trust and no reservation has been implemented during the recruitment of these faculty members. Since 2013, the government has asked TISS to raise 30% of the total expenses on their own. As a

result, the fee has been hiked up in the last three years by 46% and in some heads by 100%, thus, putting the entire burden of financing expenses onto students.

Till 2015, the fee for SC, ST, and OBC students was Rs 4,500 per semester. Now the OBC student is asked to pay Rs 61,000 per year which will extend to SC and ST students next year and worsen as they would have to pay Rs 60,000 per semester and Rs 1,20,000 per year. The fee hike has resulted in a drastic increase in drop-outs among OBC students which will soon be the case with SC and ST students as well, and only increase in the upcoming years.

Historically, the institutes of education in India have remained an *Agrahara*, dominated by upper caste students. It is only from the 1990s, with a rise of SC, ST, and OBC students, that the institutes have started democratising. This too would be stopped with these new policies.

We have been protesting against the aforementioned policies. The struggle has been long and protracted. In the coming days, TISS will be recognised as an institute of eminence with no guidelines from the UGC as to what that means for the institution or what is to be done in the days to come.

T. Gourminlal

I am a part of the Government of India's Post-Matric Scholarship (GOI-PMS) Working Group constituted by TISS and would like to make two points in the context of the protests in TISS, the process of privatisation in TISS and its effects on the student community.

The process of privatisation began well before 2012. The 12th plan document submitted to the government in 2012 by TISS details the Rs 200 crore fund raised through private entities and trusts. In 2013, the institute declared that they are raising Rs 750 crore fund from private entities, trusts, and the corporate sector. In 2012, TISS claimed that the institute was in a financial crisis and needed support from the government. In 2013, the SC, ST, and OBC students were asked to pay the fee upfront as the institution claimed that it did not have financial resources to support these sections of the students.

Ironically, in 2012, new campuses were established at Guwahati and in 2013 another campus was opened at Hyderabad. This year marked the expansion of the campus, courses and students intake in contrast to the financial shortage claimed by the institute

Again in October 2017, TISS issued a notice to GOI-PMS students that SC, ST, and OBC students should pay full fee. The GOI-PMS had a public meeting with the director to propose an alternative and the director agreed to the proposal laid down before him for the solution of the

scholarship problems faced by students. We decided to coordinate with the government, the MHRD and Social Justice Ministry, and other stake-holders to reinstate fee adjustment against scholarships for SC, ST and OBC students. Since the GOI-PMS Working Group was formed – the student led Initiative for solving the current problem backed by the institute – we have met senior MPs from North-East and have successfully brought the issue to the notice of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes who have called the institute for hearing on this matter before the commission.

The matter was brought to the institution and the government. Both are distancing themselves from the issues. While the government took a stand that we have not stopped scholarships nor any grant to TISS from UGC, the institute constantly reiterated that the financial crisis was due to the fund cut from the UGC under the maintenance grant. However, the government and the institute are not interested in dealing with the real issues that the students are facing currently. After dealing with the government at the ministry level, the UGC, and after numerous meetings with the institute authorities, it is sad to note that the ministry and the institute are not giving enough attention to solve the current problems of the SC and ST students.

To go back, reservation policy as per the government rule for public-funded institutions was introduced in TISS for

faculty positions the in 1980s after a hard and persistent fight. Following this reservation policy, the institute, realising its mission and value, introduced fee adjustment against scholarship for SC and ST students. SC/ST students don't have to pay extra fees, other than admission fees, insurance, students' union fees and some amount of advance.

Before the policy of fee adjustment against scholarship was introduced, TISS was a premier institute accessed by only the elite, but, after this policy was introduced, the economically and socially backward students from far-flung rural areas could access it and have equal access to quality education at par with the elite sections of the society. This led to a rise in SC and ST groups in TISS – diversifying the campus immensely.

However, from 2015, there has been a steady drop in OBC students with only 18% of total students now being OBC, due to reasons already explained by Laxman. A similar fate would follow the SC and ST students in 2018-2019 of the Masters' programme in the Mumbai campus. The

number of ST students admitted in various courses has reduced. The exact data is not being given out by the administration.

The big question is, if normal fees is charged for the SC/ST communities as par the general category in TISS, where will the SC/ST community go to access quality education? Where is the principle of equity and justice that the institute has been teaching and championing about in the society? Equity for whom, when opportunities are denied? Justice for whom when you are denying equality to larger sections of the communities to access better education?

Thereby, TISS will become the elite institution as it was in the 1980s and before. We have to fight to secure the diversity of TISS. We have to fight to realise and translate into practice the principles of equity that are taught in the institute. The students' protests are not just for social demonstration, but it is for real issues to make quality higher education accessible for all.

★★

Boota Singh, Panjab University, Chandigarh

'The entire time I was in police custody I was abused with casteist slurs, stripped nude, beaten brutally, and humiliated constantly'

I have difficulty in speaking in English, so I will speak in Hindi. In my Hindi, a little bit of Punjabi will be there.

I am a student attending evening classes

at Panjab University, Chandigarh. The senate body of the university increased the fee upto 1100% for all courses; this resulted in students' agitations. A call for

university bandh was made on April 11, 2017 to all the colleges in Chandigarh as well as in the university to gather near the vice-chancellor's office. The students boycotted classes and left the libraries to meet the VC, but the VC was absent. In order to drive the students away, the police threw tear gas. Eighteen of us sought safety at the university gurudwara, but the police caught us at the gurudwara and took us to the police station. While 17 of us were taken to the police station at Sector 22, I was taken to the police station at Sector 11.

On the way, the police asked me if I was a Hindu or Muslim. When I did not reply, they took my ID card and read my name. In the five-minute journey I was beaten and abused continuously by the police. A call was made by the police and some people gathered at the station. I spotted two more students in the lock-up. However, I was taken to the gallery in the top floor. Four people were already present in the gallery holding plastic and bamboo sticks ready to beat me again; they beat me even while I cried out asking them to stop. Next, I was taken to a room where five-six students were also present and provided with water. After waiting in the room for ten minutes I was again called outside and beaten.

After this the police started registering the FIR and asked my name: I replied 'Boota Singh'. They asked my address. I said, Mansa district, Punjab. Every time I would give an answer I was punched in the face by a gunman sitting beside me. They asked my caste and I replied that I am a Dalit. Upon hearing this they called me a *chamar* and beat me again. Finally, they inquired about the income of my family and I said that nobody earns and we are a poor family. I support my education myself by doing little jobs in Chandigarh.

Upon realising that I am economically backward and do not have a political background, they beat me up again. After every 10 minutes I was beaten 10-15 times, even in the washroom. In the medical examination, I was shown as normal, not given medicine, and then put back in the lock-up. Two of my friends who were arrested were only scolded and not beaten. They were told that they would be released if they piss in my mouth.

I was taken in judicial custody. The entire time I was in police custody I was abused with casteist slurs, stripped nude, beaten brutally, and humiliated constantly. My case is still ongoing and I am supported by a student organisation of which I am a part. We do not receive support from any mainstream political party. ★★

Manirathnam, Tamil Nadu

Why Anitha committed suicide...

I, Manirathnam, Anitha's brother, will be deposing her case. Anitha was the youngest of five siblings who committed suicide since Tamil Nadu was not exempted from the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) exam. We are settled in the Ariyalur district of Tamil Nadu and belong to the Scheduled Caste community. The occupation of our father as labourer and our mother as agricultural labourer did not stop us from pursuing education in a government school. They believed that education is the main tool to overcome poverty. Under these circumstances, I am the first graduate in the family and Anitha cleared her 12th class by scoring 1176 out of 1200 marks. The cut off was 196.75 out of 200.

Anitha lost her mother at the age of seven and this motivated her to become a doctor. She chose to become a doctor despite the opportunities she had – to undertake aeronautical engineering or to become a veterinary doctor. The non-exemption of Tamil Nadu from the NEET exam put an end to her ambitions and she took the enormous step to commit suicide in frustration, though she had put in endless efforts by participating in protests and filing a petition in the Supreme Court against making NEET exam compulsory for Tamil Nadu.

In the year Anitha cleared her 12th exam, the NEET exam was introduced in Tamil Nadu. It was difficult for the students to prepare for the NEET exam because there were no model or sample papers and the state had not conducted such an exam before. There was a variance of version between the central government and the state government regarding the NEET exam. The state government stepped back from their promise of not conducting the NEET exam in Tamil Nadu after the central government's declaration of making the NEET exam compulsory for all states in India. As a result, there were lot of protests in Tamil Nadu.

In these protests, Anitha emerged as an activist. She raised questions about the NEET exam because it follows the CBSE syllabus. Most of the schools under the Tamil Nadu government follow the state government syllabus. Thus, it is very difficult for the common students of Tamil Nadu to undertake this exam and score good marks. Despite various attempts and active engagement in protests by Anitha and other students, the government declared that Tamil Nadu is not exempted from the NEET exam.

Anitha's participation in various protests and as a petitioner in Supreme Court made her more visible. Otherwise, this case may not have been highlighted in the media and it must have been a common

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death like other people who have committed suicide in Tamil Nadu. We had more confidence in the Supreme Court which is based on our Constitution. Justice was not on our side. Finally, we lost Anitha in this case.

I, personally, feel that the Supreme Court ruling in the NEET exam is (derived) from the direction of the central government. As a result, marginalised communities like us are losing hope in the judiciary.

I suggest that in order to overcome these difficulties in the NEET exam, the state

government should come out with its own syllabus. This will give an opportunity to all the students from government schools to achieve their ambitions in life.

This incident is not specific to caste discrimination. However, this kind of policy by the government affects the most marginalised sections like the SC, ST and OBC communities. Hence, when discriminatory policies are implemented by the government, Dalits are the most vulnerable, as they are the most backward.

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Students of Assam Women's University, Jorhat, Assam

'Women students at the university have protested the education minister's comment. We have done hunger strikes, blocked roads, boycotted classes, conducted satyagrahas, celebrated black days, and even protested on the International Women's Day'

The atmosphere in the Assam Women's University has been turbulent since the education minister in a talk show commented that due to the absence of a permanent vice-chancellor the university's certificates hold no value. Two batches have already graduated since the university started in 2014 with under-graduate and post-graduate programmes still continuing. The Assam Women's University is a state university established under Act 22. K.M. Bujarbarua, the vice-chancellor of Assam Agriculture University, currently serves as the mentor of Assam Women's University. Bujarbarua was appointed

by the then chancellor of the university, Tarun Gogoi.

According to the Assam Women's University Act, the chancellor can authorise someone (a mentor) to carry out the functions of the VC in the absence of a permanent VC. But the act has been falsely interpreted as having loopholes and there is thus no mentor on board. Bujarbarua is undoubtedly well-qualified and capable enough to manage the Assam Women's University. Yet, it is being said that the university's certificates hold no value.

Women students at the university have

protested the education minister's comment. We have done hunger strikes, blocked roads, boycotted classes, conducted satyagrahas, celebrated black days, and even protested on the International Women's Day. We have received support from all of Assam as well as universities outside Assam such as the Sikkim Central University, JNU, IIT Kharagpur, NEHU, BHU, etc. All colleges under Dibrugarh University, Guwahati University and Cotton University also protested in solidarity.

Our issue was raised in the Assembly where the speaker said that the Assam Women's University will be protected.

But the speaker is a neutral member of the Assembly and his assurance of protection needs further clarification with respect to the kind of protection he has declared. Will the university get a VC and will the university be protected? We have not received any written assurance regarding this, and the university's name was not even raised in the recent sixth budget session held in April.

We will continue to protest and boycott classes till we receive a written assurance stating that a permanent VC and permanent staff will be appointed and the Assam Women's University will be recognised as a full-fledged university.

★★

Lokesh Reddy, Osmania University, Hyderabad

'More than 700 people, especially students, sacrificed their lives to achieve the state of Telengana'

I am a former president of Osmania University, Hyderabad. The globalisation and privatisation of education takes us back to the 1991 reforms by the then Prime Minister P.V Narasimha Rao and Finance Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. Despite strong objections by the Progressive Democratic Students Union (PDSU), on March 28, 2018, the Telangana Assembly passed the Private Universities Bill. The students' union continued its protest against the Telangana Rashtra Samithi's (TRS) Private Universities Bill. This Bill is contradictory to what the K Chandrashekhar Rao (KCR) government

had promised during the 2014 elections, after the Telengana movement demanded free education from KG to PG.

In the Telengana University, like in Osmania University, Kakatiya University, Central University of Hyderabad and Satavahana University, 70-80% students are from Scheduled Tribe (ST), Scheduled Caste (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) background. The introduction of the Bill came with a lot of restrictions on the universities like police patrolling in the campuses. Such attempts are meant to suppress progressive voices. In retaliation, *dharnas* and hunger strikes

were organised by students to convey our message to the government regarding the privatisation of universities. However, even with these concerted attempts and protests, students were unable to convey their message to the government.

The students' union is targeting the feudal attitude of the state government by narrating the situation of 1991. In 1991, there was a similar bill, the Private Bill, when Manmohan Singh was the minister. Since then, there has been privatisation in primary and secondary schools. Currently, in Telangana, there are some big magnets for the privatisation of education like the Narayana Educational Institutes and Chaitanya Educational Institutes.

Under the banner of PDSU, we are raising the issues concerning the rights of students since a long time. There have been protracted struggles in Andhra and Telengana, for instance, on the Rohith Vemula issue or this Bill. Recently, three students committed suicide and we protested. In the backdrop of these incidents, the agitation demanded justice. As a result, PDSU and students' union leaders were arrested, detained and charged with false cases.

More than 700 people, especially students, sacrificed their lives to achieve the state of Telengana. The feudal attitude of KCR has crushed the voices of students. Students, who are raising their voice, are targeted in their educational streams. For example, if a student is doing his Ph.D, his Ph.D date or viva date is not declared, or it is suspended.

So how can we overcome it?

The political ideology of the Narendra Modi government and the Telangana government is different. However, both are working for a common agenda and have a feudal attitude. They are simply running their business by introducing a Private Bill.

Before the formation of Telengana, the Indian and regional media were reporting the agitation of the students of Osmania University. The moment Telengana came into existence, the agitations and struggles were not reported. We can clearly see the big difference among democratic voices within the state.

I would like to thank the organisers of this Tribunal who are providing a platform for us, people from Telengana, to express our testimonies. ★★

Distortion of History, Syllabus and Saffronisation of Education

**Prof Apoorvanand,
Department of Hindi, Delhi University**

'State universities and colleges don't even know the meaning of autonomy. This is because they have been controlled by state governments since a long time ago'

We should refrain from using the word 'saffronisation' because that word has lost its validity. The word that should be used, especially when you talk about higher education, in Hindi at least, should be: '*ghatiyakaran*' (degradation). It can be used for higher as well as school education. We should be talking about the '*ghatiyakaran*' of our education and not about saffronisation, because it is not only an ideological makeover; the word saffronisation does not convey the exact vulgarisation and that education is suffering due to it.

When we talk about curriculum or syllabus in other universities or schools, it is difficult to comment in a generalised way because the curriculum is not decided by a centralised institution. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has been trying to introduce a model curriculum time and again but

universities are not bound to agree with this. The syllabus-making process is quite different.

It is important to see that there is total erosion of autonomy in the universities. We need to focus on that. It is being said that we are being provided with graded autonomy, while we know that autonomy resides in the Acts which govern our universities. It is not that we did not have autonomy, but we ourselves surrendered our autonomy before the UGC or the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). Now, the Minister of HRD is so kind enough to grant us autonomy – so to function as excellent centers of higher education!

Therefore, we need to talk about how the leadership of universities is being chosen – the leadership that by itself surrenders its autonomy to its political masters. It has two levels. One is that of the state universities which we have been ignoring

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because our focus has been on central universities. We need to focus on the fact that state universities have been completely destroyed at two levels. First is the governance system. The other is the student body and faculty composition. –

If you do a survey of most of the states in India, you will see that either there is no faculty or they are on contract. I went to a college in Bettiah in Bihar, established in 1955. It has 12,000 students on its rolls; barely 500 come to the college. Most of the departments are locked as there are no teachers. This is also the story of most of our state universities and colleges across India. Non-appointment of teachers has been turned into merely examination boards. They conduct examinations and publish the results. Apart from this, this thing we call 'education' does not really happen in these institutions. Nor do students expect it from these institutions anymore.

A conclusion reached on the basis of the Gross Enrollment Ratio would be quite erroneous because we will not be able to know about the knowledge systems and academic training prevailing in these institutions. Statistics and data are not going to give us the real picture. Indeed, we need to collect narratives from the state universities and colleges of their 'internal lives'.

The second level is that of the new central universities, established in 2009. Look at their leadership, the manner in which university vice-chancellors have been selected, their composition. When you

look at their faculty composition, you will discover that all these newly created universities are running as small fiefdoms. Their teachers don't have a voice and neither do the students. It would be irrelevant to talk about the 'education' happening there or their examination systems. I might seem very negative and cynical, but this is the state of things in these new universities. We need to be realistic about this.

Let us, thereby, understand the older and well-known central universities. In Delhi University, we have nearly 5,000 vacancies; almost 5,000 vacancies have been filled with and are operated through ad-hoc teachers. I don't want to mention their 'internal life' here, but we need to bring their narrative out because the life of the colleges of Delhi University is no better than the colleges of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. And we should not be deluded about this.

That is why whatever is happening within the universities makes 'education' irrelevant. Students are enrolled in the state universities but they are going to coaching centers or somewhere else; they come to the university only for the sake of taking credentials. They need a certificate which they somehow get by sitting for examinations. These are the complex factors that are impacting the life of 'higher education' in India.

The things that we see in a superficial manner and what the media talks about is 'disruption' in the last four years. This has often been done by the ABVP, or by

the central government. This disruption is what we see and this is what creates news. There is only one outcome of the disruption caused, which is to create so much instability and insecurity within the university that there is no possibility for other conversations, except syllabus and classrooms. Students are also being told that whatever is happening is extraneous, unnecessary – they are done to distract you. This is happening from one university to the other.

Let us look at research centers which are left unscrutinised because all our focus is on what is happening in the universities. This is one crucial area of knowledge generation. How is the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) distributing its grants? How are the interviews being conducted? What kind of projects are being given? What kind of change in behavior has taken place in the organisations run by the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and ICSSR?

My personal experience is of one such institution where I was invited to edit a journal. After some days, I was told that they are scared that the journal might publish anti-government things so it would be better if I could show them my content and get it passed. In these centers, which seem to be autonomous on the surface and are included in deliberations, their ‘internal culture’ is completely based on censorship. It means that they keep running internal censors due to which the ‘intellectual life’ out there is almost dead. They fear that the ICSSR might not give

them funds if anything coming out of their forum is considered anti-government or appears as critical of the government.

We need narratives from think-tanks or research institutes to know what is going on inside them, the projects they are coming up with, the kind of seminars they are doing, or, how they are conducting different activities. This is because they impact the universities as well. These centers have hitherto claimed that there is no knowledge-generation going on in the universities and that is why their research programmes are crucial. It is therefore important to know the condition of these centers that are dedicated only towards research.

I would like to say in the end that since a long time ago, in all of India, there is an atmosphere of despondency in the higher education circuit, especially in the state universities and colleges. That is why it does not matter to them, or, it is not relevant for them, if you are talking about autonomy or not. State universities and colleges don’t even know the meaning of autonomy. This is because they have been controlled by state governments since a long time ago.

This is the reason that the argument of syllabus and autonomy is foreign to them. Even the syllabus is not an issue in the state universities since a long time. Hence, when we talk about education, I would request that we should only form opinions by assessing the state universities, the state colleges, the different higher-level institutions, the old

central universities, the 2009 central universities, research institutions and think-tanks. This should be done in totality, taking into consideration the

specific nature and conditions of their 'internal life', their intellectual and academic life, and their knowledge systems.

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**Prof Akhil Ranjan Dutta, Political Science,
Gauhati University, Guwahati**

'Thereby, you have no right to write anything in a newspaper or in the social media. You can't write or speak against the government'

There are three parts in my presentation. First, I will focus on the political economy that we have been passing through which inevitably leads to both privatisation and saffronisation. I will also be trying to capture the political discourse that has emerged in different cultural contexts, for example, in North-East India. Finally, I will be speaking on the saffronisation model which has been pursued in my own region, the state of Assam.

The current moment in history – I call it neo-liberal market fundamentalism and political feudalism. It is a nexus between market fundamentalism and social, cultural and political feudalism. A regime based on the neo-liberal economy constantly manufactures inequality at all levels. It does not talk about redistribution of resources. It talks of appropriation of resources. It is a regime that does not talk of social justice, but only of profit. This kind of economy will not allow public institutions to become relying points of resistance against inequality. This process, finally, results in

a nexus between the market forces and feudal forces.

I have drawn the phrase 'market fundamentalism' from noted American economist Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate, who is of the view that the current phase of economy under globalisation is devoid of liberal laws and ethics.

If you look at the political transition which has been taking place in India, it is a testimony to this process. Look at the time period – between 1967 to 1969. It was a critical moment in our history. The Congress was losing ground and there was a clash between the Indira Gandhi-controlled Congress and the Syndicate. There was a fight between the progressive forces and conservative forces led by Morarji Desai and the Syndicate, and so on. At that critical moment, as we all know, bank nationalisation took place. Also, JNU was established. Life insurance was brought under public control and the privy council was abolished. This was done to counter the emergence of Right-

wing forces in the country. However, finally, it failed.

The Right-wing forces consolidated themselves. To counter it, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared Emergency and did it in such a way that it only discredited the parliamentary institutions built so far. Emergency could not defeat the Right-wing forces. Rather, it defeated the democratic institutions. In the long run, it helped in more and more consolidation of Right-wing forces. The BJP's growth in post-emergency period is a testimony to this phenomena.

There is a lesson that we must learn from this episode. The lesson is that the consolidation of the Right-wing, which is feudal in the national context and has affiliation to imperial forces in the international context, took place when both, democratic institutions and the voices of freedom, were suppressed. In other words, authoritarianism in the pretext of suppressing the Right-wing is not a solution at all.

How has the Right-wing consolidated itself in the post-economic reforms era? We need to investigate its political economy. Who facilitated it? What is the relationship between the suppression of democratic rights and constitutional values and the consolidation of the Right-wing? What is the relationship between the introduction of economic reforms and the demolition of the Babri Mosque? Why do the Congress and BJP speak the same language as far as economic reforms are concerned? Does India now suffer from

political and ideological bankruptcy? Has not the Congress, which pioneered the freedom movement and advocated democratic socialism, compromised its own commitments and launched economic reforms, while moving hand-in-hand with the BJP in pursuing economic liberalisation? Has it not, in the long run, opened up the gates for the feudal forces to capture the social and political domain and the imperialist forces to capture the economic domain?

I think, this context has to be kept in mind when we look at the attack on educational institutions in general and higher educational institutions in particular. With the launch of economic reforms, the government of India undermined its own constitutional commitments to social justice. By doing that, it has also undermined public institutions as a domain of debate regarding issues related to social justice – the issues of poverty, inequality, patriarchy, caste discrimination and so on. It has happened because the Indian State, through economic reforms, opened up its resources and services for private appropriation. Land reforms, the progressive agenda of social distribution, lost its relevance for all time to come. This context provided the much needed nexus between the imperialist and feudal forces. It was obvious for the reason that both imperialist and feudal forces are undemocratic in nature. Both of them suppresses democratic voices and adheres to authoritarian tendencies – the global financial oligarchies of the

imperialist forces and land and capital oligarchies of the feudal forces.

The discourse on saffronisation, therefore, is an outcome of the pursuit of policies that facilitates the rule by oligarchies. Where are we debating saffronisation? Are we debating it in private universities? No. Why? Because, private universities do not pursue an agenda of social justice. It does not debate inequality. It does not question imperialism. It does not investigate feudalism. Private universities are themselves the forces of appropriation of common resources. They do not allow a voice of dissent, a voice of protest. They have nothing to do with democracy and democratic institutions. In terms of culture, they are feudal; in terms of economic logic, they indulge in profiteering. There may be exceptions, but the exception is not the general rule.

However, what we need to remember is that India is a diverse country, and this has made politics very uncertain. In India today, political plurality is the norm. It is not always possible for any national party to capture power single-handedly at the Centre. This is, in a way, a relief amidst the general distress.

Let us look at the political experience of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) I regime. In 2004, India did not elect a single party with absolute majority. The government led by the Congress, depended upon regional political parties and Left political forces. That gave birth to populist policies like MNREGA,

NHRM and opportunities to bring in some progressive educational acts. Also, the National Curriculum Framework by the NCERT was established and the NCERT books were produced by a group of liberal, and to an extent, progressive academics of the country. But, that was again only a relief, not a solution at all.

UPA II indulged in aggressive economic reforms which created unprecedented public wrath in response. Corruption and appropriation of resources became the order of the day, which, in turn, facilitated the political consolidation of the Right-wing. The 2014 election outcome is a culmination of this process.

Similar was the case in 1996, when the BJP was elected as the largest party after Congress had pursued the first phase of economic reforms in 1991. Although the BJP was kept out of power from 1996 to 1998, it came to power in 1998 and 1999 after the Congress committed a blunder by withdrawing support to the two governments of the United Front led by HD Devegowda and IK Gujral, respectively. What I am pointing out is simple. If secular forces compromise with issues related to social security, it paves the way for conservative forces.

Market fundamentalism constantly perpetuates and manufactures inequality. They will never allow us to read history in a proper context, with a proper content. It creates falsehood, enmity, and wants to fragment the social forces that want to build resistance against all the injustice that is on. Such a situation necessarily

invites the feudal forces to reign in politics. This is the political context I am talking about.

Look at the 1991 economic reforms and the Babri Masjid demolition. There is the resurgence of fanatic forces in the country in 1992, 2002 and 2014. These are not accidental appearances of the fanatic and communal forces. These are structured in inequality and injustices. This is the first part of my presentation.

When we talk about Hindutva and RSS/ BJP politics we need to keep in mind that it is not following a particular or singular method for consolidation throughout the country. It has been doing it in different ways in different contexts for decades. In the 2016 assembly elections in Assam, in which the BJP swept the elections, what was the proposition? It was coined as a 'rainbow coalition'. What was this rainbow coalition all about?

It was about giving dignity and security to all the indigenous communities in the country. There was a slogan - '*Jati Mati Veti*'. It means national identity, land and hearth. It was propagated in such a way that it created a two-way polarisation between the upper caste Hindus and the tribal people, and, interestingly, Khilonjia Muslims, who are not there in other parts of the country, and Muslims with East Bengal origins. It was a completely polarised election. In the elections, and in the polarisation, the indigenous political forces were also trapped. The indigenous political forces, all ethnic groups, indeed, sided with the political forces led by the BJP.

The BJP did not have any credible presence in Assam until 2014. It is only in 2014 and subsequently in 2016 that it made tremendous electoral gains. It was a miracle because its own vocabulary was not Hindi or Hindutva or Hindustan - its vocabulary was the 'rainbow coalition' and '*Jati Mati Veti*'. It reminds us that the RSS and BJP are not following a single method across the entire country.

As far as the cultural, political and educational context in Assam is concerned, Hindutva is spreading in two different processes: appropriating local cultural resources into the fold of Hindutva, and, imposing Hindutva into the secular, broad, cultural milieu of North-East India. I will talk about three important events in Assam's history.

In the 15th century, Assam had a religious and social reformer, Shankardev, who provided, through the Bhakti movement, a social reforms movement. Equality and collectivehood were the hallmarks of this movement. The institution called *Naamghar*, a prayer house in a literal sense, a social, religious and cultural space in a substantive sense, was the gift of Shankardev. It was truly a democratic space. Shankardev aimed at dismantling the caste structures, and, also, patriarchy, to a great extent. Now, Shankardev has been appropriated into the Hindutva fold by the establishment of RSS-run schools in Assam named after Shankardev. For instance, Shankardev ShishuNiketans.

They have more than 500 schools. These schools are consolidating against the

background of the decay of public educational institutions and the growth of expensive, private institutions. Public institutions are in decay. Hence, the lower middle class don't have any trust in these schools and the upper middle class are shifting to CBSE and other expensive schools. In the rural areas, also in small towns, the people are sending their children to Shankardev Shishu Niketans in a very big number. There are 1.6 lakh students enrolled in the Shankardev Shishu Niketans. Therefore, the secular ethos of education and culture, the broad cultural philosophy of Shankardev, has been trapped into the Hindutva fold.

They have also been trying to impose the Hindutva philosophy by establishing colleges in the name of Deendayal Upadhyaya in the recent past. In the last couple of months, the debate in Assam was on 'integral humanism' propounded by one of the founding fathers of the Sangh Parivar and RSS ideologue - Deendayal Upadhyaya. The BJP-led Assam government has declared that all colleges to be established henceforth will be named after Deendayal Upadhyaya to pay our homage to him on his birth centenary celebration. Initially, 20 colleges were to be named after him. Now, five colleges have already been established. There was resistance from different quarters, therefore, this policy did not succeed.

Interestingly, when you start a college, it is important to ask for affiliation from the universities. I work in Gauhati University. I asked this question in the

Academic Council: have these colleges applied for affiliation? They answered, not yet. Indeed, without asking for affiliation, they were reported to have started these courses.

The contestations over the Assam Women's University have been presented here. The Assam Women's University was established in 2013 when the present education minister was also the education minister under the Congress government. When the university was established, there was no vice-chancellor, there was a mentor. In the last Assembly, there was a debate between the education minister and the former chief minister from Congress. The debate exposed the conspiracies on the part of the government - how educational institutions are being dismantled. The university was established, but neither the VC was appointed, nor the registrar! And, yet, admissions were started! Now, the government is telling the students that when you don't have a VC, how can your degrees be valid?

In the recent past, many colleges have been upgraded to universities. These universities will be hand-picked and the object is to create a conformist academic community. In 2016, under the Congress government, notifications were issued for teachers in provincial colleges debarring them to write in newspapers or participate in television channel discussions except on scientific and literary issues. Now, the government says, since you are government employees, even if you are teaching in a

college, it does not matter. Thereby, you have no right to write anything in a newspaper or in the social media. You can't write or speak against the government. You can at best write about culture, etc, and so on. Hence, the creation of a conformist academic community. This has been one of the important agendas.

The Cotton College in Guwahati was established in 1901. It is the oldest college in the north-eastern region and it has been upgraded to a university. This was being debated for the last 6-7 years. The demand was that Cotton College should be upgraded into Cotton University. What the government initially did was that Cotton College was made (degraded?) into a constituent college and established another university, under the name of the Cotton College State University. Cotton College was made a

constituent college under the Cotton College State University. It created huge dissent. Finally, the provision of the constituent college was done away with, and it was made Cotton University. There are apprehension – whether, the university will retain the status of the college or not. Six-seven years of political tussle has already done huge damage to this reputed institution.

The state government of Assam has been proposing that from primary to post-graduate classes, free text books will be provided. This is interesting. Nobody knows, how, at the UG and PG level, single text books will be provided. Nobody knows, who will write these text books. Probably, this will facilitate saffronisation or whatever agenda the government wants to inject into the education system.

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Karen Gabriel, Associate Professor, Department of English, St Stephen's College, Delhi University

'The previous BJP-led NDA regime had already started saffronisation by changing school books and by introducing courses like Purohitya, Karmakand and Jyotirvidya'

Last year, in the admissions for the current academic year, Delhi University colleges offered a pair of unique, and very telling, 'advantages' to applicants: the first was that students could opt for a Modern Indian Language (MIL – other than Hindi, meaning, one

of either Punjabi, Tamil, Urdu, Telugu or Bengali – the only MILs offered in Delhi University), or for Sanskrit, and thereby claim an additional 10% in their marks. The second was that students could now include courses categorised as 'Vocational Studies' in their best-of-four

subjects. Earlier, few such courses were allowed; additionally, the inclusion of the few that were, would cost the student a reduction of 2.5% in that subject.

These two changes in the admission policy are apparently unexceptionable, even laudable: the first appears to be aimed at promoting Indian languages and literatures (other than Hindi), while the second seems to be a fairer, more democratic policy, insofar as the previous one appeared to penalise students who had opted for, and were good at, a vocational subject in school.

However, the first policy change is in actual fact, a very curious one, because it addresses a context in which few colleges actually offer any of the MILs; conversely, many do offer Sanskrit. Perhaps, the policy-makers felt that if they had simply and directly promoted Sanskrit alone, they would be accused of not giving due importance to the MILs, or, of promoting a Sanskritic-read, upper-caste – and hence right-wing culture, or both. But, without actually creating more MIL departments in colleges, with teachers and infrastructure to deliver the courses to the applicants, this, in effect, means the *de facto* promotion of Sanskrit, while appearing to promote the MILs; the accusation still stands, and moreover, perhaps even with a hint of subterfuge.

The second policy change too is deceptive, albeit in a different way. It is a move aimed at schools, as much as colleges, and serves firstly, to encourage school students to opt for vocational

courses. Secondly, it seeks to bring such courses into the educational mainstream, and thus into greater social ‘respectability’ and ‘acceptability’, by removing the distinction between vocational courses and the more conventional academic courses. Thirdly, it quietly addresses the anomaly in the system, by which Delhi University was penalising applicants with vocational courses, even as it was introducing seven vocational courses as part of its undergraduate programme – for a bachelors degree, not just for a diploma certificate – from 2017. Overall, all three points taken together clearly indicate a deliberate promotion of vocational courses, in the guise of being more fair.

This change, however, is not about being fair and democratic; rather, it is about giving a veneer of respectability and acceptability to an increasingly unfair and undemocratic educational (as well as larger social) system. Ever since the introduction of the semester system in Delhi University, followed by the Four Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP), and then the Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS) – which was really just a three-year version of the FYUP – the common complaint across colleges and departments has been that the syllabi have been diluted and distorted, in some cases quite severely, in order to accommodate the agendas represented by these two policy changes in higher education (HE).

The first of these agendas is to increase the quantum of right-wing content in HE,

as well as the students' exposure to them. The second is to restructure HE in such a way as to render the content more 'market-friendly', 'application-based', and 'industry-ready', as well as 'de-radicalised'; alongside this, it is pushing for greater 'autonomy' for HE institutions – which, basically means privatisation – as well as bringing in a complex, subtle, layered structure of social segregation, not unlike the caste-system. I will return to a more detailed discussion of these points later. For now, I would like to briefly identify and elaborate on some of the more significant ways in which these agendas are manifesting.

To take the first agenda first, it is important to note that it is not new in either conception or execution. The previous BJP-led NDA regime had already started the process of saffronisation by changing the school books and by introducing courses like (*Hindu*) *Paurohitya* (clergy specialising in rituals) and *Karmakand* (rituals) (Puniyani, 2017), along with the romanticisation of Vedic knowledge through courses like *Jyotirvidya* (Vedic astrology). The current BJP government has been pushing this agenda even more explicitly and intensely, mostly at the school level, but also in HE.

Even after the BJP went out of power, Right-wing social forces continued to grow in strength and influence: this was brutally evident in the hurried dropping of AK Ramanujan's brilliant essay, '300 *Ramayanas*' from the Delhi University History syllabus in 2011. However, major

changes in education have taken place in the last few years, since the Narendra Modi government has come to power.

We have already noted one of these above, that is, deceptively pushing the learning of Sanskrit. Significantly, this tactic had already been successfully employed at the school level. In November 2014, the government declared that German language would no longer be taught as a third language in Kendriya Vidyalayas, while, at the same time, 'clarifying' that it was not making Sanskrit compulsory. However, since Sanskrit was the only other option being offered in these schools, this effectively made it compulsory. It also had the advantage of facilitating the choice of Sanskrit when the student reached college.

The Delhi University policy on Sanskrit, taken with this school policy, thus ensures the student's unavoidably continuous exposure to Sanskrit, even at the undergraduate level. Given that it has to be opted for as a compulsory third language, regardless of the student's choice of main subject(s), it applies nearly to the entire student body in the university. This is closely related to another significant change: in October 2014, within a few months of Narendra Modi's BJP coming to power, the Sanskrit department of Delhi University said that it would undertake a thorough study of history textbooks of various state and national boards to prepare a detailed report on the representation of 'Vedic Age and Aryan Culture' and suggest revisions

to correct ‘misrepresentations’, a study which would include, *inter alia*, a project to prove that Aryans are indigenous to India (Kausar, 2014).

Moreover, the Sanskrit department of the Delhi University, which has no relation to the study of history, wants to join the RSS’s massive project to rewrite the history of all the ‘670’ districts of our country basing themselves on the *puranas*, and claim to have discovered hundreds of 3 new *puranas* for this purpose.

That it is the Sanskrit, rather than the history department that is undertaking this work is in perfect consonance with the ‘RSS’s 8-point guide to saffronise education’ (Anand, 2015). These eight points include, among other things, (i) the formulation of a new education policy; (ii) the promotion of Hindutva icons; (iii) the promotion of the non-Christian heritage of the north-eastern states; (iv) to promote skill-development and job-oriented courses for unemployed youth, and set up vocational institutes dedicated to offering those courses (thus also providing a forum where those youth could be exposed to RSS ideas and ideologies); and (v) the promotion of Sanskrit. An unnamed RSS leader is alleged to have said that the aim of this 8-point guide is to introduce ‘Project *Bhartiyakaran*’ in education: “We have to teach students about our history, our science, our language, our heroes and freedom fighters, but the past governments have portrayed people such as Aurangzeb as great icons... it’s time to correct the things.” (cited in Puniyani, 2017).

Here, then, another deception becomes evident: that, in the guise of teaching a language, Sanskrit departments in colleges and universities across the country will become the media for the transmission of the RSS world-view. This world-view is characterised, as noted earlier, by an explicitly chauvinistic religious nationalism. More significantly though, and less obviously, it is characterised by an implicitly pervasive Brahmanism, because the corpus of writings of any kind, from any time-period, in Sanskrit, is overwhelmingly by upper-castes, with almost no positive representations of, or even references to, lower-castes or their lifestyles. Now, given that HE is becoming structured in such a way so as to push the vast majority of students into studying Sanskrit, it becomes clear that this policy will have a massive ideological impact on the youth, especially the unemployed youth being specifically targeted by the RSS.

However, this is not just about the programming, production, promotion, and perpetuation of a chauvinistic religious nationalism, or, of a post-colonial Brahmanical patriarchy. These ‘educational reforms’ also serve to ideologically secure the principles, objectives and orientations of the second set of ‘educational reforms’, which are supposed to cater especially to this section of the society – the unemployed. These latter reforms, in turn, are not just a matter of introducing new industry-oriented courses – that is, courses designed in consultation with industrial

and commercial interests, to provide applicable skills, techniques and know-how tailored to the putative demands of the labour market; in fact, such courses have been around since 1950, when the Industrial Training Institutes (ITI) were set up, and today there are more than 13,000 such institutes across the country.

If, as has been argued in some quarters (e.g., Aggarwal, 2017), these institutes are not meeting the demands and expectations of industry, then the (somewhat obvious) solution would be to get *them* to do so – that is, to address the shortcomings thus raised, within and through the existing HE infrastructure designed to cater to the industry, rather than forcibly and massively restructuring the larger, more general HE infrastructure into the same limited objective – indeed, a fundamental re-conceptualisation of HE itself. The reason for such ‘reforms’ then, can only be to let the limited objectives of commerce and industry determine the whole country’s HE vision and agenda, as well as their implementation. But this requires an explanation and justification beyond simply that of catering to the demands of industry. This is where the other set of ‘educational reforms’ play an important role.

A part of the second set of ‘reforms’ – i.e., promoting privatisation and the vocationalisation of syllabi – is a three-tiered structure being proposed for HE. This model was first proposed by the private consultancy firm Ernst & Young, in their *Vision 2030* document, and subsequently adopted by the NITI Aayog

(which translates as ‘Policy Commission’; but NITI is also the acronym for National Institution for Transforming India) – a sign of the kind of influence already being wielded by the private sector, in HE. The three-tiered model proposed an ostensibly performance-based pyramidal hierarchy of HE institutions, with the ‘best’ ones at the top. These would be rewarded with full autonomy (financial, administrative and academic); would be heavily, if not solely, research based; and would function in effect as the R&D facilities for the private companies that sponsored – or, in any other ways financed – these institutions. Going down the pyramid, autonomy and research would be progressively less, so that in the lowest layer of HE institutions, there would be neither research nor much autonomy, even of the financial kind.

If, we, hypothetically rearrange this as a spectrum, then the institutions of excellence would be at one end totally financed and controlled by the private sector; while the lowest rung HE institutions would be at the other end, financed and controlled mostly by the government(s). Alongside this, another pyramidal structure, registering levels of academic and professional competence, is also proposed, which will allow certified opting-out at various levels of academic accomplishment.

Taken together, these two structures strongly reinforce the hierarchised distribution of wealth, power and professional competence, not just theoretically, as a legitimate and just idea,

but *experientially* – in the options that are made available to, or taken away from, the student, based on where s/he is located in the pyramid – as the ‘natural order of things’, as just ‘the way things are’. At the same time, the other set of ‘reforms’, with their emphasis on Sanskrit, and on the Brahmanical worldview that it is steeped in, serve as an ideological measure through which the education system – instead of encouraging a critical and reformatory perspective on this worldview – reinforces, even celebrates, its hierarchies, biases, prejudices and chauvinisms. In other words, two hierarchical perspectives – the Brahmanical and the capitalistic – map neatly onto each other, and reinforce each other.

Between them, these two ‘educational reform’ packages are designed to produce a skilled yet quiescent labour force, willingly bending to authority and hierarchy, its own professional and personal ambitions defined and delimited by the academic levels possible and/or made available to it, levels that in turn are delineated by the demands of the market and the concomitant specialisation/s that is/are emphasised academically. This will inevitably lead to the steady erosion of interest in and demand for disciplines with no immediately obvious market-utility – except for the Hindu nationalist ones – and hence a gradual closing of the mind – but that is the least of it.

Evident from the above is the fact that the hierarchies brought in through these

‘educational reforms’ reflect the socio-economic hierarchies that we broadly refer to as ‘class’ distinctions. Furthermore, as privatisation advances, the cost of the knowledge and training provided at each level will be met increasingly by the student, and will be determined by (a) its value in and for the market; (b) its costs of production; and (c) its affordability for and by the student. So, these ‘reforms’ effectively ensure that it is difficult, if not impossible, for a particular socio-economic stratum to gain access to HE levels above those it can otherwise afford.

Compare this to State-funded education systems, where education is linked to aptitude and/or the ability to learn fast, and/or an affinity for the subject of choice. Because students are not burdened by the cost of education, students from low-income backgrounds have the possibility of, and the opportunity to, prove their aptitude and ability for jobs and professions that may require more expensive forms of knowledge and training. By de-linking education from the possibility of exploring the students’ aptitudes and abilities, these ‘reforms’ will institute a new caste system – subtler, more ‘modern’ even, but as rigidly exclusionary as the traditional caste system – indeed, just an extension of the traditional one.

This is why the BJP has intensified its offensive against genuine scholarship. For instance, Dinanath Batra of Shiksha Bachao Abhiyan Samiti and RSS-affiliated Shiksha Sanskriti Utthan

Nyas, from many decades, succeeded in pressuring Penguin, the world's largest publisher, to pulp Wendy Doniger's scholarly book '*The Hindus: An Alternate History*'. This book brings out through the interpretation of mythology the need to understand the caste and gender aspects in a sensitive manner. The BJP, however, wishes to endorse highly conservative positions on caste and gender.

Hence, it would be a mistake to treat these two 'educational reforms' as unrelated, and to assume that either one can be dealt with in isolation from the other. The blending in of Hindu nationalist themes, content, and perspectives, into the various courses and their syllabi, has already begun. It will only be intensified and facilitated by various structural changes - like privatisation and vocationalisation- because of the removal of any State obligation towards upholding and promoting secularism, civil and democratic rights, and, perhaps, most importantly, reservations for the socially and economically underprivileged sections of society. These changes in structure, in turn, need the obfuscating, mystifying discourses of the Hindu nationalist educational agenda, in order to be implemented without much resistance.

These discourses need not contribute directly to syllabus content (although that too is pushed for); besides, it would probably be difficult to find any Hindu nationalist syllabus content that could justify the blatant inequalities of the structural 'reforms'. But the forces and

discourses of Hindutva have begun to make major interventions in *pedagogical practices*, especially at the school level (e.g., compulsory yoga, rather than other kinds of exercise; compulsory singing of *Vande Mataram*; compulsory prayers to Saraswati, the goddess of learning; compulsory *Surya Namaskar*; etc. These are aimed at inculcating discipline, reverence and obedience – to constitute the subject as a structured base on which other practices may be inscribed.

The attempt is to promote its views through replicating in HE the model it has effected through the RSS '*shakhas*', through Sarswati Shishu Mandirs and Ekal Schools. It has set up organisations like Vidya Bharati to influence policies in the field of education (the Vidya Bharati is an umbrella body for thousands of educational institutions based on Hindu values, from the nursery to universities, even running various teacher-training institutes). It has also started putting its followers in top positions in universities and major research institutes of the country.

Finally, it must be recalled that at the time of Indian independence and adoption of the Indian Constitution, a key basis of State actions toward the achievement of progress and an enlightened citizenry was based on the cultivation and promotion of the principles of a 'scientific temper'. In fact, as per Article 51a of the Indian Constitution, one of the "fundamental duties" of the citizen is to develop "the scientific temper". The BJP-led NDA government and now the

current BJP government, is assiduously undertaking to reverse this orientation. It's changes in education and in the education policy is aimed at bringing education in tune with globalisation, privatisation and the Hindutva agenda of *manuwad*. This is why the MHRD is in regular consultation with leaders of the RSS. Some instances of the saffronisation of education:

1. Murli Manohar Joshi, the Union MHRD minister of the BJP-led NDA government, 1999, introduced courses like astrology and *Purohitya* (priesthood) in universities.
2. Dr Satya Pal Singh, currently state minister in the MHRD, recently stated that Darwin's theory is wrong as our ancestors did not mention that they saw ape turning into man in our scriptures. He was duly backed up by RSS ideologue turned BJP leader Ram Madhav. (Puniyani.)
3. Ram Madhav himself had stated that Wright brothers were not the first ones to discover the aeroplane. It was an Indian, Shivkar Bapuji Talpade, who had discovered it. He emphasised that such books should be taught in the schools which highlight the likes of Talpade. (Puniyani.)
4. There are claims that Kauravas were born through advanced techniques and Balkrishan Ganpat Matapurkar has patented a technique for body part generation, inspired by Gandhari giving birth to 100 sons and Karna's birth from the ear of Kunti, as narrated in the *Mahabharata*.

5. According to the Chief of Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), Y. Sudarshan, we can infer from the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* that the weapons described in them were the result of atomic fission and/or fusion. He also claims that there was stem cell research in Iron Age India.
6. Huge top level funding has recently been announced for *Panchgavya*- a mixture of cow urine, dung, ghee, curd and milk.
7. There are ongoing efforts to prove that Ram Setu (Adam's bridge), a mythical bridge between India and Sri Lanka, was for real and was built by Lord Ram with the help of his monkey army.
8. In the study of History, efforts are on to prove the existence of the River Saarswati, and to prove historicity of epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.
9. In its recommendation to NCERT, Shiksha Sanskriti Uthan Nyas, an RSS affiliate, asks for removal of English, Urdu and Arabic words, the thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore, extracts from painter MF Husain's autobiography, references to the Mughal emperors as benevolent, to the BJP as a 'Hindu' party, an apology tendered by former prime minister Manmohan Singh over the 1984 riots, and a sentence that "nearly 2,000 Muslims were killed in Gujarat in 2002, (July 25, 2017)". As such, these recent recommendations

to NCERT are continuation of the same agenda, which is, working for its goal of *Hindu Rashtra* (Puniyani: ‘What is RSS agenda in Education?’).

Indeed, this is not education; this is indoctrination.

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★★

**Sandeep Pandey, former visiting professor,
Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi**

‘Rights, restrictions and duties coexist. Different views are allowed to be expressed by proponents and opponents not because they are correct or valid but because there is freedom in this country for expressing even differing views on any issue’

I have studied at the Banaras Hindu University and then I became an activist. After quitting my job very early, I came back to teach about 18 years later as a visiting faculty at the Banaras Hindu University. On its inception, it was called Benaras Engineering College, then, renamed as the Institute of Technology, and now it is an Indian Institute of

Technology (IIT). In July 2013, I joined the institute with a yearly contract which was renewed at the end of every year. In the third year, we had a new vice-chancellor, Prof Girish Chandra Tripathi, from Allahabad University, who was a professor of economics and the president of the teachers’union. Nobody has ever seen him teaching in the university ever.

He had no research publications which I discovered from an application under the Right to Information Act. The Department of Economics of Allahabad University said that they don't have any information on his research publications or how many students have done their masters or PhD under him. They suggested that we get the information from the registrar, but the registrar did not reply.

Tripathi has openly said that he became the VC because of his services to the RSS. He has written two small booklets, one of which is called, '*Bhagvan Shiv Ke Bibhinna Roop*'. I don't remember the name of the other one. He was the main person instrumental in getting my contract terminated. Having been thrust upon IIT by the then Union HRD minister Smriti Irani, he became the chairman of the board of governors of IIT. His name was not in the panel of five which was sent by IIT to MHRD. The MHRD minister said that since BHU has a tradition of a BHU VC becoming the chairman of the board of IIT, therefore, Tripathi will be the chairman. Since the Institute of Technology became the Indian Institute of Technology, it was no longer necessary for the BHU VC to become chairman of the board.

In a board meeting on December 21, 2015, which was my third year at the institute, the chairman informed the members that he has received a letter dated October 14, 2015 from one Avinash Pandey, MA second year, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, BHU,

making serious allegations against Dr Sandeep Pandey, visiting faculty. Avinash Pandey is a student of political science, BHU and I was teaching chemical engineering at IIT. He was not in my class and I have never met him. I have been told that he was seated beside me in one of the dharnas against the former registrar at the BHU gate, otherwise I have had no relation with him.

I was teaching a course on control systems because of my engineering background and a course on development studies because of my activism background. There is a humanities option which the B. Tech students have to take at the level of 3rd year. I got this course approved by the senate of IIT and formerly offered it to the students at third year level. The major allegations levelled against me were that as a part of this course, the screening of a BBC documentary on the Nirbhaya rape case, banned by government, was proposed on March 11, 2015 as per the email circulated by Devansh Mittal, on behalf of me. The screening was subsequently cancelled, but an oral discussion on gender issues and gender violence was organised by me on March 11, 2015 as per e-mail notification. Our crime was that we posted the link in the internal FTP link of BHU on March 10.

There were other allegations and questions such as who authorised me to post a banned documentary on the BHU's intranet; does development studies course require teaching students about defying the law of the land by screening

and discussing a banned documentary? The other allegations included that I did not take attendance, class and examinations for students in development studies and that students scored an A grade irrespective of that. That I taught students how to participate in dharnas.

A live training was held last year where a mock rally was held. Some of these allegations are true and some are false. I never give examination in any of my courses, even in engineering courses. There are one-to-one interactions and based on the evaluation, students get unlimited chances to improve their performance and based on the performance they get a grade. It is not true that I give A grade to everybody. However, most students get an A because they achieve a minimum level of learning.

The allegations continued that I teach students anti-social topics such as Kashmir, that it should be declared an independent nation, etc. The complainant has also attached some articles by me, some of which show my connection and sympathy with the Naxalite movement in the country. The chairman also tabled copies of emails from me released through the registrar of IIT regarding lectures organised under the Archarya Narendra Dev discussion film series. I had formed this forum because Archarya Narendra Dev was the VC of BHU, a famous Buddhist scholar, the VC of Lucknow University, and the first president of the socialist party with which I am associated. A positive outcome of

having these discussions was that it created a space for the interaction of students from both IIT and BHU.

Email evidence of group discussions of controversial topics in the development studies course and newspaper clippings of my involvement in demonstrations were also presented. The board took cognisance of the aforementioned documents. The members were of the opinion that the act of posting the Nirbhaya documentary, which has been banned by the government, falls under the category of cyber crime. Further, the members were of the opinion that topics covered by me in the class room teaching of development studies were against national interest, may disturb communal harmony and encourage the students to take law into their own hands on campus.

These were the charges and the decision was that the engagement of Dr Sandeep Pandey, visiting faculty, be terminated immediately after serving one month notice to him. On January 6, 2016, I was given a letter that I have to leave the campus within a month; thereby I left the campus. I didn't want to go to the court. My director, Prof Rajiv Sangal, Professor at IIT Kanpur earlier and Director of IIIT, Hyderabad, who had hired me, defended me in the board. He felt bad that Tripathi, Prof Dhananjay Pandey, who was Dean and a person with allegiance to the RSS, and the VC of Gorakhpur University prevailed upon him and got this termination order passed. I consequently went to court and was pleasantly surprised to get a judgement in favour of

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me. The Allahabad High Court judgement says it all.

The court said, ..."The case in hand is not a termination simplicitor, rather it is a punitive stigmatic order wherein petitioner has been alleged to have committed cybercrime and not only that he has been accused of cybercrime, allegations are there that he has been acting against national interest. Heavy words such as commission of cybercrime and acting against national interest have been loosely used. All these allegations are serious in nature and such allegations have serious aspersions on the conduct and character of the incumbent and the way and the manner in which the decision in question has been taken against him ex parte cannot be approved by us. We may make note of the fact that under our Constitution, the phrase Freedom of Speech and Expression contained in Article 19(1)(a) has been given a very wide interpretation by the Apex Court in the case of PUCL and Another vs Union Of India, 2003, by mentioning that it includes freedom of propagation of ideas, right to circulate one's ideas, opinions and views, right of citizens to speak, publish and express their views as well as rights of people to read as well as to know about the affairs of the government. Freedom of Speech can be restricted only in the interest of security of State, friendly relations and some other things which we know are part of the Article....

...The Apex Court in *Shreya Singhal vs UOI*, 2015, has reiterated the view noted above in the reference to Section 66 of IT Act by mentioning that the provision of law that forces people to self-censor the view for fear of criminal sanction violates the constitutional

guarantee of free speech. Freedom of Speech and Expression includes right to acquire information and to disseminate, same is necessary for self-expression, which is an important means of attaining free conscience and self-fulfillment. A legitimate right of freedom of speech and expression including fair criticisms is not to be throttled. No responsible person in democracy should incite the people to disobey the law duly enacted but situations may arise where responsible persons may feel that it is their duty to criticise the subject and invite people to carry discussion on the subject. The Apex Court in the case of *Baldev Singh Gandhi vs State of Punjab* has clearly ruled that the discussion carried in public interest would not constitute misconduct....

... Rights, restrictions and duties coexist. Different views are allowed to be expressed by proponents and opponents not because they are correct or valid but because there is a freedom in this country for expressing even differing views on any issues. Freedom of expression which is legitimate and constitutionally protected cannot be held to ransom by an intolerant group of people. Fundamental freedom under Article 19(1)(a) can be reasonably restricted only for the purposes mentioned in the Article 19(2) and the restrictions should be justified on the ground of necessity and not quick stand on and of expediency and convenience. Open criticisms of government policies and operations are not a ground for restricting expression. We must practice tolerance to the views of others. Intolerance is as much dangerous to democracy as to the person himself..."

A surprising matter was that the court has quoted the founder of BHU, Madan Mohan Malaviya, who was also a member of the Hindu Mahasabha. He said that BHU has been conceived as a residential university keeping in view its objective of complete character development through monitoring of students. The founder's vision has been as follows: "India is not a country of Hindus only. It is a country of Muslims and Christians and Parsis too. The country can gain strength and develop itself only when the people of different communities in India live in mutual goodwill and harmony."

So the court in the end said, "*...Consequently, in the facts of the case and overall assessment of all aspects of the mattered decisions dated 6.1.2016 has been taken in pursuance of meeting dated 21.12.2015 of the board of directors IIT, BHU, Varanasi is hereby quashed and set aside.*"

When I called my Director he said our stand is vindicated and I was welcomed back. But when I went there, he said that the VC has stalled my joining and asked me to wait for some time before joining back. Indeed, they never let me join and my contract expired. They paid me four months' salary and told the court that they have complied with the judgement. I did not go to court again against this because my lawyer said that since it is a contractual job, the university has the right to renew or to not renew it and they can easily say that they will not renew the contract. If the judgement had told the university to take me back within a stipulated period then it would have been binding on the university. But the judgement only said the termination order should be quashed without directing the university to re-employ me. So, I was prohibited from re-joining BHU even after the fantastic judgement in favour of me.

★ ★

Navdeep Mathur, Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

'However, in my experience, the institute leadership fiercely defended the autonomy of whatever happened in the classroom for good reasons'

Being a privileged individual who does not belong to a group that is discriminated on the basis of gender, class or caste, I also belong to a privileged institution, Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad, where I have been teaching for the last 10-11 years. However, over two years ago,

during the tenure of Smriti Irani as the Union HRD Minister, an inquiry was set up against me supposedly based on an anonymous complaint about the nature of courses that I teach at IIM. The institute's leadership was very supportive, attempting to protect the autonomy of its professor. They were

wondering what happens inside the class that somebody has complained against it. It seemed obvious that the person who complained about the nature of my courses identifies with the RSS and is unable to withstand the questioning of xenophobic hypernationalist orthodoxy. The specific allegations against me were that I take a anti-national stance on developmental conflict in India and an anti-State stance on Kashmir. These two issues have already been discussed in my classes in the same courses for a decade.

The institute leadership said that the best they could do was to look into students' feedback of those courses, which was very good. However, the feedback evaluation was re-conducted because of the inquiry by the minister. Hence, a month after the course ended, another set of students' feedback was demanded by the institute administration. The feedback this time was even more positive than earlier when it was conducted immediately after the course.

Interestingly, the contradiction is that the students' feedback is a market-oriented

performance standard of professors, which was used by the institute to come to the conclusion that there is absolutely nothing wrong with what the faculty has taught in his classes as the students have given good rating. On the basis of this, they sent a letter back stating there is no cause for concern or a ground for an inquiry.

In a previous occasion, armed police had disrupted a seminar which was examining the largescale and inhuman evictions for the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project where Professor Ghanshyam Shah, a member of this jury, was overseeing the proceedings. So, whether it is any developmental conflict or Kashmir or any issue which is not available in the mainstream media, when we look at poetry or literature or musicians who position these differently, the word gets out as far as this institution goes, because it is not supposed to be like that over here. However, in my experience, the institute leadership fiercely defended the autonomy of whatever happened in the classroom for good reasons.

★ ★

Rohin Kumar, former student, Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi

'An institute as prestigious as IIMC, which should be concerned about fake news, now teaches that 'Narad' was the first journalist'

I am Rohin, a former student of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), New Delhi. Certain incidents which have been happening in our campus for the last three years; they have been very disheartening and disappointing. After the suicide of Rohith Vemula, our professors organised a protest in the campus led by former professor, Amit Sengupta. Following the protest, he was transferred. Sengupta resigned.

After some months, a Dalit woman sweeper of our college was allegedly raped in our campus. None of the faculty members raised their voice against this. Though it has not been proven, we heard that another faculty member, Naren Singh Rao, leaked this information to the media. News about the rape came out in various newspapers and portals.

Following this, in December, Naren Singh Rao's employment was terminated by the IIMC Director General, KG Suresh. He was harassed like a criminal and was debarred from entering the campus. After his suspension, our Radio and TV journalism students started a social media campaign to bring him back. Notice was served on them warning them not to write anything against the institute in the social media.

IIMC, which is a media institute, has a social media code of conduct and we are told what we can write and what we cannot write on Facebook or Twitter. When we challenged the Director General and former Assistant Director General against this, we were told that we should ignore what is happening here and concentrate on what is happening in the country and around the world.

During this process, I wrote a blog for my friends and professors titled, '*Wo toh shikshak tha, aap toh diploma patrakar hai maharaj*' in which I wanted to highlight that journalists who go for a job after completing their college education will not be given any proper reason for being removed from office and they will be left with nothing. Immediately after that, I wrote an article for *News laundry* where I mentioned the unhealthy atmosphere in our campus. The article was published on January 7, 2017 and my suspension order was in my hand on January 9, 2017. As per the suspension order, I was debarred from entering the campus. The allegations were that I was instigating the students and destroying the environment of the campus.

Our Director General says with pride that he won't let IIMC become another JNU, which, for him, is all about February 9,

2015. After my suspension, my friends started campaigning for me on Facebook. During this, Suresh Chiploonkar, a right-wing member, whose profile picture is a photo with Narendra Modi, started writing inappropriate things to our teachers on Facebook to which we replied back on Facebook.

My suspension continued for 15 days during which no teacher took a stand in favour of me. I want to take the names of those professors, especially those who claim to be Left, socialist and progressive. Indeed, it is important to shame certain professors, as they won't understand until they are affected by it. They teach students critical thinking, media ethics, and such things, and prepare a lobby outside the campus, but do nothing when it comes to matters inside the campus. The duty of a professor is to invoke critical thinking among the students, but these teachers are not committed to their role in the greed for higher positions.

A time comes when professors have to speak. They wrote a letter stating that their voice goes unheard in administrative decisions and hence they are resigning. The next day, Prof Anand Pradhan was asked to vacate the hostel where he was the warden. Then he realised that no one will take a stand for him as he didn't take a stand when it was needed. After that, Prof Saswati Goswami, course director of the Radio and Television department, was also asked to vacate the hostel where she lived with her children. She was also removed as head of the course.

In our campus only right-wing intellectuals are called for talks. People directly affiliated with the BJP, Swapan Dasgupta, Chandan Mitra, people belonging to the RSS, including Rambahadur Rai, taught us about matters such as the independence of media. An institute as prestigious as IIMC, which should be concerned about fake news, now teaches that 'Narad' was the first journalist. The students told the Director General that since all his invitees for talks are RSS members, why not invite the former students of our institute who have been given awards like the Ramnath Goenka award. He didn't respond.

In April, 2017, the Inspector General of Chhattisgarh, SRP Kalluri, was invited to deliver a lecture on the independence of media. The man who cannot go to the National Human Rights Commission and give his statement about how he has reportedly harassed many journalists, was in the campus to teach us how to do reporting in media and journalistic ethics. We protested against this.

RTI officers have been changed in our campus thrice because some students raised the issue that the IIMC administration is organising programmes in collaboration with an RSS 'think-tank', the Vivekananda Foundation. This information was not given earlier and after changing three RTI officers they admitted it to be true.

During this year's (2018) admission interview, the interviewers asked a Muslim candidate if Muslims are also

eligible for OBC reservation. The interview was stalled as the interviewer was busy confirming if Muslims are in the OBC category.

In IIMC, hostel facilities were taken away from us in an attempt to ‘curb politics’ since KG Suresh thought politics should

not take place in the campus. The names of hostels were changed.

It is time for us to come together. Instead of an individualistic approach, we should strive for a collective approach. Let us all come together.



Debabrata Saikia, Gauhati University and Bidyut Saikia, Dibrugarh University

‘We have been harassed constantly like this but we will stick to our decision and will not allow establishment of even one college under the name of a communal icon’

In Assam, saffronisation of education started with the establishment of Sankardev schools run by the RSS. Today, 1,60,000 students are pursuing their education from 521 Sankardev schools, employing 8,000 teachers. Sankardev is the father of our Assamese culture who shaped the Assamese modern society. He never distinguished in the name of religion, caste, or creed. But, in the Sankardev schools, children from the primary stage are taught about religion and caste – what to eat and what not to eat. These are the students who would be the future of our nation. What will they do after growing up?

After the BJP was elected in 2016 in Assam, the cabinet passed a proposal granting Rs 10 lakh to every Sankardev school under the Indian Constitution. However, the schools are run by the RSS and not the government. There were many schools which were set up during

the post-independence era by locals in different localities that have not yet been provincialised. The Provincialisation Act introduced by the earlier government in 2011 was scrapped by the BJP, thus hindering provincialisation of teachers and schools.

The cabinet proposed opening 22 colleges in the name of Deendayal Upadhyaya. We have never heard of Deendayal Upadhyaya. We discovered that he was an RSS member, the founder of Jan Sangh, and was notorious for inciting conflict between Hindus and Muslims. He and his RSS army conducted meetings in remote villages of Assam during India’s freedom struggle. They made no contribution in India’s freedom struggle. In his name, the BJP-RSS wants to divide the Assamese society.

There are eminent personalities like Sankardev, Bishnu Rabha and Jyoti Prasad Agarwala who have contributed

immensely to our people and Assamese culture. We ought to establish colleges in the name of such people who have contributed to our culture. The proposal to rename institutions in the name of the RSS leader was met with democratic protests by organisations, teachers and intellectuals alike. We went on strike and submitted memorandums to the government. Education Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma ignored the protests and continued with the programme.

Thereby, we put black paint on the name of Deendayal Upadhyaya in three colleges of Assam in Bongaigaon, Goalpara, and Biswanath Chariali

districts. We renamed the colleges as well with the names of Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Sabilal Upadhyaye, Guru of Gurkhas, and the Kamata Ratna winner Ambika Charan Choudhury. A case was filed against us and our local boys from the Chatra Mukti Sangram Samiti were taken in custody. Akhil Gogoi, the leader of our brother organisation Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti, was charged with NSA, without any evidence; the case was later proved false in the high court.

We have been harassed constantly like this but we will stick to our decision and will not allow establishment of even one college under the name of a communal icon.

★★

Karunesh Divedi and Ankit Singh Babu, Lucknow University, Lucknow

'The police harmed us physically, and this would continue throughout the night; they tortured us'

Karunesh Divedi

I am from Lucknow University. In our university, since 2005, there has been a fee hike. The fee, which was Rs 1,400, is now Rs 36,000. Similarly, the fees of some courses rose from Rs 1,260 to Rs 24,000. The seats with low fees were closed. In some general seats there has been an increment of self-financed courses.

After the 2009 elections, various programmes of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the students'

wing of the RSS, were conducted in our university. Presently, in Lucknow University, Vice Chancellor SP Singh personally goes for these programmes and registers his participation. For several consecutive days, we have been protesting against this kind of activity and partisan participation.

We have protested because the Students Welfare Fund of Rs 25 lakh was being used for purposes other than that of supporting the poor students of the university. On July 7, 2017, a programme, 'Hindavi Swaraj Diwas 2017', was

conducted in the university. Prior to this, on July 5, 2017, we served a notice regarding the utilisation of the Students Welfare Fund for this event. We said that they should use their own funds for the programmes of the BJP or any other political party, instead of the Students Welfare Fund. On July 6, 2017, we requested the authorities to use the Students Welfare Fund for poor students and opposed the spending of the fund for BJP programmes in our university. Our request was not taken into consideration.

In retaliation, on July 7, 2017, at 10 am, I, along with my friends Mahender Yadav, Ankit Singh Babu, Madhurya, Satish Sarma and Samar peacefully stopped Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's vehicle by showing them black flags and tried our best to stop their programme. In response, the police arrested us under several sections, some of which were used during the British regime and detained us for 23 days. The police harmed us physically, and this would continue throughout the night; they tortured us. We were harassed. We were frightened in jail. Many prisoners came to threaten us with torches at night; we were threatened in different ways. Apart from former chief minister of UP, Akhilesh Yadav, none of the political parties or even the university authorities made any attempt for our bail. Akhilesh Yadav engaged his lawyer for our bail and also arranged clothes, food and tooth brushes for us in jail.

Among the 11 students, the career of three students almost came to an end as they were dismissed, while eight students are on suspension. Teachers have informed us that there will be strict checking of

papers for the exams we recently appeared for, in order to ensure that we don't get admission in MA. Our future is at stake. The authorities have rusticated us from the hostel, leaving us with no option but to live in rented rooms. Till date, investigations are going on with constant threats.

Ankit Singh Babu

The black flags hoisted were not only limited to the concern of fee hike in universities and the misutilisation of the Students Welfare Fund for a programme hosted by the BJP in the university. We, the students, found something common in us; eleven of us attempting to break the silence existing in the university and within the opposition parties since Yogi Adityanath government came to power.

During the bail plea, the judge denied our plea by making a statement that he won't let Lucknow University become like JNU. The unpleasant condition of educational institutions in UP, for that reason all over India, shows that since the advent of the BJP, their agenda has always been anti-youth. They don't want students to break their silence and raise their voices against them. If anyone raises their voice against them, they feel this is the biggest threat. Thus, students are made weaker. The Lucknow University, with the help of the power structures, has crushed the voices of students' associations. This is a transparent conspiracy.

Sathiyo, I would like to thank this people's tribunal. I support Kanhaiya Kumar's words—this tribunal should reach out to those places of India where electricity has not arrived.



Students' Union and Elections

Prof Abha Dev Habib, Department of Physics, Miranda House, Delhi University, former member, Executive Council, Delhi University, and Secretary, Democratic Teachers' Front

'It was Union MHRD minister Kapil Sibal in the UPA-II government who pushed universities towards commercialisation. Subverting the autonomy of the universities, the vice-chancellors were taken on board to push 'reforms' in their respective units. Teachers who raised their voices were targeted and isolated'

A student has raised a very important question. Why are teachers silent and not able to raise issues in many universities and educational institutions? There seems to be anger in the question.

Two very important things have happened that have contributed to the silencing of teachers' voices.

First, there has been no appointment of teaching and non-teaching staff in most universities over the last 10 years. The present day government wants to further reduce funding in higher education, it does not want to give people opportunities of progress and promotion. The number of teachers working on contract or ad-hoc basis has increased. Under these circumstances, when a large section of workers/teachers are on short-term contracts, unions find themselves

weak. When the Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) raised its voice against the semester system in 2008, most teachers of DUTA were permanent and our fight had support and impact. Today, the situation in Delhi University has changed as over 50 per cent teachers are working on ad-hoc basis.

Second, all of us from the middle-class and lower middle-class background have our lives governed by EMI obligations. Hence, when the trade union actions result in threats of salary cuts, be it of a worker or a teacher, the person tries to back off.

I am from a Left organisation and we have been writing about the shift in government policies towards privatisation and commercialisation of education and the crisis this will lead to. However, the rate at which public-funded

higher education is being restructured and dismantled is astounding. Major changes are being pushed without any wider discussion.

Restructuring of public-funded higher education: It was Union MHRD minister Kapil Sibal in the UPA-II government who pushed universities towards commercialisation. Subverting the autonomy of the universities, the vice-chancellors were taken on board to push 'reforms' in their respective units. Teachers who raised their voices were targeted and isolated.

The present day government is pursuing the commercialisation of public-funded higher education even more aggressively. Recent education policies will force institutions and students to take loans. Equity and accessibility of higher education do not seem to be the policy-thrust anymore. Commercialisation will redefine the purpose and content of higher education. It will also push a large section of students outside the ambit of higher education. These policies also aim at weakening the students' movements.

Recent government policies aim at subjecting public institutions and public funding to the logic of the market. It is true that a parallel system of private institutes exist, but, today, a conspiracy is going on to end public funding and encourage privatisation. Recently announced policies aim at pushing the burden of maintenance of public-funded central and state universities on students and parents, thereby reducing the gap in

the fees structure of private and public institutions. For example, the 7th Pay Revision MHRD notification stipulated that while the government will contribute 70% of the enhanced salaries, institutions will have to generate 30% themselves. So, from where will universities and colleges generate these funds? Of course, from students' fees.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his 2016 budget speech, announced the creation of a Higher Education Funding Agency (HEFA), which will give loans to institutions like IITs, IIMs and universities for their infrastructure needs. In this year's budget (2018), we see that the money allocated to HEFA has been increased while the allocation to IITs have come down. If institutes want a nano-technology lab, or if they need a new tutorial building, institutions will have to take a loan from HEFA. Until now, public-funded institutions used to receive grants for their infrastructural needs. But, today grants are being replaced by loans to institutions, to be repaid through students' fees.

Despite opposition from DUTA and associations of central and state universities, Prakash Javdekar, the current MHRD minister in the BJP-led NDA regime, declared in March 2018 that they are taking the 'historic' decision of granting 'Graded Autonomy' to 52 universities, including 5 central universities, 21 state universities, 24 deemed universities and 2 private universities. Further, 8 colleges were declared autonomous. Universities are

being divided into three categories according to National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and National Institute Ranking Framework (NIRF) ratings.

Classification of universities and graded autonomy was one of the key recommendations of the Draft New Education Policy (NEP), 2016. And, even as the Draft NEP, 2016 was shelved after it drew criticism, its recommendations are being implemented without wider debate.

From the testimonies presented in this conclave, it has become clear that the NDA government is not talking about academic autonomy, administrative autonomy or functional autonomy, or the democratic structures of every unit.

So what kind of freedom is being talked about here?

The freedom being talked about is that government agencies like the UGC will not monitor what fees institutions will charge! The freedom that is being provided in the name of 'autonomy' is that from now onwards, if Category I and II universities want to introduce new courses or establish centres of higher studies or research, they will have to generate the funds for it. The UGC will not review the course or look at its quality.

When the fees in public-funded institutions will rise to Rs 50,000-60,000 per semester, there will be ample opportunity for private universities to

raise their fees and this expense then shall fall on the parents.

This government has imposed 18 per cent GST on education while there is 0 per cent GST on 'kumkum' and bangles! They have directly declared that education is a commodity. Today, public-funded universities have been exempted, but it may not be the case tomorrow.

Attack on Democratic Spaces: Another key part of this restructuring is the destruction of democratic spaces and policy-making within units. If a section in the NAAC report requires information about systems in place in educational institutions for maintenance of quality, then a vice-chancellor like Dinesh Singh, former VC, Delhi University, or Jagadesh Kumar, current JNU VC, will list all statutory provisions to claim that the university has many layers of democratic decision-making to ensure quality. However, the truth is that it is through these vice-chancellors that the democratic structures of policy-making have been destroyed and teachers and students have been systematically pushed out of policy-making.

Draft New Education Policy, 2016 – The Policy of Exclusion: The Draft NEP, 2016, recognises that the need for higher education has increased. According to the document, 2,00,000 students were enrolled in 1950-51, while in 2014-15, 3.33 crore got enrolled. And, yet, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) is just 23%. It also says that 80% of this student population is in universities. And, yet, these

universities are facing tremendous policy onslaught. The recommendations of the Draft NEP, 2016 further pushes the PPP model, eroding the existing set-up of public-funded higher education. The thrust remains on commodification of higher education without any regard of its impact on marginalised sections, and, therefore, GER.

Regarding school education, Draft NEP, 2016, recommends that the schools that are functioning in small villages with just one or two teachers should be closed – we do not need expansion anymore. Instead, we need consolidation. This recommendation is placed without producing any study to support it and without any study of the impact it may have on the education of students from marginalised sections, including Dalits, adivasis and women.

Regarding the students' movement, the Draft NEP, 2016, says that the organisations that are being formed on the basis of caste and community, which are aggressively pursuing its agenda and political interests, need to be shut down. They need to be confined. Chapter V of the new education policy says that there needs to be a balance between free speech and freedom guaranteed by the Constitution and between the functions of the universities and colleges. Besides, it claims that the system of students remaining in a university for 7-8 years is wrong.

War on Universities: This government seem to have declared a war on

universities, especially against students, and have used ABVP systematically to this end. The pattern of attacks on the students' movement in the last 4 years can be understood in the context of the ongoing policy onslaught. All the attacks on students' movements can fit into either of these two categories: they were attacked because they were questioning inequalities in the society or because they were waging war against commercialisation of higher education and the policy onslaught.

If students stay for a long duration of time in a university and consider themselves as stakeholders, while not being in the rat race of appearing for the next entrance exam, then students will raise issues. This is the reason behind the slash in MPhil-PhD seats in JNU.

While Draft NEP, 2016, recommends that caste and community-based organisations should be disbanded, it does not present any analysis of how the ABVP, or organisations of the ruling parties, have caste equations within them and how it is used as a basis of association with these mass fronts of ruling parties.

In 2014, when an Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle was formed in IIT Madras, it was called 'anti-national'. In Hyderabad, Rohith Vemula and his organisation, whose agenda was both Left and Dalit politics, spoke about the Muzaffarnagar riots – they were labelled anti-nationals.

In 2016, JNUSU was attacked. Through the 'Occupy UCG' movement, JNUSU

had successfully built a pan-India agitation against the withdrawal of scholarships. They exposed how scholarships and opportunities for students are being curtailed, especially of students from marginalised sections. In 2016, false charges of sedition were slapped on the president, JNUSU and other leading student activists. Similarly, when students were fighting in Punjab University against the fee hike, the government slapped sedition charges on them as well.

The ABVP is in a dominant position in the DUSU. The agenda of the ABVP-led DUSU in Delhi University was to install a statue of Saraswati. This, of course, doesn't come in the way of government policies! It only furthers the divisive agenda of the present day government, led by the BJP-RSS.

However, if you talk about inequalities, if you collectivise people, if you raise questions, if you speak against commodification, you will be labelled and attacked. There is a greater heterogeneity within universities today because of the inclusive policies. A large number of girls, SC, ST, and OBC students have the opportunity to enter universities. When they question inequalities and fight for public-funded education, they are attacked. On March 28, 2018, over 15,000 students and teachers participated in the DUTA People's March against the commodification of public-funded higher education, the 30: 70 funding formula, HEFA, Tripartite MoU, Scheme of

Autonomous Colleges, Graded Autonomy, while demanding just service and working conditions. The number of women students who participated in the protest march was astounding. The government is afraid of this heterogeneous population of students who are resisting all attempts to sell public-funded higher education. The government is afraid of the students' movements.

An attempt to change our DNA: There is yet another side to the present attack on education. There is an attack on scientific education and critical thinking in order to further the Hindutva model of the BJP-RSS. There is an attempt to change our thinking process, in fact our DNA itself through pedagogy and content. The BJP-RSS understand that subjects of liberal humanities and social sciences have helped in the transformation of this country.

So, where is hope?: Hope is moving forward, playing the role of the missing 'opposition'. Resistance to the present-day government is coming from students, farmers and workers, who are taking their struggles forward despite threats. The DUTA and other teachers' associations are fighting to save public-funded education, for just service and working conditions, against contractualisation.

I appreciate the kind of positive pressure which is coming from the students' movements. These movements also make teachers more answerable and remind us of the reasons why we became teachers, remind us of our primary role and

positions we should take today to save education. In many campuses, students and teachers are fighting the policy onslaught together. I believe this coming together of movements will be our strength.

Also, we have to keep 2019 in focus. We have to fight and show this government

that this dismantling of public-funded institutions will not be tolerated. We need to show that education, which is our constitutional right and is defined as public good, will not be allowed to be sold as a commodity.

Inquilab Zindabad!

★ ★

Sucheta De, president, AISA and former president, JNUSU

'Without JNU, I would never have a Master's degree, an MPhil and PhD.

By giving Rs 175, girls like me, boys like me, people from discarded groups, see a dream that it is possible for us to study in this country. That dream is being crushed'

In contemporary times, if we talk about student politics and student unions, then, we are living in an intensely repressive period along with expanded resistance. I believe the script has been written many days ago. In 2000, the Birla-Ambani report came out which said there are many problems with student unions; they don't allow fee hike, there are always fights, and the student unions are a big roadblock as per the WTO agenda. In recent times, and rightly so, students have come forward as roadblocks against fee hike and commercialisation of academic institutions.

The Birla-Ambani report was followed by the Lyngdoh Committee's recommendation. It stated that student unions must detach itself from politics. Students may do politics, they may contest elections, but they should not talk

about fee hike, social justice, gender justice – the union should operate like a club. If it remains a club, it will thereby organise fests, dance parties, spend money, but it will not talk about rights. This structure, this script, was written many days back.

Let us look at the current phase, the phase in which we are fighting, especially after 2014. After 2014, the regime in Delhi has one more weapon – nationalism and anti-nationalism, Hindu-Muslim. This has been used for many days. From our struggle on the streets, it is clear that that this weapon will not last long.

For instance, the 'Occupy UGC' movement began in a context. This was when the non-NET fellowship was cancelled in 2015. At the same time, WTO's 10th ministerial conference was going to be held where the Indian

government was going to say that yes, your conditions to make higher education into a tradable service in a world market is acceptable. That is, the government will not spend on education. This report was meant to be given to the WTO by the Indian government – that this is why the non-NET fellowship has been cancelled.

At that point the students started the protracted Occupy UGC movement in Delhi because the UGC's office is in Delhi. That is why JNU played a very important role. When the movement was going on, *Panchjanya*, the RSS mouthpiece, wrote that JNU is an 'anti-national' place, that here they discuss discrimination and exclusion, they talk about gender studies and teach women's rights. Look, it said, they talk about the North-East! These are the reasons with which they branded JNU as 'anti-national'.

We saw the same script written in 2015, and on February 9, 2016, like predictable cinema. An inevitable story foretold. That is when they started the campaign: Shut down JNU!

The JNUSU president was arrested by the police which entered the campus and the whole country was shown that JNU is 'anti-national', the JNUSU president is 'anti-national' and student leaders in JNU are 'anti-national'. What was the reason? If education is not inclusive, if education, for a whole generation, is not playing the role for morality, then that kind of education is meaningless; then, there is no meaning in the existence of educational institutions. If education

becomes like a pizza, if education becomes something which only the rich can buy, then it cannot be called education. Thus, to stop this meaning of education, whichever students' union fights, it faces a crackdown. Students are arrested and branded as anti-nationals.

I want to focus on the events of 2014. We are also from Left organisations, we also write many pamphlets every year, every month, every week. After 2014, there is one special thing which is happening. Even before, there was the problem of democratic participation during general elections. We know that those who don't have money, for instance, a poor farmer, if he or she contests the Lok Sabha elections, victory is impossible. What is happening now? Today, we don't trust the mandate, and the EVM controversy is in the public eye.

Likewise, a dangerous infringement exists in the students' union election process. If you are electing those students who are fighting for students' rights, whether it is in JNU, Jadavpur University or HCU, they will be called 'anti-national', they will be punished, they will be beaten up. By entering into the campus, the RSS will try to manufacture riots. If it is Rohith Vemula, then, he will have to commit suicide.

In Bihar, university elections were held. The story of students' union elections in Bihar follows a pattern. According to the Lyngdoh Committee, you need 75 per cent attendance to contest elections. In Bihar, except in Patna University, classes

are not even conducted. If you go into campuses, you won't find students because there are no classes. So how can there be 75 per cent attendance?

What is interesting is that ABVP candidates have 75 per cent attendance and only the nomination of ABVP candidates were finalised and declared valid. In the JP University, in the Sivan-Chhapra area, the vice-chancellor, while sitting with a BJP member, did a students' conference before the elections. Then they claim that elections will be conducted in a democratic way. In Tilka Manjhi University in Bhagalpur, during 'chhat', which is a big festival in Bihar, they were asking for 75 per cent attendance! Elections were being conducted and ABVP was in full swing. The whole panel belonged to ABVP. This is the level of infringement.

Elections were held in Patna University. This university has a culture and you will find students in the campus. And, yet, there are scandals in nominations and in the counting process. We have here, in the conference, a member who contested the elections for general secretary and he will surely put his points. During the counting, the counting agents were not shown the ballot paper – who voted for whom, total number of votes, in which booth was the polling? Nothing was shown and the result was declared. The president who won was a rebel from the ABVP, but belonged to their lobby. ABVP won the vice-president's post and other posts.

The rules apply only to the other contesting students. Often, FIRs are lodged and they are not allowed to contest elections. As for the ABVP, no rules apply. The vice-president is not even a valid student, she has failed in the courses. Despite this, she is the sitting vice-president. The vice-chancellor gave them oath. When students protested, there was a heavy lathi-charge by the police.

Students from Jadavpur University are also here. Jadavpur University is known for resistance against fee hike, commercialisation, for gender justice. Now, they are trying to replace the students' union with a students' council which will be absolutely toothless with no space to give a good fight.

We are living in this kind of a phase and fighting hard and protracted battles. The attacks have intensified. For instance, in Delhi University, there are students' union office bearers who do 'astraa-puja'; perhaps it is called 'shastra-puja'. There is a tradition where they keep the gun and worship it.

The MHRD said that it is a historic day when 60 colleges and universities were given autonomy. Autonomy basically means dictation. These universities are told to open self-financing courses and if they don't do it they will be shut down. In the coming days, if the universities do not open self-financing courses then they will be shut down. It is being said that to maintain quality, autonomy has been given.

I would like to speak from my personal experience. If JNU had not been there, I would not have been speaking here. Without JNU, I would never have a Master's degree, an MPhil and PhD. By giving Rs 175, girls like me, boys like me, people from discarded groups, see a dream that it is possible for us to study in this country. That dream is being crushed.

Today it is being said that if you don't belong to a millionaire family, you don't have the right to study. If you are not from a rich family, or, a privileged background, the doors of India's universities will be closed for you. The name of this conspiracy is autonomy.

Students and teachers are fighting against this conspiracy. In the current phase of repression, the JNUSU president, vice-president and officer bearers have been charged with dozens of cases. They are facing around 30 cases. FIRs have been lodged against them. However, I would reiterate, there is repression, but the resistance is also very high. In the days to come, both students and teachers will fight against the whole structure of autonomy and commercialisation of universities. And, in 2019, we, students and teachers, we will play a major role. This regime has to go.

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Tony Kurian, Indian Institute of Technology, (IIT), Mumbai

'It is ironic that elections itself stand in violation of students' rights'

I am a PhD student in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at IIT, Bombay. I would like to highlight two key issues I have been actively involved with as a student in the institute last year.

The first is the anti-fee-hike struggle in the institute. The fee-hike was implemented by the administration without consulting the students, and the student representatives claimed that they got to know of it at the last moment. The fee-hike was about Rs 8,000 to Rs 11,000 per semester, which basically meant pushing students out of higher education and thereby out of the IITs. We initiated

the anti-fee-hike campaign in a collective effort, asking students to request the administration to negotiate with students. We further demanded that the fee-hike should be rolled back fully or partially.

It is important to note that the administration, largely, did not obstruct or discourage students from protesting. A few students from some labs faced an antagonistic approach from their professors because the students were a part of the anti-fee-hike movement.

The second major issue is the IIT Bombay (IITB) students' election. I am a student with a disability. Having lost 100% of

vision in both my eyes, I am legally blind. I filed my nomination for the position of PG academic secretary which is a position exclusively for PG students in IIT referring to M.Phil and PhD scholars. There is a three-hour window period for filing the nomination and I filed it. After filing my nomination, former office bearers tried to convince me for a long time that due to my disability I would not be able to discharge the duties of the post. A particular secretary holding the post last year, in fact, thought that I am not able to read by myself and advised me to take help from someone to do some reading related to the elections.

The IITB elections have some unique features which I believe are anti-democratic. For example, every candidate, after writing the manifesto, has to take the manifesto to the panel of former secretaries. The panel would review and edit the manifesto depending on what they call "feasibility". This process is known as 'black box'. Many of my election points were either edited or entirely taken out by the panel as they thought that they were not "feasible".

One of my election promises was that I would ensure the efficient working of the committee dealing with sexual harassment. According to the panel review, this was outside the jurisdiction of the post-graduate academic secretary and hence cannot be part of the manifesto.

I even had a point to institute an Office of Disability Affairs, but was told that, strictly, it did not fall under my

jurisdiction. Many of the points that were progressive and focused on democratic rights of students were edited, because, as I have emphasised, they were not "feasible". Multiple conversations with the past secretaries, which are mandated as part of 'groundwork', were held. One secretary asked, "What is your motivation?" I tried to answer it as much as I could. The conversation went on to convince me that I do not have enough motivation to represent the students as PG academic secretary.

Almost every former secretary I spoke to held the view that I am not motivated enough or figured out some technical difficulty I might face, and dissuaded me from fighting elections. By this point, I was the only candidate fighting for this post and victory was certain. However, I internalised a bit of what these secretaries said, and had to withdraw my nomination.

What I would like to highlight is that IIT Bombay elections in itself is anti-democratic. By the process of black box, any new ideas put forth by students can be quashed by the administration. IITB elections are not done on a collective basis which means a candidate cannot be endorsed by an individual or a collective. This ensures that any collective bargaining power of students are weeded out in the beginning.

Furthermore, very few students take interest in elections. There were only five candidates for six posts altogether. I personally think that elections are more farce than substance.

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I faced an extremely anti-democratic, unduly and personal backlash as a candidate because they knew that my views contradicted that of the administration. My view of a democratic and participatory administrative process with students was not appreciated by the institute's administration.

I further believe that the IITB administration wants continuity and not change. What the administration refers to by continuity is a set of students who would tread the administration's line. Manifestos of candidates would sound very similar and have more or less the same points. Let me quote a former secretary: "The post I enjoy as academic secretary is delegated by the director. And I am a secretary to that."

This means that the set of elected secretaries do not view themselves as students' representatives, rather as secretaries of the administration. I believe this ought to be changed and my attempt was to work within the given system.

I would largely point out that elections are not a guarantee for democracy. They might be 'revolutionary' but they can also be managed. It is ironic that elections itself stand in violation of students' rights. It is an irony that candidates view themselves as secretaries and not as representatives. It is indeed a huge irony that I was convinced by former secretaries that my motivation and eligibility for the said post is not at par.

★★

Crackdown on Dissent and Criminalisation

Prof Surajit Mazumdar, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, School of Social Sciences, JNU, New Delhi

'There is a crackdown but there is also resistance, and in that resistance lies hope'

In my opinion, the crackdown on dissent in Indian universities reflects in the first place the existence of widespread discontent in Indian higher education and the perceived need and yet inability to put a lid on expressions of this discontent. The roots of this mutual dialectic of dissent and crackdown, which has certainly experienced an acceleration in recent times, perhaps lie in the two-sided development of Indian higher education in the neo-liberal era.

As has already been indicated in the concept note, the onset of neo-liberalism has given a fillip to a multi-faceted process of privatisation of Indian higher education – in terms of its institutional mix, the source of its financing, as well as of its content and purpose. Inevitably accompanying these are shifts in the conventional wisdoms and discourse about the social functions of educational institutions, particularly in higher education, and how they should be run or managed.

In addition to these reinforcing the tendencies inducing conformism rather than questioning among the recipients of higher education, privatisation has legitimised and given a greater impetus to a top-down style of functioning of institutions not entirely absent earlier and made this even more the norm. An increasing emphasis on 'discipline', 'accountability' and 'efficiency' has been the garb in which anti-democratic tendencies have clothed themselves.

However, these tendencies springing from the process of increased privatisation have collided with the increasing inability of the process to satisfy the democratic aspirations whose expansion it itself has also unwittingly fostered. While stagnation in public expenditure on higher education and consequent increase in the cost of higher education has certainly worked towards reinforcing entry barriers to it, the social demand for higher education, derived from seeing it as a necessary means to

securing a future and achieving upward social mobility, has also grown over time.

An increasingly privatised higher education system has therefore expanded considerably, particularly in the last one decade. The enrolment in higher education has seen a more than six-fold increase between 1991 and the present. At around 35 million in 2015-16, 6.7 million of which was in university departments, the total enrolment accounted for nearly a quarter of Indians in the relevant age group (18-23). This Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) was less than 5% in the early 1990s and even in 2005-06 was only around 11%. However, while there has been this enormous expansion in the numbers of those entering and emerging from higher education institutions, neither the nature of that education nor the pattern of the corporate sector-led growth process has helped create opportunities to absorb them.

An increase in the ‘supply’ of higher education may have been matched by an increase in the ‘demand’ from higher education aspirants, but the consequent increase in the supply of degree holders has far outstripped the demand for them. Public sector employment has shrunk while a private sector growth primarily reliant on cheap labour and accessing technology from abroad has created too few jobs of the appropriate kind relative to the young population of India. In other words, there is an increasing gulf between one of the aspirations behind the increasing social demand for higher

education and the ability of the overall economic process to satisfy those aspirations – a contradiction that is further sharpened by the increasing costs of higher education.

Expansion of enrolment has also altered the social composition of students. The proportion of females in total higher education enrolment has grown from just about 29% in the early 1990s to about 46% (over 43% in the case of universities), and this trend is true across all categories. While their GERs are still lower than the national average, the proportion of SCs, STs and OBCs in total enrolment is now 13.9, 4.9 and 33.8% respectively – which means that together they now account for well over half the students in higher education. In the case of the Muslim minority, though, it still remains true that their proportion in the students (4.7%) is significantly below their share in the total population.

Changes in the social composition of teachers has also lagged behind students – 61% of teachers in higher education institutions are still male (and their proportion increases as we go up the academic hierarchy), while the proportion of teachers from SC/ST/OBC communities is barely above a third of the total strength. The entry of larger number of women, historically underprivileged sections and first-generation entrants into institutions of higher education, of course, exacerbates the contradiction between the quantum of opportunities and those of aspirants. It perhaps has also served as an antidote to the culture of

conformism and conservatism otherwise being bred by the shifts in higher education.

The changing social mix of the student population is likely to have given an impetus to the creation of a democratic social outlook within the student population as a whole and brought into sharper relief the anti-democratic, discriminatory, restrictive and conservative aspects of the spaces, structures and processes within higher education institutions. Public universities in India have been part of the change in Indian higher education, but, in their own specific ways. Unlike in undergraduate education where private institutions dominate, the university system and post-graduate education is still more 'public' than private – in terms of the institutional mix, though, the public funding proportion has come down more sharply. Public universities have led in the process of changing composition of students – both because of the still lower levels of costs of such an education relative to private institutions, as well as affirmative action measures.

In private universities and private deemed universities, for instance, it is still the case that the SC/ST/OBC student population is just 27% of the total and girls make up just a third. Public universities are also those where policy shifts have been most immediately felt precisely because they have, and had, public funding. They are also the institutions where government intervention and interference on a regular basis is more direct and palpable.

Unlike the private institutions which tend to have an undemocratic structure of governance from birth, it is in public institutions that the change in the direction of increasingly authoritarian governance is often more perceptible. Public universities, at least the older ones, are also the places where there has been some tradition of student and teacher activism. Thus, the objective situation of universities in the contemporary context, and public universities in particular, inevitably, make them potential centres of unrest and we have seen this being actually expressed in several places. All of them, particularly movements outside some prime locations, may not have captured media attention at a national level.

Notwithstanding the specific issues central to each struggle, these movements have a common underlying basis. Further, they reflect as well as impact on the ferment in the larger Indian society produced by a highly polarising growth and accumulation process in the neo-liberal age.

The sheer magnitude of increase in enrolment and the change in the social composition of students only magnifies this mutual interaction between what is happening in higher education and larger political processes. Killing the spirit of rebellion in the universities which broadly speaking reflect and reinforce an urge for an egalitarian and democratic transformation of Indian society, subverting the processes which nurture such a spirit and checking the spread of

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this ‘virus’ – have all therefore become an increasingly important part of the neo-liberal agenda of Indian capitalism, objectives that have to be pursued even at the cost of destruction of the higher education system. Even if these have proved so far to be insufficient for that purpose, further assaults on public higher education and increased authoritarianism are the only instruments available in the neo-liberal arsenal.

Since the 2014 general elections, we have seen a specific confluence of neo-liberalism and authoritarianism which reflects in part the crisis being confronted by the growth trajectory. Increased authoritarianism and an intensified assault on democracy in general through the instrumentality of the current regime and its politics are the ways of opening up opportunities to revive an accumulation process that has been stuttering badly as a result of its own internal contradictions. The attack on universities should also be seen as part of that process.

That is the reason why the destruction of Indian higher education evokes so little protest from corporate bigwigs who might otherwise complain of the shortage of ‘skills’. The crackdown on dissent in public universities emanating from the context described above is also one with several dimensions. While they may express themselves in different places in different degrees and combinations, these trends are visible everywhere.

The crackdown has a variety of agents

acting in tandem – governments, regulatory bodies like the UGC as well as university administrations, with sections of the media playing a supporting role. It covers teachers, students and non-teaching staff in these institutions.

It is not limited to a crackdown on dissent within universities but extends to circumscribing the role they can play in the articulation of dissent in the larger universe of society. The crackdown is also sought to be achieved through a variety of ways – some working directly to prevent dissent from being expressed and others indirectly by rendering its influence ineffective.

We have seen in the last few years the propagation of the idea that protests in higher education institutions are conspiracies driven by dangerous forces inimical to the interests of the nation. This serves the dual purpose of legitimising the crackdown and delegitimising the ‘dissenters’ in addition to producing a climate which itself is coercive in nature. Criminalisation of dissent and taking punitive action through the police and courts and through administrative action follows logically and the recourse to such measures is rampant.

This is accompanied by the curbing of democratic rights like banning/restricting political and union activity, including bans on unions and restrictions on the right to protest, hold meetings, etc. Teachers and other employees are sought to be brought into a ‘disciplinary’

framework with imposition of restrictive codes of conduct, coercive application of 'no-work no pay' principle, bio-metric attendance, etc. The already limited autonomy of universities has suffered further considerable erosion and structures of democratic self-governance have been increasingly undone with increased centralisation of powers in the hands of vice-chancellors.

The recent government initiative to grant greater 'autonomy' to some institutions is also a move towards accelerating these processes of taming universities and their privatisation. They are part of the design of restricting entry to publicly-funded education and changing the composition of students and teachers in a manner that would undo the gains of reservation

policies – ends towards which a spate of UGC regulations like those governing the award of MPhil and PhD degrees or the ones on 'Graded Autonomy' are directed.

Jawaharlal Nehru University, to which I currently belong, has been experiencing this crackdown over the last two years in a particularly concentrated dose. Its history and location have, however, helped draw media and public attention to what is happening in JNU, including the resistance put up by its teachers and students. The JNU story is not unique though – pretty much the same story is being repeated across the country. There is a crackdown but there is also resistance, and in that resistance lies hope, if Indian higher education is performing its true social function. ★★

Dr Parthosarothi Ray, Associate Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Kolkata

'Ironically, while dissent by student organisations has been facing highly repressive conditions, Right-wing organisations are allowed to function under dummy names'

I would like to thank the organisers of this very important event to allow me to come here and depose before this people's tribunal about the crackdown on dissent in educational institutions in India. This crackdown has been there all the time, but it has been accentuated in the last few years. There are well-documented and well-known cases, such

as JNU in Delhi or Jadavpur University in Kolkata, which have now become well-known. I won't go into the details of such cases but crackdown against dissent is happening in both the universities and institutes of prominence in India.

The system of higher education in India, post-independence, was developed on two different trajectories. One was the

system of universities and colleges, which had a sort of democratic space; a space which provided opportunities for different ideas to flourish. As a parallel, the system of institutes of higher level, the IITs, IIMs, IISERs, IISc etc, were various institutes and centres under central agencies such as CSIR, DBT, DST and DAE. There were also centres under the various autonomous councils such as ICHR and ICSSR.

We have had two different spaces of higher educational institutions in India. A lot of the discussion over the last couple of days has been focused on universities. I would like to focus on these institutes of higher learning which occupy a big space in the 'educational eco-system'. These institutes and centres were designed to be authoritarian in nature just about when they were established; they were built on an authoritarian line under the pretext of efficiency and productivity. A productivity defined by the requirements of the market, and for the ruling dispensations. The same dispensations in various times defined for us the requirements of 'national development'.

In most cases, these represented one and the same thing. These institutions were basically designed to provide commodities and finished products for the requirement of industry. Hence, there were constricted spaces for dissent and debate and for expression of free opinion by the faculty, students and staff. In such universities and colleges, dissent was usually suppressed by brute force, with

student or staff organisations allied with the ruling parties. Or, there was direct intervention of outside elements, which we have seen in the universities in West Bengal. In Jadavpur University, there were movements against the authoritarian actions of the vice-chancellor. However, outside groups affiliated to the ruling party were called by the vice-chancellor to the campus to beat up students who were protesting for a genuine cause. This happens in other universities like Allahabad University, BHU, etc.

The regular process of political appointments of vice-chancellors and teachers is always meant to follow the agenda of the ruling party. However, in the case of institutes and centres, dissent has been curbed by structural processes inbuilt into the system by rules, regulations and practices which are part and parcel of these processes. Over the last few years, interestingly, dissent has been crushed and the process accelerated due to the environment of fear which has been created all over the country. These two processes are converging, and that is why it is an important phenomena of our times.

Whereas university and college administrations are becoming equally heavy-handed and authoritarian, they are resorting to structural measures in order to curb dissent. Institutes have become spaces where student organisations and even outside organisations, affiliated to the RSS/BJP, etc, are getting a free hand. The convergence of these two kinds of

onslaught on dissent should be taken note of because this has brought an overly suffocating atmosphere in the entire educational system.

There are so many examples; this is no more an exception. As in JNU, Jadavpur University, BHU, among other campuses. It is now a ‘new norm’. This is a real phenomenon which we are seeing today in our times. I am talking about the structural processes to curb dissent in institutes.

My own education was in a certain institute in Bangalore. Now, I teach in a so called ‘institute of national importance’ in Kolkata. I am involved with student organisations in various institutes across the country, which has given me some insights into this process.

In the universities representative student bodies were student unions. So, student unions were accepted in various universities, although the current political dispensation has tried to change the scenario. In some of these institutes, students unions never existed. Instead, there are bodies which are called as Students Activities Centre/Club, whose mere function is to control and volunteer students’ activities and ensure that they do not walk off the line. Their function is not to represent students’ voices to authorities – but to suppress that.

For example, last year, fees were raised at the time of the semester break in IIT Kharagpur. Although the student representatives knew about the fee hike, they were instructed to inform the

students only during the semester break when most of the students are away from the institute. This is the way the student representatives are manipulated by the authorities in order to curb any dissent.

In these institutions, all activities of students or by their bodies have to be endorsed by the authorities. Student organisations have to register with certain administrative bodies. Student activities have to be approved by so-called faculty mentors who are assigned to administer that student organisation. However, even in this atmosphere, over the last few years, actually, a number of student organisations have grown up around various sensitive issues such as caste and gender-based discrimination, science and rationality, in these institutes.

We know the case of the students’ organisation in IIT Madras. These organisations have come up in a very repressive atmosphere and that is commendable. Not only that, last year, these student organisations have formed a body called ‘Coordination of Science and Technological Institutional Students Associations’ (COSTISA), which is now trying to face this repressive atmosphere in a united manner.

Ironically, while dissent by student organisations has been facing highly repressive conditions, Right-wing organisations are allowed to function under dummy names. These organisations are increasingly part of the process of targeting dissenting opinion on campus and act as eyes and ears of the

RSS who report on any dissenting activities on the campus. Through these organisations, the RSS has a direct foothold within these institutions. Whenever there is a dissenting opinion, these Right-wing student organisations become part and parcel of the process of an authoritarian regime to smash the dissenting voices.

An important part of this atmosphere means that outside speakers, who are

presumed to talk about such activities or such issues, are not allowed. They are not allowed to speak in these institutions, whereas speakers from the Hindutva background are invited to speak. Indeed, the administration has been used by the current political dispensation to encourage and safeguard such Right-wing organisations within many campuses.

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Mihir Desai, Senior Advocate, Bombay High Court

'We should not forget the students' protests in Kashmir'

In several sessions in this conference, I have heard many narratives about various protests and the responses to them. I don't think I would be able to add anything to the narratives.

When we talk about students' protests and dissent, we need to keep three Articles of the Constitution of India clearly in mind. One is Article 19 (1) (a), which talks about Freedom of Speech and Expression; second is Article 19 (1) (b), which talks about the Right of People to Assemble, and the third is Art 19 (1) (c), which allows citizens to form themselves into unions and associations. None of these three articles of the Constitution are barred or stopped at the gates of universities or academic institutions. Academic institutions are not black holes in the Constitution. Hence, whatever applies under the Constitution to

anybody who is outside the academic institutions, equally applies to those who are within the academic institutions. Thereby, the students' right to freely speak, express, assemble peacefully, demonstrate, agitate and form unions, are fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution. We must keep in mind that all these protests which were discussed here are justified and legitimate protests and constitutionally protected. That is one aspect. The second aspect is that under the Constitution there is a list of duties of every citizen.

We have been talking about critical thinking and academic institutions. Article 51 A of the Constitution, speaks of the fundamental duty of all citizens to generate scientific temper and spirit of enquiry. This and other provisions of the Constitution not only permit but

encourage healthy disagreement. Dissent is a core component of democracy. If you look at the students' protests or any other form of protest, it is an overt articulation of dissent. It can be individual, it can be collective, peaceful, etc. If you are not going to allow dissent, you, obviously, cannot allow protest. That is the logic.

In the environment today, across the country, and not just in academic institutions, dissent itself is seen as 'anti-national'. This is something which we need to keep in mind.

Look at the situation, particularly from 2014 onwards. I read somewhere that they have arrested some people in Hyderabad on the ground that they wanted to kill the vice-chancellor. In 2015, the FTII protests met with arrests and severe suppression. In 2016, there were the JNU protests. There were protests in Lucknow. A female student in BHU was molested in 2017 which led to protests by women students who were lathi-charged. The protests in TISS continues. The common feature is that wherever there are protests the authorities are cracking down.

They choose to take disciplinary action; they will hold an inquiry against the person who is protesting, suspend him or her, impose fines, possibly this is followed by rustication. This is the traditional way in which they take disciplinary action.

Students who are here from TISS are aware that the institute went to court in order to stop the students from

protesting, then sought injunction to stop people from sitting on dharna, etc. This happened in institutions like TISS in March and April, 2018. The second method is using the criminal law, which may have happened earlier, in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. At that time this happened occasionally, but criminal law is now used during every protest and in every struggle. That is the change.

From 2015 onwards, to suppress most struggles, criminal law is used. FIRs are filed that 'you are rioting... you are disturbing... you are unlawfully assembling...' There has been imposition of the sedition law, which is most shocking. Sedition should not be in the law books at all as a crime. The Supreme Court has held that you can charge a person with sedition only if the statements made by a person leads to violence. It is unbelievable that sedition is used against students; this is unheard of.

It is not only the question of filing FIRs to stop certain activities. The use of police brutality, whether it is lathi-charge, or, as a person from Panjab University was mentioning, the use of casteist and communal language to subjugate students has also increased in the last two years. It is not just police brutality at the time of stopping a demonstration through a lathi-charge, the brutality continues when you are taken into police custody.

All this is illegal. No police person has the right to touch, torture or slap, or to in any way cause any kind of physical or

mental humiliation to any arrested person. This is the law. However, what is a law and what happens in reality, are two different things. This is the situation whereby from 2014 onwards there have been increasing atrocities on students through the use of the legal machinery. There is even the misuse of legal machinery against teachers and we have the example of Prof Saibaba. The use of the legal machinery to throttle protests is increasing and this government – and not just in the case of students and teachers – has generally used the law to oppress people. I won't dwell on NGOs, or how and why FCRA has been cancelled using the legal machinery, or, various other means. They will use it more and more

against the students' protests in the days to come.

Finally, I want to say that we should not forget the students' protests in Kashmir. Massive students' protests and resistance have been going on in Kashmir since many years. Many of those brutalised are children, something unheard of in our so-called 'democracy'. We have to worry about the ways in which the law is being used against the protests while legally and constitutionally we are fully justified to carry out agitations, to express dissent against the government or anybody else. That constitutional protection is being eroded by the use of ordinary laws. This is something which we need to worry about.

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Vrinda Grover, Advocate, Supreme Court of India, New Delhi

'Of course, there is no chargesheet till date. The purpose of invoking criminal law is not actually to take it anywhere. It has already served its purpose'

From 2016 onwards, for me personally as a lawyer, there is almost a new specialisation in law. This is about students, professors, and all issues relating to universities.

From 2016 onwards, many of my friends have become clients, in a sense. On the aspect of criminalisation, the point is not that the law is going to be used to necessarily entangle you in law proceedings. That is also a part of the story. But, there is a more immediate and pointing purpose to which the law is

being used, particularly, criminal law is being used, and that is to demonise the individual, vilify the institution and to engineer and orchestrate hate against those persons. These testimonies from teachers and students, as they talk about spine-chilling experiences, the feeling under surveillance, is precisely the purpose of the criminalisation being done.

I want to go back to three of these cases, in the legal sense, which are very

important incidents that have taken place, as I have been personally a part of them as a lawyer. Post the JNU incident which took place on February 9, 2016, nobody even knew what had happened till Zee News was kind enough to bring it to national television through doctored and engineered videos. There is a plan and an entire process through which this hate is engineered and law is deployed with full knowledge that there will be political patronage, that public opinion can be manipulated and courts may be overhauled by the public opinion.

I will just show why I say so. On the morning when Kanhaiya Kumar was to be produced, there was a petition filed in the Supreme Court saying that on his production, security must be provided. The court listed the names of all of us as lawyers who will be allowed to be there and the Registrar of the Delhi High Court was asked to make arrangements. When we were entering, we saw a very large mob. Just two days earlier, teachers and journalists had been attacked. Those who were raising slogans and were part of the mob were actually lawyers of that court, or, otherwise; it was hard to say, but the national flag and certain slogans were part of this process, which nowadays seem to sound as alarm bells for us who were present there.

There was a lot of so-called police, there were senior judges present and all of us were present. We informed the senior-most judges that the way in which this has been organised was not right. It was clear to even those of us who were not in

charge of security plans. If you are going to put me in the center and have the mob surround me, anyone with common sense would understand that this is a bad idea and can create trouble. This was brought to their attention.

When Kanhaiya Kumar came in, he was attacked. We saw the man who attacked him. The judicial officers and the police said they did not see him, but some of us did see him. It is not a mystery how he was able to come in. Nobody could have walked in without an I-card or permission from the police that day. So, if he did walk in, there was not a breach of security – he was allowed to walk in.

After which, again, the issue was raised by us that this is a very serious violation, including of the high court order. I have seen the 1984 carnage of Sikhs in the city and it was the only memory that was coming back. This kind of sloganeering of lawyers and the mob; this was what was happening in 1984 in Delhi. The Supreme Court had to rush in Court Commissioners. What happened after all this?

Five or six senior lawyers of the Supreme Court came as Court Commissioners because we reached out to them. Incidentally, all our cell phones were taken away, even of the lawyers. It was only after the breach happened that some of us insisted that since the judicial officers and the police have failed to provide security, please return our phones, we have to reach out to our colleagues. At which point the Supreme

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Court was interrupted by Indira Jaisingh, Prashant Bhushan and senior lawyers. They were attacked. They went back and reported.

All of us lawyers who were present as Kanhaiya Kumar's counsels in Patiala House that day gave a signed written statement to the bench headed by Justice J Chelameswar to please take this on record and take action against those who have indulged in these acts. Justice Ranjan Gogoi, in January 2018, said that there is no reason to 'flog a dead horse', that this matter should now be put to rest, and that if anybody wants to take it up, the court can access different remedies in the law; it's open to you.

This is how we first demonised individuals and institutions. We created a narrative. The State is able to shape a certain public opinion. The only institution that can step in to curb this or to turn this in the other way is the court. And if the court does not do that, then there is both, reason to be worried, and to repeatedly point out where these institutions have failed us.

I am only curious as to who is the 'dead horse' among all of us. I also want to read out a portion of Justice Pratibha Rani's bail order. I am not going to bother with the song that she began her bail order with. However, we need to look at what is this demonising, sedition and hate speech doing in our midst - that becomes very important.

The judge writes, and I am quoting from her bail order: "Today I find myself

standing on a crossroad. The FIR in question has been registered only on February 11, 2016. Investigation is at the initial stage. The petitioner is the President of Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union. His presence at the spot on February 9, 2016 has been claimed on the basis of raw video footage of that day, February 9, 2016. The petitioner at present is in judicial custody. The question is, in view of the nature of serious allegations against him, the anti-national attitude which can be gathered from the material relied upon by the State, should (it) be a ground to keep him in jail."

What is the legal meaning of the phrase called 'anti-national'? How does a sitting judge of a high court use language of this nature?

These are issues we will have to talk about because there is too much silence surrounding things that are happening in very important institutions and offices. It continues: "As President of Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union, the petitioner was expected to be responsible and accountable for any anti-national event organised in the campus. Freedom of speech guaranteed to the citizens of this country under the Constitution of India has enough room for every citizen to follow his own ideology or political affiliation within the framework of our Constitution. While dealing with the bail application of the petitioner, it has to be kept in mind by all concerned that they are enjoying this freedom only because our borders are guarded by our armed and paramilitary forces. Our forces are

protecting our frontiers in the most difficult terrain in the world, that is, Siachen Glacier or Rann of Kutch."

I don't know if it should be laughed at or ridiculed; this has been stated by a sitting judge of the high court! One dare not laugh, not because of the fear of contempt, but because of the fear of this kind of interpretation of the Constitution that is being done in the course, where we have to turn for protection. Therefore, when students say that they are fearful, there is good reason for that.

In the JNU case, despite the fact that we were attacked, the fact that one man breached security, the highest court of the land did not see any reason to interfere with the matter, whereas a condition was imposed that he (Kanhaiya Kumar) should not participate actively or passively in any 'anti-national' activity. I am not even sure that if this condition was imposed on anybody; what do they do or what are they expected to do?

Of course, there is no chargesheet till date. The purpose of invoking criminal law is not actually to take it anywhere. It has already served its purpose. The point is, both, to put fear in the wider community, what is called the 'chilling effect', and to vilify and demonise, and this demonisation has not gone away with time. We know that demonisation of JNU happened. I think, JNU, in particular, is being seen in a certain way.

I will just flag two cases which are coming up before the Delhi High Court with respect to appointments and admissions.

All the rules and procedures are being distorted and contorted in a manner so as to control both admissions and appointments. If you can close the admissions and appointments in a university, it is as good as over, having already vilified it.

There are reasons why most of JNU is contesting every single attack – whether that is the procedure of appointments, the sedition accusations, the injunction of where you will protest, how you will protest, and CCTV cameras all over, etc. They have been removed now because there is also a very strong faculty committed to civil liberties which makes a lot of difference. It enables both the students as well as the faculty to take certain positions and stance.

In the Ramjas incident in Delhi University, I had helped them with their legal processes. They were not able to get an FIR filed. Despite repeated reminders, they were unable to even get FIRs registered – that they were attacked. The principal also wrote letters to the Morris Nagar SHO. The only FIR registered was against them. A complaint case was filed in Tees Hazari, by a young person, saying that sedition should be invoked against these people. We saw a crime branch enquiry, the result of which nobody ever saw. We don't know what is happening because these are slightly 'under the radar' kind of operations that are conducted.

Certainly, in the staff room, all teachers were not willing to put their necks out,

get condemned and isolated. People think of jobs and other forms of public scrutiny. In February 2016 also, the pattern was the same. The Ramjas event was directly related to the JNU event because of the invite to Umar Khalid which was seen by ABVP as an act of provocation and therefore it had to be halted. So, there is a common pattern. They are drawing and controlling what you will speak and against whom you will speak.

Snehsata, from the Central University of Haryana in Mahendergarh, is an extremely brave lecturer, who did not have the support of a faculty like JNU and had organised a festival where 'Draupadi' written by Mahasweta Devi, was to be enacted. She had read out an epilogue quoting what are the contemporary situations in which we could reflect upon Mahasweta Devi's 'Draupadi'. It led to some kind of neighbourhood protest by people who apparently joined the army etc, because she pointed out to the kind of violations the armed forces had committed in the North-East, Kashmir and in the region of Bastar in Chhattisgarh.

She had to face a rather high-level enquiry, which was, if I am not mistaken, conducted by three retired vice-chancellors. Actually, she had been asked to give an explanation for reading out an epilogue. She was let off with a warning that in case she commits a similar act in the future, they will take disciplinary action.

These are cases that I have been personally involved with as and while I was assisting these people dealing with the kind of attack they were facing. I think the attacks are quite clear. The attack is on what you speak, what you will speak to the students, what are the ideas that will be allowed to be presented to the students. Criminal law is being brought in to draw the boundaries of that speech, and the speech that will not glorify their version of the nation-state or the armed forces. That is, what is permissible activity and what is not.

We will see much more use of criminal law. It's not going to go anywhere, they are not interested in filing the cases; the job has already been done by naming you in the FIR. Moreover, representing such people now seems to carry its own issues and concerns.

Given the fact that we are in such a scenario, and given the fact that the university authorities will be increasingly deploying these means, it is important for those of us who do intend to stand for the freedom of court, the freedom of speech and expression, and use the university as arenas of cultivating that kind of thought, to acquire some familiarity with law and its processes. It's not something that we have to necessarily do in life, but it will be good to have some familiarity because you will have to know the enemy and its imagination to be able to deal with it.



Mukul Mangalik, Associate Professor, Department of History, Ramjas College, Delhi University, Delhi

'My Salaam to all those students, past and present, who, through the 'Marcusian quality' of their 'Great Refusal', have kept hope alive in dark times'

Members of the jury, organisers of this Peoples' Tribunal and friends, let me begin with a few preliminary remarks:

Just yesterday I was reading out a passage in my class for 3rd year History students, from a book called 'The Slave Ship -A Human History' by Marcus Rediker. Towards the end of this passage, Rediker says that "this has been a painful book for me to write". I could not help remembering these lines as I sat down last night to recollect the details of the terrible happenings at Ramjas College in February 2017, for purposes of putting together this brief testimony. All of it came flooding back, in waves and waves of images and sounds, leaving me in anguish and seared with pain.

As I stand before you today, I shall say what I have to say without a trace of vengeance and surprisingly enough without feelings of anger. The overwhelming emotion is one of pain, accompanied by the desire to open up a conversation with all concerned about what has remained unspoken for over a year now. The hope is that this might begin a process, through which, the enormity of what happened can begin to be openly acknowledged and talked

about as we start out on the road to political justice.

I shall be speaking only about what happened at Ramjas College on two consecutive days but with the clear understanding that the meanings and implications of those experiences can transcend boundaries and can and must speak to every individual concerned for the present and future of democracy anywhere in the world.

- 1) On February 21 and 22, 2017, Ramjas College, located in the North Campus of Delhi University, having completed its centennial on January 17, became the site of unprecedented violence. The very air, it seemed, had become charged with the worst imaginable intimidation, threats, abuses and physical assault. The viciousness of it all continues, I think, to haunt and disturb each one of us who experienced those two days of sheer terror.
- 2) *This violence was not the result of any 'clash' between rival student groups.* It was a direct outcome of a brazen, one-sided, daylight assault on innocent students and teachers of Ramjas College by members and supporters

of one student organisation, the ABVP – the student wing of the BJP/RSS – which, during the academic year 2016-17, was also in control of the Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU).

Hell-bent on deciding, with the help of the police, who should and who should not be invited to a two-day seminar on 'Cultures of Protest', organised by the Literary Society and Department of English, Ramjas College, and then faced with a perfectly legitimate, peaceful and spirited protest against their arbitrary exercise of power and brawn, by students, teachers and organisers (and participants) of this seminar, they literally occupied Ramjas College over these two days. They held students and teachers hostage in life-threatening situations – for example, inside the Conference Hall located on the first floor above the college canteen on the afternoon of February 21 – and then let loose their fury on unsuspecting students and teachers, kicking and punching them, screaming and shouting at them, injuring several, abusing and chasing women down the streets of Delhi University, and making no bones about their open intent of causing grievous bodily harm.

This, I repeat, was no 'clash'. It was a one-sided attack, pure and simple.

- 3) I started teaching at Ramjas College in 1984, so I know that DU has not

been a stranger to violence, even as it has also been home to students' and teachers' movements against '*gundagardi*' and for democracy and secularism. Yet, or, rather, precisely because I am aware of DU's long tryst with violence, I feel the attack on students and teachers at Ramjas College on February 21 and 22, 2017, was unprecedented. It was unprecedented and frightening. In fact, the memory of it continues to send a chill down my spine even today – for the following reasons:

- never before have any college of DU been almost taken over by a violent mob for over two full days;
- never before have I seen or experienced such viciousness, hate and fury in the language and actions of the aggressors, the feeling that they might or would, in fact, do absolutely anything;
- this was pre-meditated, systematic and organised mass violence, enacted with the clear purpose of sending out a message, not just to many at Ramjas, but to all colleges and universities, at least, in Delhi, that, henceforth, it would be the ABVP that would call the shots at the universities, not the invaluable pillars of academic autonomy, democratic rights and the principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution, without all of which universities cannot survive as universities;
- never before have I been forced to go

underground for fear of being singled out and physically targeted by students at DU, some of them my own students of History at Ramjas College, not just on February 22, but for a few days thereafter as well, because of a high-voltage and malicious social media campaign projecting some of us, and me, in particular, as being seditious, rendering us fair game for all and sundry;

- the attack, in all its elemental ugliness and perversity, was being celebrated even as it was happening, by the very people who were carrying it out; and
 - the police, at best, allowed this macabre dance of violence and mayhem to go on, more or less unchecked, or, at worst, were hand-in-glove with the ABVP.
- 4) As for the students and teachers of Ramjas College who were attacked, I would like to state unequivocally, that they were not in the wrong at all. They did nothing that was illegal, unconstitutional, undemocratic or professionally or ethically wrong. They were, in fact, by organising the seminar on 'Cultures of Protest', doing what all teachers and students don't just have the right to, but the duty to do so. Far from their doing anything, *absolutely anything wrong*, they were, in fact, being prevented, all of a sudden – by the ABVP and the police – on the morning of February 21, from doing their legitimate work within the premises

of their own college, their place of work, the crucible of livelihood, meanings, dreams, friendships, collegiality, struggles, freedoms and all the other things that make life worth living.

It speaks volume for their implicit commitment to the highest ideals of education and to democratic rights, civil liberties and the spirit of solidarity, that in the face of the most horrific violence, abuse and intimidation that came their way and forced the seminar that they had so painstakingly put together to be shut down and snatched away from them, these students and teachers did not run away. They might have taken a step back at this one moment or another, but, all in all, they stood their ground, protesting and fighting back, not just then, but all through, right until today, with words, arguments, ideas, slogans and songs, in the finest traditions of active non-violent resistance.

I would, therefore, like to end by saying what I think I will never tire of saying: my '*Salaam*' to all those students, past and present, who through the 'Marcusian quality' of their '*Great Refusal*', have kept hope alive in dark times, together with the burning desire to read, write, think, speak and live without fear, and in freedom. They have done this for the emancipated ways of being and living at Ramjas College, for freedom in precious spaces, including in the classroom, and for democracy – '*what spring does to the Cherry trees*'.

But, for this – especially since new modes of surveillance and monitoring are threatening to take over our lives in the college – silence might have come to rule over Ramjas, and I too may have fallen prey to looking upon those who attacked us, students or otherwise, as ‘others’, enemies to be vilified rather than as human beings with whom I shall always be willing and happy to speak, argue, explain and debate in the abiding hope that they too, like the rest of us, carry possibilities for re-inventing themselves through genuine repentance and deeply felt remorse rooted in the demanding processes of self-criticism and reflection.

I don't see how else we can continue to believe with the Xhosa that “*people are people through other people*”, or dream along with Aime Cesaire that that “*no race holds the monopoly of beauty, of intelligence and strength and there is room for all at the rendezvous of victory and we know that the sun turns around our land shining over the plot chosen by our will alone and that every star falls from the sky at our limitless command*”.

I don't see how else students and teachers can remain the people we are meant to be and universities stay true to their real purpose.



Dr Snehsata Manav, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Central University of Haryana, Mahendragarh, Haryana

‘We, so-called intellectuals, are surrounded by our own selfish ends. We are very selfish, and we are governed by market ideals instead of philosophical principles’

Dissent is what is not going parallel to or not adhering to the idea of dominant meta-narratives. To name a few: nationalism, patriotism, student-teacher relationship, or ideas that power wants everyone to accept. Even the Marxist version of India as a class-system can be included in this list. These are powered by power, prompted by power, directed by power, and to maintain the power, they do not want to be interrupted by marginalised realities. Whoever wants to talk about marginalised realities are not accepted by the meta-narratives, or the mainstream.

Sometimes, however, dissent is created by the meta-narrative realities themselves. Hence, not all dissent is positive. The dissent that is targeted usually belong to marginalised realities. What happened at my university, the Central University of Haryana (CUH), is of the former kind – the one created by the meta-narrative. It did not originate from within the university, rather, it was a publicised dissent which got its steam from outside – from the nearby villages. (I never intended to say that the university is a closed space aloof from the outside world.)

The Department of English and Foreign Languages has a paper named 'Literature and Gender', and Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories* is part of its syllabus. In July 2016, Mahasweta Devi died and our department thought we should pay a tribute to her by organising a programme. The responsibility of this was given to two teachers - my colleague Dr Manoj Kumar and me. I was told that since I was teaching the paper, I could do anything creative. So we thought we could convert 'Draupadi', a story by the author, into a play. I rewrote the script in play form and wrote its prologue and epilogue.

'Draupadi' is a story situated in West Bengal in the 1970s in the time of drought. A landlord is murdered by his peasant tenants because he has been inflicting various kinds of injustice upon them. In response, the police and the army come into the village and burn the whole village down. Dulna and Draupadi, the main characters, escape from the scene, but after some time Dulna is killed in a fake encounter and Draupadi is captured by the army. Throughout the night she is gang-raped by the soldiers. The following morning, she is called by the chief of the army. She goes to meet him naked and refuses to wear any cloth. Surprised and puzzled, the chief of army asks where her clothes are. She replies, "You can unclothe me but how can you clothe me again." Her breasts are vandalised and brutally bitten. She says, "Why are you afraid? Why are you afraid of a naked woman?"

The story ends here. In the epilogue, I called it a story of a real situation

depicting the realities happening in contemporary India. I spoke of the brutal rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama under custody by the army in Manipur. When her corpse was recovered it was discovered that almost 20 bullets were pumped in her private parts. As a response to this brutality, several Manipuri women came out naked outside the Assam Rifles headquarters in Imphal holding banners that read, 'Indian Army, Rape Us'.

I also spoke of the sexual abuses Indian women are facing and the pseudo intellectuals who use this opportunity for their own selfish ends. When these kind of incidents happen, the pseudo-intellectuals become silent, but on stage, in the media, and in their air-conditioned rooms, they are very good people and speak very well. I spoke of people like Senanaik in the story who says things like, "I know the world; its memory is very weak. I will change colours in all the worlds and I will be respected in all the times."

The play was well-received and there was applause. I was congratulated by my own colleagues. It was the first English play on stage in this university. By evening, though, agitations started. I was shocked by some students who were affiliated to the ABVP and RSS. They were propagating that the army has been depicted in a negative way. They motivated and organised the nearby villagers. They called other army people and started protesting against the university. We were asked to write an

apology stating that it was not our intention to harm anybody's emotions.

However, this was not enough for them. For one month, continuously, we faced lots of abuses and dharnas in front of the university. The sad part of the story was that the authorities, who gave all the permissions and worked with us, shifted their stance in the wake of the uproar. The next day we faced questions about why did we organise this kind of a programme. We responded in our own way and two committees were formed. The first committee did not want to write anything negative about us and hence was not given a second chance. In the second committee, a very eminent professor from Osmania University was made the chairperson. He gave a strict warning letter to me and asked very surprising and distressing questions like, "You had personal intentions and if you repeat such actions in the future you will have to face strict disciplinary action." That eminent professor asked me, "What was the need of talking in this desert area about Mahasweta Devi? She is a well-reputed fellow and the sand dune is not the place for giving tribute to such a fellow. Do you think by talking about rape you will change the mindset of people? Army people are dying on the borders serving the country and you are vandalising their reputation. Do you not think you are anti-national?"

I asked him to tell me, if I was a part of this nation. Ultimately, he spoke only negative things. The police made enquiries from me, complaints were filed

at the police station. These authorities inquired about my education, about the places I happened to live during my studies. I told them that I did my school plus-two from my village, BA from a local college, MA from a government college, MPhil from Kurukshetra University, and PhD from CUH, Mahendergarh.

They were surprised to discover that I was not from JNU. I told them that JNU was not the only place of dissent, and not all who pass out from JNU dare to speak the truth.

The situation now is that there is a screening committee in our university. Whatever you wish to speak on the stage, even a single word, will be screened by the screening committee and only then you may speak on stage. There is a sense in my mind that I have to think a lot before I say anything. The saddest part is that the same intellectuals who speak big words on stage turned their faces away when we faced them.

Our university is young, established in 2009 and was located in a temporary campus till 2013. It has no working teachers' association. There are only seven members in it because that is the minimum required number and we had to plead to the teachers to come and write their names for the association. There is no students' organisation either. Only two teachers were standing with us, and we had nearly 70 teachers at the time. One teacher called me up on phone, only for him to say, "I am sorry Snehsata Ma'am, I dialed your number by mistake." I said

I am glad at least the number was dialled—he seemed breathless and he did not have words to speak. Even today, even if a teacher is dying, there would be no assistance.

When I see these things I think the problem is not in the authorities, but, within the teachers themselves. The

future, I think, lies in the hands of the teachers. The authorities are nothing if all the teachers are together. Whatever is happening is because, we, so-called intellectuals, are surrounded by our own selfish ends. We are very selfish, very politically motivated, and we are governed by market ideals instead of philosophical principles. ★★

Abinash, Ramjas College, Delhi University (DU), New Delhi

'I fear invoking the Constitution. There needs to be some kind of a moral persuasion, and justice needs to be redefined not through the prism of law but through humanity and values'

It is very difficult for me to imagine, as I speak about what happened in those two days, but I would like to speak about what followed. I want to put into perspective the incident. What followed was that actually criminalisation is not only happening in terms of legality, but, in a sense, it is the 'democratisation of criminalisation'. There are two issues, two incidents, that I want to recollect.

Sometime, in September, I was a part of 'DU conversations' started by a bunch of students, primarily by the students of the Delhi School of Economics. We were trying to organise something around the lines of a talk, and that was scratched and shut off because of our names as members. I want to recollect and really emphasise here the fact of how the police locates students. When one person becomes the face and the face becomes a threat, and the fact that Ramjas becomes

a kind of name that chills the spine, one is completely rattled by what can happen by the name 'Ramjas College'.

I want to refer to the fact that how this 'democratisation' is happening inside Ramjas College after last year (2017). I spend a lot of time in college. I stay there till night, till 9/10 pm, and I have had a very good relationship with the guards over these three years – 2015 to 2018 – that I have been in college. It is very depressing to see that very slowly and insidiously these guards are turning against us. It has been enabled through a larger and grand narrative of not allowing certain things to be talked about and taught. I think what is very scary is how these guards react to us now. There is this venomous attitude towards students, not allowing them to stand in college during day time, the guards will ask you to go away, they will take action against you.

This is not the part of criminalisation of the lifestyle of the students.

The other aspect I would like to talk about is about what is happening in the lecture rooms. Prof Mukul Manglik was organising that lecture as part of our world literature class and all of us were a part of it. He was talking about the 1968 students' revolution in France. An IPS officer who spotted us started asking questions. What was very interesting and in part scary also was that what happens inside our classrooms, what we talk about, are taken out of context and put in this grand narrative. And then conclusions are drawn and actions are taken.

What is scary in this is that none of us are safe in the college sphere. In the last one year, the college has always been the place where we fear to go, and every time I go to college I know that all of us are being looked at, all of us are being heard, out of context, mostly. This is the criminalisation. So how do we deal with this criminalisation?

I understand the Constitution is the tool that protects us in many ways. What is also needed is how we deal with this criminalisation at a very personal level. This is because I do not invoke the Constitution to a security guard with

whom I really had a brilliant relationship when we used to sit with the evening *chai*. I fear invoking the Constitution. There needs to be some kind of a moral persuasion, and justice needs to be redefined not through the prism of law but through humanity and values.

The attack that happened at Ramjas was not against a particular institution or students' body. It was against the Literary Society of the English Department, for god's sake, of a college which was trying to organise a talk. What one needs to understand is that they are not against a party, they are against certain individuals. So, how do we deal with threats at that level?

Of course, the Constitution is there. I remember my trips to the Tees Hazari Court where the sedition hearings were happening. I was trying to strike a conversation with a man passing by in the corridor. The man has nothing to do with what is happening in the court and yet there is animosity in this common person, and he reacts in the most hostile manner. This is where the Constitution fails. There needs to be some base on which the Constitution stands and I think moral persuasion does the job for students and teachers.



Roshan Pandey, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi

'These people are trying to crush students' opinion and questions. There is not a single platform within the campus where you can express your opinion or raise questions'

We gather at the Constitution Club in Delhi because our educational institutions are not abiding by the Constitution. I do not blame anyone, a party or a government for this situation, rather, this situation of oppression is because of the ignorance of constitutional values inside our educational institutions across the country. At the Banaras Hindu University (BHU), we raised an issue regarding the library. Almost 40 per cent of students on an average get admission in the hostel, and 60 per cent students live in villages who do not get any facilities. The library provided a better and necessary environment for these students. The library allowed an environment where discussions and conversations took place between students on campus at night. For this purpose, our library would be open 24 hours. This is what BHU stated in the Executive Council's resolution and the prospectus.

However, since the new government has taken power and a new vice-chancellor has been appointed, the library has been closed. We raised the issue. Why is the library not given to us despite BHU mentioning it in its prospectus? We were told that some of the great people studied under streetlights so we should also study

under streetlights as well if we want to study. So, we protested by studying under streetlights. In between, we did signature campaigns and adopted other democratic measures. We wrote a letter so that our concerns may reach the higher authorities, but we got no response.

Thereby, we sat on a peaceful hunger strike for nine days, but nine students were suspended citing reasons that we are protesting on the campus. We were suspended and now allowed to give our exams as well. Neither an enquiry committee was set up, nor was a show cause notice provided for the suspension. This means that even the principle of natural justice laid down by our Constitution was not followed.

We took the matter to the court, but without luck. For a year, our case went on in the high court, but we received no relief. We approached the Supreme Court and were given the permission to write our exams.

In between all this, the daily staff workers were holding meetings. They protested for 171 days, and went on hunger strike for 41 days in which we too participated in solidarity. Issues were raised of serious gender discrimination in subjects, hostel fee, hostel facilities, etc. Women staying

in the hostels face a curfew at 7 pm and 9pm. The reservation policy was not being followed in one department. General seats were left marked vacant, while the reserved seats were marked 'Not Found Suitable'. We started getting vocal on these issues and violence broke out on August 31 in which we did not participate. However, criminal charges were filed against us.

We had proof of CCTV footage and some people being unwell but we were still trapped. It has been more than a year and there is still no report. We participated in a movement regarding sexual harassment in BHU in September 2017 and had to face criminal charges again. During a peaceful

protest, the police did a 'lathi-charge'. We were given a notice stating that we have made attempts to murder, kept weapons and explosives, conducted riots, etc.

These people are trying to crush students' opinion and questions. There is not a single platform within the campus where you can express your opinion or raise questions. If you differ ideologically even a bit, then you are crushed.

As long as the institution runs there are going to be problems. If there are questions, how can we come up with solutions for these problems? We are still fighting for our cause. ★★

Harishankar Nachimuthu, former president, FTII Students' Union, Film and Television Institute of India, Pune

'The union is completely destroyed, whatever we had has been completely destroyed'

With so many strikes in the last couple of years, FTII has become an old story. I would like to concentrate on what happened post the strike at FTII. The strike continued for 139 days drawing tremendous support. Having heard the other testimonies, I think the students of FTII were privileged, primarily because we got support from celebrities and hence the increased media attention.

Before the strikes, FTII was not a very politically potent space for protests. The space was more of a niche and liberal

space, not participating in anything unless it directly concerns FTII. Just before the strike we had called the Kabir Kala Manch- after which things started getting worse on campus. The then president of ABVP was also one of the members in the strike. The strike continued and we had criminal charges filed on us. Section 143, 147, 149, 323, 341, 353, 506, were filed. My lawyer was told that the number of witnesses required in these sections were not enough. Once we go on trial we will be implicated, obviously, but most of us would not be

implicated as we had gone to shoot. What occurred was a ‘normalisation’ of what I would call ‘a slave mentality’.

After all the money the government spent on the new director, Gajendra Chauhan, he never turned up at the campus except once. I was called for an appointment and it seemed that it could just be a birthday gift for Chauhan. But, that was not the case. In fact, all of it was well-planned.

I was then the president. He spoke to me quite nicely, asked me to forget everything and that we will make the place wonderful. They opened a faculty office where they were doing some small puja and he called me. I told him that I do not believe in all these rituals and maybe I will just take the sweets offered.

I come from a small town called Kolachiin Tamil Nadu from where my father called me up to inform that an IB officer had come by. Fortunately, one of my school mate is a bar councillor and hence the problem did not escalate.

Advocate Mihir Desai mentioned about the right to form a union. We once organised a strike in favour of the sweeping staff on contract. I was sitting outside when the director called me and told me to stop this “union-giri”.

Gradually, things became normal on campus. We never thought that it would be a matter of privilege to call a speaker without the administration’s permission, like we used to. Earlier, we would just inform the administration. Things did not happen like we thought, such as the

campus being blocked after 10pm, or stopping liberties like partying in the campus, etc.

They knew how to create a split between the faculty and us. The faculty does not have a strong union in FTII like the JNUTA of JNU. Most of them are on contract, hence, they do not step forward for most of these issues; whoever did support in little ways were harassed. There was this new application on facebook, ‘Sarahah’, where somebody anonymously messaged me: “FTII cannot become JNU.” I thought the language was that of a student.

At the time of admission, they ask whether I am going to start anything here? Obviously, why would I say yes? Last year, we tried to celebrate Ambedkar Jayanti and the director asked for the names of those being called and if their research is political, or acceptable to him. The new set of students get turned against us. When students ask the director for scholarships, he refuses to talk to them and directs them elsewhere. They organise pretentious things like, ‘Pune for FTII and FTII for Pune’ and turn the public against us. The security guards check labourers working on construction sites every day so that the labourer does not take things for firewood. This is the kind of attitude towards outsiders.

I feel ashamed to tell this as for me to come here right now takes a lot of pain. I have missed three shifts by coming here and when I return to FTII they might criticise me. The union is completely

destroyed, whatever we had has been completely destroyed. It is easier gathering support for FTII due to the kind

of place that it is. But, lending support to others is becoming difficult for us as everything is being destroyed. ★★

Writwik Saikia, general secretary, Democratic Students Forum of Assam and North-East India, Gauhati University, Guwahati

'I was kept in police custody for 4 days and then sent to jail for 35 days'

I am from Gauhati University and I am the general secretary of the Democratic Students Forum of Assam and North-East India. I was arrested on June 9, 2017. In the past, several remarks have been made against me, "You are Leftist"; "You are an anti-national", by the DCP of Jalukbari Police Station. Such are the kind of remarks they have been making about us.

I want to divide my testimony into two parts. The first is about 'when and why' I got admitted to Gauhati University in July 2014 for a Masters in Mass Communication. Within three months we came to know the administrative, financial and academic defaults inside the university. The entire university is run by one person – the vice-chancellor. We started various movements like fasting and agitation and through RTIs we tried to bring out more issues.

On January 16, we filed an RTI with the administration seeking details about some financial matters, fraudulent officers, and certain professors in our university. Now, interestingly, it has become an issue in Assam that many

professors in various colleges are reportedly getting PhD degrees from outside Assam – illegally.

As we had expected, on May 15, I got a show cause notice with charges of "anti-university activities" and there was a disciplinary committee instituted against me. On May 20, I was expelled from the Gauhati University, just 7 days before my MA final exam.

This issue immediately got attention of the national media and the controversy became viral on social media. The then president of JNUSU, Kanhaiya Kumar, strongly condemned this. We fought and my suspension order was revoked on June 4, 2016. I was allowed to appear for the exam. It was interesting that we were referred to as "anti-university" after this incident.

Thereafter, we continuously opposed the VC on various issues. On May 18, I filed another RTI against the VC. The issue was that he was renovating his residential premises by spending Rs 1.5 crore. On May 19, the administration filed an FIR against me.

On May 22, an ‘Expression of Interest’ letter was issued by the registrar of Gauhati University saying that we need a bus stop inside the campus which would be a public bus stop for which the university wanted to give the land to a private party. We opposed this and told the registrar that we will not tolerate this anymore. We submitted a memorandum against this decision on June 6, and after three days, they arrested me on charges under Sections 124 – UAPA etc. After that, I was produced in the court and kept in police custody for 4 days and then sent to jail for 35 days. After spending 35 days in jail, I got bail, but it was not over. I have come to know from the media that I am in the ‘surveillance list’ of the Assam Police.

I want to bring to your notice why this has happened to me. As students of Gauhati University, we raised some issues with the administration regarding the fee structure – certain fees collected by the university which is not necessary – identity cards being issued for Rs 450, deserving students not getting admission and seats for girl students being limited.

Two sandal trees were cut down in the campus which is theft. The VC said that he does not know anything. Interestingly, a CID inquiry is still pending against the VC.

Our university land was not purchased by the government. It was donated by the villagers of the adjoining villages. So, it is the duty of the university to maintain the campus. We have already lost some land which has been given for the construction of a highway. There was no need to permit a public bus stop inside the campus when classes are going on. For students, there is a bus service available free of cost. Then what is the requirement of a public bus stop? We opposed all these decisions. Hence, I was arrested. Actually, this entire issue was nothing but organised government propaganda.

Another example is how the university gives us RTI ‘facts’ without signature, without authority letter, to whom it has been given – nothing. Till now, no action has been taken and the governor is silent about this.



Deborshi Chakraborty, former student, Presidency College, Kolkata

'Outsiders! Maoists! Conspirators...'

Being a former student of Presidency College, now Presidency University, Kolkata and currently a research scholar at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, I feel that I have the amenities and privilege to depose my testimonies in public. However, there are many colleges and universities in my state where students are facing atrocities at the hands of the ruling party, the police and the administration, and these acts of injustice are not getting highlighted.

First, I want to narrate the incident on April 10, 2013 in Presidency University when I was a student. The ruling party students association, Trinamool Chhatra Parishad, ransacked the campus. They came inside the university and beat up student activists like me. My nose was broken, I was run over by 10 people, my T-shirt was torn, female students and female teachers were allegedly issued rape threats by these goons. Then they entered the heritage building laboratory and ransacked the laboratory, the classrooms.

The whole university premise was almost destroyed. The interesting thing is when this was happening, we were protesting outside the university. I came to know about those who were associated with this attack. So, when I depensed their names, in the public, in the media, the next thing they did was to file a case against me; they said that I was the person

who was responsible for the destruction of the laboratory, etc. It was not only me, there was another student who was charged with atrocious threats and the police is continuing with these false cases even now.

Let me cite the '*Hokolorob*' movement or the movement that happened in 2014 in Jadavpur University. In our official capacity as student representatives in the Presidency Students' Union, we went there to express our solidarity on September 16, 2014. Police patrol happened on that night. They picked up students. I was one of those picked up. I was among the three 'outsiders' who were arrested by the police.

Later, they floated the story that the 'outsiders' had arms. The mouthpiece of the ruling party carried out a story with my picture that I was associated with the Maoist movement, that I had a gun, that there were associates who had a Chinese pistol or something like that. These kind of fascinating stories were circulated while trying to turn public opinion against the movement. And that is what they always do!

When we protested against the incident that happened in Ranaghat, a small town near Kolkata, they also pointed out protestors like me as the 'Mao-Maku' conspirators. They always call us conspirators, those who are raising their

voice against them, against the government.

When I was a student in Presidency College in 2015, the chief minister had come to the campus. The students were protesting because Presidency was not given many things even after stated promises. Then, again, these newspapers, mouthpieces of Trinamool Congress, carried out stories calling me a conspirator, that I tried to assassinate the chief minister with other conspirators.

There has been destruction of statues – Lenin, Periyar, Ambedkar. There was a statue of Lenin in front of Jadavpur University, a very old one. We came to know that the RSS is coming to destroy the statue. So the students went there and resisted that attack. The next thing that the West Bengal government and the police did was to launch cases against us. That is how they work. The West Bengal government is actually trying to polarise with the BJP and RSS. That is their strategy.

There is another movement which is going on right now, which is very serious. There is a people's movement that is going on in Bhangor, not very far from Kolkata. The students who participated in this movement have been charged with atrocious penal codes like the Arms and Explosives Act. I have been charged with the Arms and Explosives Act, conspiracy against the State, etc. This is a problem medical college student Dr Rahul Banerjee, who is right now in prison, is facing; he has been charged with UAPA for participating in the people's movement.

This is the state of law and the Indian Constitution right now in West Bengal where any kind of protest is being branded unlawful and anti-national. It is not only the fascists, who are in power at the Centre, the state government too is calling us 'anti-national' and using phrases like unlawful activities against us.

★ ★

Sannaki Munna, University of Hyderabad, and president, Ambedkar Students' Association, Hyderabad

'It is a fight in which all of us, all the students, are coming together. We are rejecting victimhood, we are not scared, and we are hoping for the best in the future'

Jai Bhim. I am Sannaki Munna, representing the University of Hyderabad and working as president of the Ambedkar Students' Association

(ASA). We have been struggling and our fight is at the state-level. Till date, the challenges and issues continue to prevail and our fight is continuing.

Currently, Appa Rao, the sitting VC, is continuing with his suspension orders – before Rohith Vemula and after Rohith Vemula. More than 50 members of ASA have got suspended. They have removed the North-East, J&K and union territory reservation quotas. There is no proper implementation of the reservation policy in the University of Hyderabad for students, faculty and employees. The ASA filed a petition in the high court last year – till date no judgement has come.

The victimisation is largely affecting MPhil and PhD students. The ratio of students from downtrodden backgrounds has become lesser in the universities, including in HCU. Whenever we represent any issue, through organisational level and the students' union, the administration rejects our demands. We are left with no option but to fight – and we are fighting.

Since the past three years, we are struggling with the institutions of education – there is no rest for us. Everyday, there will be something to engage with in order to represent the students' concerns. The university is continuously rejecting our representations and clamping down on our struggle.

I am talking about centres – the closing of two centres. They received notices from the MHRD and HCU, because they want to close down some centres in HCU. There are also serious fund cuts in the HCU and they are now generating funds by raising the fees. According to the

recent circular released by the MHRD, around 60 plus universities will have their own autonomy. If this kind of autonomy comes to any university, they will set their own 'Agrahara' – the universities will have the power to crush the downtrodden students and this will affect the students belonging to the SC, ST, OBC and minority communities, and students from the J&K, North-East and union territories.

I would like to put down certain issues and challenges we are facing in the University of Hyderabad (HCU).

- Currently, Appa Rao, the VC, is continuing, despite his suspension.
- On different occasions, before Rohith Vemula's suicide and after that, more than 50 people were arrested.
- The university has removed the reservation quota for the North-East, J&K and union territories.
- There is no proper implementation of the reservation policy either for students, faculties and employees.
- There is a seat cut and this is affecting mostly MPhil and PhD students. The ratio and percentage of doctoral students are becoming less in the universities, including in the University of Hyderabad.
- There are serious restrictions, from the gate to the hostel; we are restricted at the gate itself. At the gate, many security persons are deployed.

- Inside the campus, we are not allowed to do protests, public events and even gather in groups.
- According to a recent circular, outside food is not allowed inside the campus – as the institution ‘cares’ for the students.
- There is a serious fund cut issue and they have to generate their own funds by increasing the fees.

The administration is constantly making its own rules and regulations to control the university. They are silencing the students so that students won't be able to question the decisions and the rules. To implement their decisions and to make us silent, they are using methods like creating fear by deploying police and other security personal in the campus.

Another method is by not responding to the students' questions so that the students don't join the students' organisations. Continuously, the police are coming into our university, for any whimsical reason. Even for a small talk organised by us, the police is visiting the campus. For any small event which is affecting them, a DSP-level set-up will be deployed and they will try to create fear. Therefore, there is a strong attempt to create this environment of fear while clamping down on dissent.

However, in this crucial time, all the students' organisations are still fighting for the larger community.

I would not like to create a sense of frustration among all of you. In this

environment of fear too, there are good things happening. One of the good things is that students are fighting even while losing out on academic work and career prospects. Students have become the voices for all kinds of public and democratic issues.

The other good thing is that since I joined the university in 2007, and till now, we have been defeating the ABVP. Hence, we are continuously getting elected and the university is rejecting the ABVP – for whatever they do. This time, in my estimation, ABVP has spent a huge amount of money to win, and, yet, they were defeated.

There is a collective response and we are constantly fighting on issues which are happening across the country. We have been giving our solidarity to different universities and struggles all over the country – for instance, on issues related to atrocities, fellowships, MHRD, BHU, JNU, DU, FTII, etc.

Finally, I would like to focus on the thoughts of Rohith Vemula. We are rejecting ‘victimhood’ as Rohith said in his letter – he was deeply sad about our society. He was not sad about the Sangh Parivar, the BJP. He was sad about the irresponsibility of us – everyone. He also rejected ‘victimhood’ when he became a martyr.

It is a fight in which all of us, all the students, are coming together. We are rejecting victimhood, we are not scared, and we are hoping for the best in the future.



Richa Singh, former president, Allahabad University Students Union, and PhD Scholar, Allahabad University, Allahabad

'When I first went to talk to the administration, the registrar told me that you are a girl and you should behave like a girl. I replied that right now I am the president of the students' union and for one year I will talk to you as the president only'

First of all, I want to thank the People's Tribunal on Shrinking Democratic Space. Thanks to the organisers for organising this tribunal in which student leaders and students from all over the country who have faced continuous attacks can share their narratives. Thanks to the jury members, because seeing you gives a feeling that at least there are some people who are here to listen to our pain. Otherwise, we are told that being a student if you want to do politics, then you will have to face all these attacks relentlessly.

My name is Richa and I am pursuing PhD from Allahabad University. Since we are talking about the 'crackdown on dissent', I want to share my narratives.

In 2015, I contested the elections of the Allahabad University Students' Union and became the first woman to be elected as the president of the union in 128 years. Adil Hamza, our former-vice-president, whose testimony has also been attached, being a Muslim, became the first vice-president from the minority section. The reason why these facts are important is because when we talk about universities and educational institutions we presume that they are democratic and that there are progressive thoughts in these

institutions. However, during the period I have been in the Allahabad University, where I did graduation, post-graduation, research and my project, I realised that there is no place for women in the union at Allahabad University which is also called 'Oxford of the East'.

When I thought of contesting the elections, and talked to my friends, people made fun of me. They said that anything can happen in Allahabad University, but a woman can never become the president of the students' union. There are reasons behind it, because Allahabad University is not like JNU or Delhi University. Uttar Pradesh is already in news because of Yogiji.

UP has its own parameter of politics. And those parameters of politics affect the society and universities. So, in Allahabad University, where students' union elections are dependent on money and muscle power politics, women cannot participate in the elections. Not only women, common students, people from marginalised sections, Dalits or Muslims - they just cannot participate in the elections. Only a certain group of people rule the roost and only those people take part in elections.

However, we decided that we will fight the elections. I, with my friends, contested as an independent candidate. When we were contesting, other panels also approached us – the Right-wing, Left-wing. I was asked to contest for the vice-president's post. The president's post is booked for the ABVP, and it so happened that the other four seats seemed to be 'owned' by the ABVP.

We made hand-made posters and tried to talk to the students by approaching them on students' issues – which they understood. While we were giving our qualifying speech, we were bombarded with hooting, continuous hooting, so that we could not finish our qualifying speech. Despite these obstacles, a lot of students supported us and gave us the chance to be elected to the union.

Indeed, contesting the elections was not as difficult as it was after getting elected – considering the entrenched patriarchal thought structure existing in the university. For 128 years, the university administration was accustomed to see a male president. They said that being a girl she has been chosen by chance, it is not an issue, and one year will pass. This is when the confrontations between the administration and us began on questions of gender, that how can the campus be gender-sensitive, how can the campus be handicapped-sensitive as our university didn't have ramps, how can the campus provide library facilities, and what kind of toilets will be in the campus.

Being a woman, I have faced this problem. When there was no toilet, girls

had to go to the hostel for using the toilet. Hence, when I was elected, people said that when girls are elected they don't work on anything but just talk about toilets. When I first went to talk to the administration, the registrar told me that you are a girl and you should behave like a girl. I replied to him that right now I am the president of the Allahabad University Students' Union and for one year I will talk to you as the president only.

In Allahabad University, girls did not even pass through the union office. But, after the elections, girls have started coming to the union office. They bring their issues. Sometimes, they come demanding answers and for protests too.

Except me, the entire union comprised of ABVP and they thought that since a girl has been elected as the president it will be easier for them to carry on with their agenda. On November 19, 2015, 4 members of the ABVP invited Yogi Adityanath, who is currently the chief minister of UP, for the inauguration of the union. I wasn't asked. The Constitution of our university says that no event can be organised without the president's consent and without a decision taken by the president. The question was not whether I was asked or not; the question was that the need to ask a female president was not even considered.

First, without my consent you cannot overrule me, you have to talk to me. Second, there is no room for communal space in our university.

We sat on a hunger strike and the administration did not allow Yogi Adityanath to enter Allahabad, let alone enter Allahabad University. Our protest went on for long – all the progressive forces of Allahabad came together for the protest and we went back after the protest. But, on that night, we were attacked by several goons in which the university administration's proctor and registrar were involved. My friends and I got fractures on our hands.

After this episode, the university started serving me one notice after another notice. They questioned me on why I protested. I lodged an FIR against the registrar and proctor who were involved and against many members of the ABVP. That FIR is still lying in the police station but no action has been taken on it. After this, a committee was formed to cancel my admission and the vice-chancellor said that we will check whether your election process was fair or not, weather your election was wrong or not.

Many such committees were formed, around 5 to 7, one, to check my election process, another, to check my PhD admission. I was almost on the verge of being thrown out of the university. However, on March 8, which is International Women's Day, the Congress, Samajwadi Party, CPI and CPI(M) leaders raised the question in Parliament and my suspension was stopped.

There were many incidents like this and we had confrontations, offline and online,

with the VC in the university. We are simultaneously fighting with the BJP and its students' wing, the ABVP, while fighting with the administration and the VC. The VC did not have a Sanghi mindset, but he has become one now. That is why there is difficulty in raising voices of protest in the university. If you protest, then, your admission will be cancelled.

This issue is not only limited to student leaders. When the university administration takes such actions against students, then, it is a threat for the other students – that, if you protest, you will face the same consequences. So, under a very well-planned plot, democratic spaces inside the university is being curbed. Students are threatened that if you want to risk your education and still choose to protest, then you will have to face the consequences.

This is a very dangerous time. However, one positive thing has happened across the university and across the region. A strong unity has been formed between students and student leaders, whether it is in Hyderabad University, DU, JNU, Lucknow, BHU or Allahabad. Today, when Rohith Vemula's issue happens in Hyderabad, it is not only Hyderabad that fights but Allahabad, Lucknow, JNU, DU – everyone fights together. Likewise, when something happens in BHU, then, not only BHU, but all the students, people of progressive mindset, come together to fight collectively. This unity needs to be taken forward.



Fahad Ahmed, former president, Tata Institute of Social Sciences Students' Union, Mumbai

'Those who think that this is not an unannounced emergency, they should ask questions to the government just once, they should try to fight for their fundamental rights. Then they will realise that this is an unannounced emergency'

This is a platform from where we can raise our voices for our fundamental rights with the confidence that no one will throw a shoe from the crowd. We can speak with courage to raise questions about our government and educational authorities. The truth is, we are going through an unannounced emergency. This emergency gives only the people in power the freedom to talk or assault anybody. Those who think that this is not an unannounced emergency, they should ask questions to the government just once; they should try to fight for their fundamental rights. Then they will realise that this is an unannounced emergency.

The unannounced emergency in our campus began on February, 21, 2018 when we raised our voice in the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. From then, until now, it has been a long journey that has made us realise that if you raise any question against the authorities, if you raise any question on the country's policy-makers, then you will receive notices/court orders, you will be mistreated in every way and you will have to bear with it all.

On February 21, 2018, as the general secretary of the students' union, I organised a protest on how educational facilities can reach the SC, ST, OBC population who have been deprived of education for thousands of years. TISS, which is a fully public-funded university, has a fee of Rs 76,000 per semester. Not per year -Rs 76,000 *per semester*. Thereby, we are asking the question: if the fees of a public-funded university will be Rs 76,000 per semester, then, how will students from the marginalised sections, whose father's income is Rs 20,000 annually, continue with their higher education?

So what happened, when we started asking these questions?

TISS is a democratic space. We have always raised questions regardless of the government. However, since this government has come, they have found a different way to seize all the democratic spaces.

The first thing they did was to decrease our non-salary maintenance grant. In 2011, we got Rs 15 crore as non-salary maintenance grant, whereas, now, in 2017, we got Rs 6.45 crore as non-salary

maintenance grant. When I met Union HRD Minister Prakash Javdekar and told him about this development, he started shouting at me. It is with a heavy heart I am saying that the country's education minister says that he cannot do anything. He refuses to take responsibility. I feel very bad about this.

I understand how difficult it is to explain empirical data to such people, but I still tried to show it to him. He just waved them off, threw away the papers, and did not even receive the letter which we were supposed to give him. So, this is a kind of democracy in which we are living.

It is also sad that even our teachers didn't support us when we raised our voice, like a friend from the Central University of Haryana mentioned in her testimony. Whenever I try to call some teacher, they say that your call is getting delayed, that is why they cannot talk to you. When it is an emergency situation, I tell them that it's for your work; then they call over WhatsApp thinking the call might not get taped.

Hence, this kind of emergency is going on. I want to repeat to all the people of the country, if you are of the opinion that this is not an emergency, just once, just for once, try raising your voice against the government, and not just the government, raise your voice for your fundamental rights - then you will realise it that day.

When we started our struggle, the institute declared that "your fight is against the institute". They were

continuously targeting me and the students of TISS saying that you are fringe elements, you are trying to malign the image of TISS. I am asking them that if we are fringe elements, we are fighting for the marginalised sections of the society. If you call us fringe elements, then, it's a badge of honour for every student of TISS. We will keep on fighting for the issues of education, we will keep on asking questions to the current government, even if they try to clampdown on all dissent.

Regarding autonomy, let's see it from the perspective of social justice. They are saying that now the institutes have autonomy to increase the fees. So, when we go to them, whichever government, and say that our fees have been increased, they will just wash their hands off saying that it has been hiked by the institute so we cannot do anything about it. So we have to look at it from the social justice perspective.

We will have to understand that we need to unite, because I believe that in India, SC, ST, OBC, minorities and liberals constitute 85% of the population. Let us come together irrespective of the ideological differences we have. This emergency cannot stop us from fighting the fascist forces - be it Ambedkarites, Leftist organisations, students or teachers - whoever believes that we need to save our country. Let us come together and fight against all these forces, not only the current government, but all those forces who are trying to snatch away our fundamental human rights. ★★

Ajmal Khan, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

'I have books in Urdu in my cupboard. I don't know if there is any banned literature in Urdu. I may be targeted for being a Muslim'

Thank you very much for inviting me here. I want to make it clear that our protest is not an isolated protest within the university. It's about larger manifestations and responses of the students' community to changes that they are facing. In Mumbai, I was involved in forming the Joint Action Committee for Social Justice along with Prakash Ambedkar which blocked the city on February 2, 2017, demanding justice for Rohith Vemula.

We understand the 'crackdown on dissent' in two ways. One is in the institutional way - using police, institutional processes and State repression. Second is by using political forces like ABVP and the RSS and other politically motivated groups who are allied with Right-wing ideologies supported by the current government. I would like to mention a few examples.

We were doing a campaign. A rally was conducted in Mumbai in February 2017. We were mostly doing campaigns within the Dalit *bastis* in the wake of Rohith Vemula's death. During a small rally, inside Dharavi, which has a big Dalit population, we were marching on, when we were attacked. Some of us were beaten up by RSS goons who came from the front when we reached a congested lane. Later, we came to know that these were local RSS people who had planned the attack.

However, we had good strength and we protested on the spot. We stopped all vehicles moving in the city, went to the police station and demanded that a case under the SC/ST Atrocities Act should be filed against these goons. I was hit on the forehead and taken to Sion Hospital. The local activists had the names and other details of the local RSS cadre. After giving the information, we started our protest in front of the police station at Dharavi at around 9pm and by 2am we were successfully able to register all the cases under the SC/ST Atrocities Act, which was a tremendous success, given the current circumstances.

Last year in December, when I was coming back to TISS, I was interrogated at the main gate by the security staff. They said that they have to check my room as they have got 'secret information' from the Intelligence Bureau that I had gone to conduct a programme on Kashmir. I think this was the same day an attack had happened in Kashmir and Kashmir was in the news.

Normally, I don't lock my room because my other roommates close the room. Unfortunately, my room was not locked when the security staff came into my room. Half of my cupboard is filled with books of Ambedkar and Marx. Seeing these books they did not do anything.

They know that in Maharashtra, Ambedkar is very powerful person! They can't target us, in that sense.

I have books in Urdu in my cupboard. I don't know if there is any banned literature in Urdu. I may be targeted for

being a Muslim. I don't know Urdu, because I am from Kerala. Hence, this kind of narrative can be created against me by saying that I am doing it to degrade the so-called reputation of TISS.



Shraman Guha, Jadavpur University, Kolkata

'In the absence of any credible opposition, Jadavpur University, perhaps, has become a very credible axis, a very credible pole, where people can believe that this is the pole which can take the attack against the State and yet not get co-opted by any other narrative'

I will be speaking about certain events that will perhaps track the trajectory of the crackdown on Jadavpur University and the resistance movements. The first crackdown, legally and institutionally, came in 2011, after the Left Front government was defeated. The Left Front was the ruling party before the Trinamool Congress (TMC) came in. It had a very different way of operating in the universities and very different ways of clamping down upon dissent. I won't go into that today.

In 2012, the TMC government came into power. The first thing they did was that it abolished the university statute. It effectively effaced students' representation from every executive council in Jadavpur University and in all the universities across the state.

In 2014, there was a massive police crackdown on students. Not only the police, many people who in no way can

be associated with the police or any state authority, Trinamool goons, came into the campus and beat up the students.

From 2012 onwards, there has been a massive presence of IB and special branch officials monitoring students' activities in Jadavpur University. From 2014, it has been trying to malign the students, bring shame upon the students. It has not been successful in doing so but there has been a clampdown on those showing solidarity with the students of Jadavpur University.

The major clampdown has been on students in Jadavpur University, and in various public universities across the state. Especially against students associated with the *hokkolorob* movement who tried to stand in solidarity with Jadavpur University students.

From 2016 onwards, the RSS started entering the Jadavpur University, using the 'anti-national' slogan. There have

been very serious attacks in the university which has targeted the student community as a whole. There have been attacks led by the present MP, Rupa Ganguly, against the students. She picketed the university with a few thousand men and said that the university will be shut down from tomorrow if it does not conform to the RSS ideals of nationalism.

Presently, what is happening in Jadavpur University and in West Bengal is that the state government wants to abolish all students' unions in all the universities of

the state. This is very serious. There have been movements going on across the state against this.

What is inspiring is that despite these attacks, the student community, especially in Jadavpur University, has emerged as a very dependable axis of protest in the state. In the absence of any credible opposition, Jadavpur University, perhaps, has become a very credible axis, a very credible pole, where people can believe that this is the pole which can take the attack against the State and yet not get co-opted by any other narrative. ★★

Structural Marginalisation: Caste

Prof Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, Author and Director, Centre for Social Exclusion and Inclusion Policy, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad

'I say that till Ambani's children, Adani's children, the priests' children, are not tilling the land, are not sweeping roads, till then, reservations will be there'

In my opinion, higher education in India falls under three ideological categories. The first is the broad liberal spectrum having broad roots in Dr BR Ambedkar's thought as well as liberal thought – Navayana, constitutionalism, etc, whatever is the practice that has emerged. The second is the communist stream having some interface with liberalism. However, the communist mode of higher education in Bengal was worse than the liberal one in rest of the states. They have not implemented the SC, ST, or OBC reservations in Bengal and I have not come across even a single SC, ST, or OBC intellectual from Bengal – even after 34 years of their rule.

The third is called the radical Hindu higher education. This radical Hinduism is different from Gandhian Hinduism. Radical Hinduism here is not just Hindutva or communalism. Radical Hinduism is a characteristic akin to

radical Christianity in the pre-Protestant era, and radical Islam, such as in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and now Pakistan. Radical Hinduism, and Hinduism *per se*, is a major problem for us.

All the Shudras, including Justice BG Kolse Patil and me, are born from the feet, according to radical Hinduism, and not from the head of God. According to this theory, the 'Atishudras' – that is, the Dalits – are not born. Historically, then, we are not supposed to be literates.

Today, there is a radical Hindu party ruling under an OBC, but, let us not forget that Narendra Modi is not a Shudra OBC but a Baniya OBC, a business OBC; selling tea is also a business. It is not food production. It is not tilling land, rearing cattle or making pots.

In its internal structure, radical Hinduism has an ideology that Shudras, including the non-reserved ones, OBC, Dalits, and

tribals, should not be in higher education. They cannot allow us even basic school education – literacy, Sanskrit, anything. To them, highly educated university intellectuals emerging from the so-called ‘meritless’ reserved classes are the biggest problem.

Ambedkar created a problem having acquired a PhD. They think these elements like Kancha Iliaah are able to write books like *'Why I am not a Hindu'* or *'Post-Hindu India'* because of the universities. So, they need to take the universities away from such elements.

Their view is that let these elements be illiterates and till the land, look after cattle – the cow. We have to take care of the cows and hand them over to the *sanyasis*. The *sanyasis* will not look after the cows, they will only protect the cow after we have taken care of the cow.

The SC and ST reservations had tremendous backlog and so did the OBC reservations that came in the states post-1980s and at the Centre from 2007. Post the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations under the UPA regime and by the time the 2014 elections were underway, the biggest expansion of the Dalit, OBC and adivasi people in higher education as well as the largest expansion of higher education institutions were taking place. This expansion was opposed by the core ideological BJP-RSS senators inside their ideological structures who did not agree with it, but had to go along with it anyway. The UPA had also proposed

reservations in the private sector, but the industry resisted it vehemently.

If 2014 has to be taken as the benchmark for the total number of SC, ST, and OBC presence in higher educational institutions, my estimation is that by the next election, in 2019, the presence will reduce by 10-15%. The drop-out rate is increasing.

Since it is a caste society, every Left-liberal upper caste intellectuals, even those who now say that *burqa* or *topi* are communal symbols, would never characterise *janeyu* (the sacred thread of the Brahmins) as a communal symbol. They will simply remove it for the public.

The backlog positions could all have been filled by 1940 in all universities, but they did not do it. All these secular Left intellectuals sitting on the selection panels said that every SC, ST, or OBC with a PhD is not eligible, even from ‘great’ universities like JNU or Delhi University, let alone a ‘bad’ university like Osmania, which produced me, from where the PhD itself is not recognised.

They say we are ‘anti-national’. I am a shepherd. A shepherd is known as a person with an acute level of madness. But I have a much bigger madness. I say that all these selection committees are ‘anti-national’. They find it unsuitable to provide education to any land-tiller, cattle-rearing person, pot-maker, shoemaker – the ones who make this nation. They look for an Oxford PhD, a Harvard PhD, a Cambridge PhD, which, according to them, are ‘nationalist PhDs’.

I say these selection committees are anti-national because they are not into production. They are not tilling land, they are not looking after cattle, not making shoes or pots, they are not fishermen. Once those who do these productive occupations become graduates and post-graduates, by their sheer number, they will occupy every inch in the society within 20 years.

After the Modi government came to power they have carefully chosen various 'Dronacharyas' to head the institutions. These Dronacharyas do not want the SC, ST, or OBC to learn and if that happens then the SC, ST, or OBC would need to have their thumbs cut. That is what all the vice-chancellors today are doing.

There was a Dalit UGC chairman who has done so much. Do we see any Dalit in any one of the decision-making bodies in India? There is no single OBC president, no OBC vice-president, in the central government, or, as a vice-chancellor; they were not there even under the Congress regime. This is because, according to the dominant perception, apparently, OBC lack a brain.

At least under the Congress we were protected and we were hopeful. Under the current regime, there is 'de-educationalisation' of the Shudras, Dalits and adivasis. This is because that is what their '*shastras*' tell them. Even under Atal Behari Vajpayee, the situation was slightly better, since he led a coalition government, and their HRD minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, was only changing

the syllabus. Now, they are changing everything because they are in full power.

Let me speak of the BJP and not the RSS, as the BJP is more known to the voter. The BJP thinks that the quantity of higher education has to be brought down, leave alone quality. No single SC/ST graduate, post-graduate, or PhD has merit, according to them. I have not seen a single BJP intellectual who knows something about the world or this nation. They know only what Namo said, what Kautaliya said, and what '*Bhagwad Gita*' said, and that is their social sciences. The biggest damage the BJP is doing is that it is subtly abolishing social sciences and introducing Hindu theology, like the old Oxford or Cambridge University. As a result, today, all research centres are being 'de-financed'. Almost 38 'Ambedkar social exclusion and social inclusion research centres' are about to be closed. There has been a restructuring of institutions.

Earlier, planning was in favour of SC, ST, or OBC. Under the Planning Commission, if a programme was introduced, it continued for five years and in the next plan it got some money in some scale. The BJP has 'de-planned' the economy and removed the SC/ST and OBC plan budget; they can introduce a SC/ST budget and stop it in one year. Under the planned scheme we had the judicial right to go to court, but, under the current dispensation, we do not have the judicial right.

Abolishing the Planning Commission has been the biggest threat to the SC, ST, or OBC. They call this new scheme the Niti Aayog. I call it the 'Abhiniti Aayog' as there is no 'Niti' in their philosophy. If there is 'Niti' then there cannot be caste. This 'Abhiniti Aayog' cannot plan for us. It can only plan for the Brahmins, the Baniyas, the Jains, and others. They plan how to demonetise, how to increase the economy of the Ambanis, Adanis, Reliance, and, then, how to transfer money to America along with Nirav Modi. There are a number of Modis today transferring money. So, these are their schemes and they call us 'anti-national'.

Prof TK Ommen said the current symbol of nationalism is putting tanks in the university and dead soldiers' photos in the university. I ask, is there a Brahman regiment in India to protect it in any battle? There is an Ahir regiment, a Jat regiment, a Gorkha regiment, a Mahar regiment. Which national leader's father was a soldier except Ambedkar's? Was Savarkar's father a soldier?

No RSS OBC activist can become a soldier because they are all vegetarians. Vegetarianism is another form of 'nationalism'. All Shudra OBC and Dalits are 'meatarian' and some of us are 'beefarian'. Few Brahmins are 'fisherians' and 'meatarians' in the east, but none are at the border of China, or of Pakistan. Who are the ones at the border then?

If you ask the soldiers stationed at JNU their caste background, you will notice that they are Dalits, OBC and tribals. So,

are these very SC, ST, and OBC soldiers 'anti-national' because they are fighting on the Pakistan border?

Muslims eat beef, tribals eat beef, OBC eat beef, and they think we are all 'anti-national'. How would we fight China without eating beef?

They have their 'nationalist games' like yoga! The SC, ST, or OBC do not believe in sitting games. We believe in running games - high-jump, long-jump, etc. They want the army person to sit and do yoga on the border and get killed by the Chinese soldier!

We should have a massive rally in Delhi together with all the university teachers, students and research scholars, and claim that the country belongs to the ones with whose sweat and blood the country has been made - the SC, ST, or OBC. If they have to talk about nationalism, then they should till the land. No Brahmin or Baniya is tilling land. They have no business teaching us about nationalism.

Like the Arab Spring, there has been a Dalit Spring - the April 2, 2018 national protest. We will witness an OBC Spring too very soon, once their reservations are under threat.

The ruling regime is totally against reservations. On social media you can notice them talking against reservations, calling us meritless, and asking: reservations for how long? I say that till Ambani's children, Adani's children, the priests' children, are not tilling the land, are not sweeping roads, till then, reservations will be there.

Indian Campuses Under Siege

These are our educational institutions and quality does not come easily, quantity is very important. Millions of SC, ST, or OBC have to be in universities and they should get their PhDs. If the selection committees reject the SC, ST, or OBC, then the selection committees ought to be declared 'anti-national'. Once an SC, ST, or OBC candidate goes for an interview, he/she must get the job.

I know that not even one ABVP student in history has attended a class. They never attend classes, never organise seminars on the economy, labour or untouchability. They just celebrate festivals on campus like the Ganapati festival, Ram Navami, etc.

SC/ST education is about improving science and technology in agriculture, improving production, teaching dignity of labour, inequality. A day will come

when the OBC Spring will join the Dalit Spring and the Adivasi Spring, and the Muslims and Christians will have to join us. We have spoken for Muslims and Christians for a long time, but they have not come in support of us.

If they drive out Muslims from this country, the Muslims have 56 countries to go to that are Muslim, the Christians have 107 countries to go to that are Christian. Kancha Ilaiah and BG Kolse Patil have no other country. If we are driven out we have nowhere to go as there is no OBC outside anywhere. There are no tribals outside like in India, there are no Dalits anywhere. When the Muslims and Christians fight for us, then the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, Jamaat-e-Islami, AIMIM, everybody will be safer, and we will too, at least, be safe. ★★

Abhay Flavian Xaxa, National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights

'A sad kind of 'intellectual lynching' is happening to ST, SC and OBC students'

Iwould like to thank the organisers for inviting me to submit my statement. I will deposit on the critical issue of structural marginalisation related to caste. Coming from an adivasi background, especially, this is a big opportunity for me to put forward the issue of caste discrimination in higher education.

How do we understand the structural marginalisation which is being felt by the larger SC, ST, or OBC in avenues of higher education today?

Working on the issues of discrimination in higher education in the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), we feel that although there are ample cases of 'physical lynching' in the last two years under the current BJP-led regime, in higher education, a sad kind of 'intellectual lynching' is happening to ST, SC and OBC students. I would like to focus on how 'intellectual lynching' is happening and who are the major actors behind this.

In my view, this is happening in three ways. First is physical discrimination which has been very traditional and it has become an old story; and, yet, we listen to students facing it every day. The other two on which I would be focusing, includes, fiscal discrimination and barriers put up against the policies meant for the educational development of ST, SC and OBC students.

For fiscal discrimination to happen, there are certain actors who are behind this. We know the banking structure in this country is collapsing and soon we can see the economic meltdown. When the farmers' loan, which is one of the biggest credit programmes of the banks, collapsed, they started looking for the American model. In the US, after the housing loans, the second biggest source of income for the banks is educational loans. Based on the American model, in 2014, the Indian Banking Association (IBA) came out with a report. With the arrival of the new government, this report was presented to the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in Delhi.

They projected the data that only 6% of SC students, 1% of ST students and a little bit more of OBC students are availing banking loans for their higher education because they are getting scholarships from the government. Therefore, this provision is undermining their market. Till the time these scholarships are being provided, the banking sector won't be able to recover.

Hence, they gave a plan on how to formulate certain government policies according to which SC, ST or OBC students will come in more numbers to take up bank loans for engineering, medical and other professional studies. In June, 2017, the Bihar government issued a notice regarding not awarding scholarships to Dalit and adivasi students where the fees is beyond Rs 15,000 per year. These students are expected to take the student credit cards. Through these credit cards they can pay the fees – but they will have to repay it back after finishing the courses.

At the same time, there is the rise of private institutions. I will call it the 'Lovely Professional University Model'. These private universities started with a lot of profit models, but they soon saw that profit can be extracted from SC, ST or OBC students. To achieve this, in Punjab, they sent out agents to far off places with a sizeable Dalit population and straight-away started giving admissions. These students were promised exemption from all kinds of fee payment for the professional courses. Thus, the private universities will be getting the fees amount directly from the government.

This model quickly picked up in the south, especially in Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, and Andhra Pradesh, and also in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, where they started hiring agents. They would get a number of SC, ST or OBC students who will give their original caste/ tribe certificates. They

will then take them to the universities and thereby there will be some kind of direct connection with the ministries from where they can get the fees. This is how the professional universities and the private universities started making profit. Therefore, the banks and private universities are the two great villains in the present era of the education system.

The SC, ST students are becoming targets in the given education system because there is a history behind it. The history is of the post-matric scholarship, which is a national scholarship started in 1944 by Babasaheb Ambedkar. This is the biggest scholarship in the world, running uninterrupted since 1944, in terms of making higher education available to SC, ST, OBC and minority students. This scholarship's fund covers the tuition fees, maintenance fees, expenses on books, educational tour for students from Class 12th to MA. Last year, 56 lakh Dalit students and 17 lakh ST students applied for this scholarship.

When we calculated the total number of students who applied for this scholarship (including SC, ST and OBC students), the figure goes beyond 1 crore. This scholarship has been instrumental for many of us – Dalit, adivasi and OBC students – to pursue higher education.

To retain the objective of this scholarship, we have been filing RTIs and communicating with the Union Ministry of Social Justice, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, and the Ministry of Minority Affairs, which run this scholarship. There

is a constant attempt by the banking sector and private universities to target this scholarship – one of the oldest and national level scholarship. This government, with its casteist mentality in higher education, formed a nexus and is adamant on denial of the scholarship to the students. Indeed, they 'made up' some scams in Maharashtra, Punjab, UP and Bihar, so as to block this scholarship.

The government is giving the rational that there is so much corruption in the scholarship scheme that they are re-thinking and re-designing it! In this regard, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs went to the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) and said that they want to evaluate this scholarship scheme. That is, they were expecting that there will be some adverse remarks on the scholarship scheme, especially the alleged scams which were coming up, so that they can get a reason to stop this scholarship. Due to this, for the past two years, more than 56 lakh Dalit students have been denied this scholarship.

According to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, as stated in the Rajya Sabha, in the last two years, the amount of scholarship dues was Rs 8,224 crore. Off the record, the ministry is asking: Can you help us? This is because even the ministry feels that they are not able to get this money from the Narendra Modi government. Can you put up a hand to pressurise the government so that the Union Finance Ministry can release this amount? The ministry has said on record that they have requested the Finance

Ministry to release the scholarship money since the last two years, but the Finance Ministry has neither responded nor released the scholarship money.

Recently, when the Dalit issue was heating up, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley responded that they are planning to release this money before the elections (reported by CNN-IBN). While he is holding on to the scholarships of 56 lakh Dalit and adivasi students, to gain electoral benefits, we have reports of thousands of students dropping out from their engineering and medical courses. In Bihar, a student dropped out from the MBBS course and is working now as a labourer in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREGA) scheme. Indeed, this is the kind of 'intellectual lynching' that is going on against Dalit and adivasi students.

In another instance, in NCDHR, we have been getting calls from a private university in Puducherry where 150 tribal students have been admitted. They are

not being allowed to write exams because there money has not arrived from the central government.

Under the new directive on reservation for faculties, recently, in the Indira Gandhi Tribal National University at Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh, they advertised 52 positions for professor, assistant professor and associate professor. Not a single post has been given to ST and SC candidates. This means zero recruitment of SC and ST candidates under the new directives on reservation for the faculty.

If this situation continues, then, by next year, we won't have access to the scholarship started by Dr BR Ambedkar, or, in the open universities, which have been earned through protracted, hard struggles, and mobilisation on the ground. I consider that these cases of 'intellectual lynching' are not isolated. Instead, these issues of corruption and denial of admission to students is part of a bigger design of structural discrimination based on caste. ★★

Ajay Kumar, former student, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow and Fellow, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla

'My father enlisted my name in the village school, Panditji said – Since you are a Dalit you cannot study even if your forefathers come back on earth.'

I am not a student of Ambedkar University anymore. I am now a part of IIAS, Shimla. But, before that, I was associated with Ambedkar University, Lucknow, since the time I came in 2009. Prof. Kancha Ilaiah was speaking a while ago about identity and what is this institution. People from Uttar Pradesh might know what our identity is when we go to a university from villages or small towns. I still remember what I was told when I was five-year-old and my father admitted me in a school in the village. The Panditji said, "I know your father, your grandfather and great, great, great, grandfather." My father enlisted my name in the village school, Panditji said, "Since you are a Dalit you cannot study even if your forefathers come back on earth."

We might have seen our grandfather, someone might have seen their great grandfather but he was talking about our great, great, great, grandfather. Here, the main point is that the identity of a Dalit's past, present and future, all three, were hidden in this statement. Imagine: this is the identity with which we go to colleges and universities and this is what happens to us there.

Why is Ambedkar University important for this country's deprived communities and students? To understand this, we need to explore its history. This university was established in 1996 and it is the first university in the country to have 50% seats reserved for SC, ST in admission. So, why are there so many clashes in Ambedkar University? The clashes have been happening since the time it was established, regarding the name of the university when it was named Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, then, regarding reservation policy, and all of this is going on because a discourse of Dalit knowledge was being formed in north India.

The university offers Master's, MPhil, and PhD courses. It is natural that the students who will enroll into the Master's programme will go on to do PhD. Since 50% of the seats are reserved for SC and ST students, these students are being provided with fellowships. Some get UGC/RGNF (Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship) for SC students; some get UGC/JRF. This is the central problem.

There are no reservations in faculty recruitment. There are numerous problems in the university arising due to

the SC and ST reservation. The administration knows that they cannot do anything to remove the reservation system. Hence, they make policies that gradually force such students to drop out. The examinations are conducted in English language, including the entrance exam. The number of students appearing for the entrance exam is low, so the seats are not getting filled. They make an excuse that the reservation policy exists but the students are not coming. When there is an annual or semester examination, the paper has to be written in English. Now, where do the students come to Lucknow in north India?

These students come from small towns and districts of UP. Some come from Odhisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and the north-eastern states. Kanhiaya Kumar has asked, "What is being taught in colleges and universities?" Do you think that the medium of instruction would be English in some college in Hardoi, Unnao, Sitapur, Bahraich or the backward district of Sonbhadra in UP? They come to do MA or MSc, post-graduate programmes, after passing their under-graduate exams. So, do you think they can study in English?

The issue is that of giving less marks in papers during evaluation in exams because of the brand of caste. The other thing which they have done since the last

four years is transparent. We have our vice-chancellor, everyone here might know, I will take his name; there have been a lot of protest in the university against his anti-student policies, basically anti-SC/ST students. The VC's name is Prof Ranbir Chander Sobi.

We are deeply hurt with all the drama that he has enacted with the student community. He came during the Congress regime and now it is the NDA regime; you have these individuals who keep changing their homes according to the regime in power. After the change of regime in 2014, this person appointed by the Congress government, has now invited Dr Krishn Gopal, RSS pracharak, to speak about Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. The university has invited a RSS leader to try establish a relation between Dr. Ambedkar and the RSS.

The university could have become a good campus in north India but they did not let it happen. The RSS has focused its vicious eyes on the university. They have no problem with other universities, but since there is 50% reservation in the university for the SC/ST students, methods are devised to dilute it, weaken it and have clashes. The clashes continue between Left students and ABVP goons, even while casteist comments are routinely passed.

★ ★

Anonymous student, West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata

'I have inherently come to believe this through my experience that your class is written on your face and there is no way one can come out of it. You are judged according to the kind of dress you wear, and the kind of English you speak'

I am a law student from the West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences (NUJS), Kolkata. I got admitted in the third best national law school of India after clearing the common law admission test (CLAT), the entrance test which we are supposed to take after 10+2 for admission to National Law Universities in India. My testimony is about two things: one is scholarship and the other is caste discrimination that I have faced very rampantly in the past five years at the national law school. Although we have reservation, which seems like a fair system that is based on natural justice and ensuring equal opportunities, I am the only Dalit girl in my batch and that created a lot of subtle, implicit and explicit discrimination. I was very delusional in the first 3-4 years in the national law school and I was right in calling it discrimination. There was a dilemma about whether I should move politically or should I take a stronger stance about it. I agree that the adivasi, queer and Dalit students, who have a lot of intersectional marginal identities, have faced very rampant forms of structural discrimination over the years when we are stuck in the national law schools.

There is a scholarship which every SC, ST and OBC student could avail from 1st year to 5th year till 2013. However, post-2013, the new government that came to power changed the rules and scholarship is being awarded to the top five students among the SC/ST students only. The top students are those who have the social and economic capital to survive and do well in a national law school as the atmosphere is very elite. I have inherently come to believe this through my experience that your class is written on your face and there is no way one can come out of it. You are judged according to the kind of dress you wear, and the kind of English you speak.

I am told that although I am a Dalit, I have social capital. However, here, we are not really climbing up the ladder. To remove the stigma, I still have to fight it every day. I still have the trauma of being called a 'Dalit slut' and things like that by the boys of the boys' hostel when I go to the mess which is below the boys' hostel, because I started challenging them slowly from my 2nd year. This behaviour is not limited to the student body, but it is prevalent among a section of the teachers also, and they make remarks like if you knew that

you are BPL (Below Poverty Line) and you wouldn't be able to secure scholarship, so why didn't you just drop-out, why did you have the guts to still study here. These are the comments that my teachers and my vice-chancellor have been making for the past 5 years.

For obtaining the scholarship, all our documents were supposed to be uploaded online. Now there were some technical glitches there, the NSP portal never functioned. I am from Delhi, but my other friends, who were from rural areas, were not able to upload the documents and there were other regulations like the size has to be limited to 100KB which required some special software which we have to buy. There were other technical regulations as well. This continued for about three years and the ministry of social justice was not helpful either. Our university was clueless about it throughout and there was no designated officer to handle such cases.

My scholarship has been delayed for four years now and it is so tough to survive in a city which is not your home. Every day in NUJS, we need to spend at least Rs 100 or so on daily expenses either for stationary, clothing and food or even things like my own farewell. I refused to pay Rs 2000 for my own farewell and I was refused entry after which I ultimately had to pay. I was doing odd jobs in Kolkata to sustain myself as I was not getting my scholarship. So, I did not have 70% attendance and now they are debarring me and giving me a year back.

My scholarship will not cover my year back. I will be forced to drop-out and will not get a job either. And there is no chance of coming back to my family also. There is a Undergraduate Council in my college which repeatedly denied a hearing to me with my vice-chancellor saying that they don't cover basic expenses as per administrative rules, or, something like that, and that they don't have grounds for psychiatric rules, financial rules or even humanitarian grounds and the only ground they would consider would be for students going for more courses or something like that which is very law specific. That is the way they force us to drop-out from these elite universities and they won't even listen to us.

Our vice-chancellor has refused to meet me for the past 5 years and now in my 5th year we have made him resign forcefully because there were a lot of financial irregularities. But the issues of sexism and casteism are still not being addressed because the concerns of the upper caste, upper class, elite students, would always be issues, like the curfew timings, and the bad mess food. However, their concern would never be the fee hike or the general atmosphere that prevails in such universities.

Caste and capitalism thrive on such inherited inequalities in such national law schools. If you challenge them you get a backlash from everyone, be it the administration, or the students. You will be boycotted and that results in your voice being marginalised. When you operate from the fringe of the society, it

becomes very difficult for you to make them realise that it is a very valid and legitimate cause. Even though my cause is just limited to one aspect of scholarship, my every day experience reeks of sexism and casteism.

Every law school has to make a University Review Commission (URC) every 5 years which analyses the functioning of the college, teachers and vice-chancellor. Our VC has never mentioned this. Then we forced him to set it up in 2017. The URC came out with the report and he buried the report for one year until our union fought for it repeatedly and then it came out. That report basically says that this is the place where social justice is a farce, the number of minority students are declining, and gender issues is at its worst. We couldn't get access to the URC report and it became very difficult for me to proceed without my scholarship. It was only in the last year. I read this and I have

annexed it in my written submission and I have highlighted some portions. This is not only my issue. I am the only Dalit girl in my batch. But there are my juniors whose testimonies I have annexed as well in my written submission.

They couldn't come because from tomorrow the end-semester exams are starting. I have been debarred from the university, but they are giving the exam. There are 16 testimonies attached. There was very implicit hostility, it was clearly very unstable and they were sort of wanting to stop me. Now on April 14, the first time in the history of NUJS, we will be celebrating the Dalit history month, and we will install a photo of Babasaheb Ambedkar. There is a lot of hostility, as lot of other general category students have been sending a lot of mails. I need to see what happens – whether I will get my scholarship and whether I can still continue speaking in such a hostile environment.

★★

Aarti, Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha, Maharashtra

'We talk of personal is political which we try to bring into our struggles'

Due to the big movements led by Sabitribai Phule, Jyotirao Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar, many ST, SC, OBC communities, women and minorities, with protracted struggles and hard work, have been able to come to the universities. I remember that Dr Ambedkar wrote in the *Annihilation of Caste* that Dalits do not have right to food, education, proper clothing, and even the right to do politics. We, the ST, SC, OBC communities, the Dalits and women, have not received our constitutional rights even after independence.

In April 2015, our vice-chancellor met the Union MHRD minister, Smriti Irani. She said that they spend Rs 4 lakh per student in our university and what does it mean to spend that much money in a university where liberal policies, inter/multi-disciplinary subjects are taught like women's studies, non-violence studies, tribal studies, Ambedkar studies, social work, etc.

I am a student of Gender Studies, our course starts with our struggle; we talk of personal is political which we try to bring into our struggles. Ours is a Hindi university which was well-funded among the 1200 universities in India. But, in 2015, our university funds were cut by 47%. A newly appointed teacher suggested fee hike in the university. We did the first

anti-fee-hike movement in India in April 2015.

Politics in our university started from the establishment. Our Hindi University is in a non-Hindi belt and that too in the rural sector of Wardha. We are located near Nagpur which is the headquarters of RSS. We have witnessed the immense force of the Dalit movements and women's movements, and we have been inspired by them. My four guides have changed. I started receiving 'scolding' from the fourth guide; so I got a call from a fifth guide.

I spent 7 years in the university and five years doing my research for PhD. Now, I need to submit my thesis. However, I felt that it is important for me to come here to talk about our struggle. We feel that it should be brought under the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act.

So why did we start the anti-fee hike movement?

The cost per student comes to Rs 4 lakh because in our university we have more faculty and non-teaching staff. The ratio is three teachers for one student. I have not paid Rs 6 lakh as fees. We sat in protest for three days in extreme heat conditions in the month of April asking whether the increase in expenses warrants an increase in our fee structure.

We said that the fee hike should not be done on the basis of growing costs of the last 6 months. The SC, ST, OBC communities and women are the major population in this university. We cannot pursue our interests. I wanted to become a pilot and I am instead a scholar due to the Brahmanical structure that did not allow me to pursue my interests. I did not know what my abilities were because I have not even seen a plane. Most of the students come from this category.

We supported FTII and the documentary '*Muzzafarnagar Baaki Hai*'. The way Rohith Vemula was fighting, we too were fighting here. When we were returning from collecting funds for the 'Occupy UGC' march, a public meeting was organised where we were asked from where are we coming from?

When it comes to government policies, our university implements them immediately. The ABVP was initiated by the head of the mass communication department and dean. Members of Bajrang Dal started joining ABVP. You can imagine, we were raising our voices in a hostile environment. When I protested against them, I was attacked and abused. There are laws for sexual harassment and atrocities, but when I complained against the harassment, they were simply released with a warning. When I complained to Dr Supriya Pathak, who is head of the Women's Studies Department, I only faced injustice.

Dr Pathak hurled allegations that I entered a seminar hall without permission. Actually, I raised my points with the permission of the speaker. For that incident, I received a show cause notice from the university. My fellowship was stopped and for the past two years I am facing continuous financial hurdles. On March 18, 2017, when we decided to hold a seminar on '*Pratirodh ki Rajniti*', the VC told us that you cannot do it in an educational institution as it will affect the schedule.

Regarding my case, no action was taken. However, a committee was set up with 8 deans under the chairmanship of the VC with one ST and one OBC member. This was based on the complaint filed by Dr Pathak. An expert of the SC/ST Act recommended that a complaint should be filed against Dr Pathak under the SC/ST Act. It was also recommended that the matter must be reported to the national commission for SC and ST for speedy disposal of the case. This recommendation was given on September 9, 2017. I don't have any information about the decisions taken against Dr Pathak, whereas, other committee members were of the opinion that there should be a patch-up.

I sent 15 letters to the national commission, but there has been no action from the commission. This is the reality of the commission and it implies who actually misuses the SC/ST Act. ★★

Megha, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

'Students, whose family's annual income is Rs 20,000, you are asking them to pay Rs 31,000 for six months. Is this not discrimination?'

Jai Bhim Saathiyo! I am Megha, coming from a community which has been deprived of education since thousands of years. Presently, I am studying MA in Social Work in TISS, Mumbai. After graduation, there were a lot of questions in my mind before I took admission in TISS. I was thinking if my admission will answer the nagging questions of employment and discrimination that I have been facing. These were not resolved during my graduation. With all these questions in my mind, I joined a students' organisation.

While working for the organisation an incident took place which everyone knows – Rohith Vemula's suicide, an 'institutional murder'. The suicide inspired me to realise how important it is for us to seek higher education and the importance of education for us. Rohith has portrayed in his struggle how in higher education discrimination happens against Dalit and adivasi students. With this inspiration, I wanted to take admission in TISS.

However, the process of the admission was not quite simple. First, I had to fight in my home. I am the first girl from my family to pursue higher education. I am a first generation learner in my family.

I thought TISS is an institute which talks about social justice, social work and social issues, that it will provide me with the freedom and liberty to express my opinion. That it will allow me to raise my voice. However, this did not happen.

After joining the social work course, I realised that their pedagogy is very discriminative. They teach us social work, group work and case work. Under the group work, they teach us how to work with people. The group work takes place with our friends, but the question arises, who constitutes a group in the institute? From what I have experienced, the groups were formed on the basis of caste and class. The people who belong to the upper classes will have upper class friends. I have faced this. Most of the friends I have belong to my 'category'.

They teach us case work. They teach us ways to solve people's problems in case work. They take the charity approach. This is very problematic – the problem you are teaching about, you are not referring to them as rights, but charity. Thereafter, they teach that we should do field work because we will understand these issues better if we do field work. They send students to look at the life of the poor and adivasis in their field work. The students are asked to go to slums and see the way Dalits and Muslims are living.

They send students to villages to see the way adivasis are living. I became distant from the concept of 'social work' due to all this and got excluded from their culture.

The institute's pedagogy is problematic and even teachers discriminate. Teachers say that we don't care if you are sick or anything else, you have a deadline, and your assignment should be submitted on the given deadline. If you are in a hospital, take your laptop to the hospital and complete the assignment. In other instances, there are a lot of students in TISS who come from marginalised communities. Even after writing a good paper, they were marked failed in the subjects. And they say that they are talking about social justice.

A strike went on in TISS for 50 days. Our demand was to bring 'the teaching of social justice' into actual practice. The institute, which is talking about social justice, is also saying that SC, ST and OBC students should pay Rs 31,000 as fees per semester because the institute does not have the money to arrange food and lodging for students. That is why are asking, what kind of social justice are you talking about?

Students, whose family's annual income is Rs 20,000, you are asking them to pay Rs 31,000 for six months. Is this not discrimination?

Students are fighting for their coming generation by following what Babasaheb Ambedkar had said – 'educate, agitate, and organise'. I am a first generation student who is studying in my family and I want that all the upcoming generations should be able to study. This is the reason we are agitating, through education, in this institute.

I know that this is not just my struggle or of that of any other individual. This struggle is going on in all the educational institutions of India and in the rest of the world. We hope that all of us will come together and talk about social justice and that we should inculcate the beliefs of Babasaheb and Bhagat Singh in the institute.

This institute discriminates on the basis of caste and is so '*Manuwadi*' that they will simply ask you to not speak out. The teaching process and academic understanding is limited to writing papers and textbooks, instead of bringing it into practice – this has been the institute's attitude. Our struggle is clear: whatever we are being taught – for instance, about social justice – how should we implement it? We have the hope that our struggle will go on until our demands are met.

Jai Bhim!

★ ★

Rakesh Vishvakarma, Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha

'The vice-chancellor reportedly spent Rs 1.5 lakh for the programmes of the RSS. When we wanted to organise programmes on Babasaheb Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh, Jyotiba Phule, etc, they did not allow us. They branded us Naxalites and anti-nationals when we sought a hall to conduct a programme'

I am from a very small district of Madhya Pradesh. Till 2010, I knew that there is a board office of a university where documentation happens and exams are conducted. I was not aware that studies too happen in universities. In 2010, I arrived at Wardha, where I am currently situated. Wardha too is one of the smallest districts of Maharashtra. On arrival, I witnessed a lathi-charge as men were demanding electricity and water. I topped the entrance for PhD at Hyderabad Central University (HCU) but was not given admission on grounds of not knowing English. The same holds for Sagar University where they asked me how I will do my PhD if I do not know English.

After the October 21, 2015 order by the MHRD stopping the non-NET fellowships, the Occupy UGC protests began on October 23. Wardha University was the first one to protest against this on October 21, and there was a lathi-charge. I joined the protest in Delhi on October 26. From November 2 onwards, I was continuously in Delhi, and visited other universities in between. I felt my presence in the protest here was

important as protest itself is very necessary and I feel deeply involved with the issue. Though I had JRF at the time and thus did not personally face a problem with the MHRD decision, I protested since this was an attack on my fellowship and other fellows.

In Delhi and elsewhere, we campaigned in many universities like Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi University, JNU, Pune and Mumbai, and acted as a bridge as it was a major concern for students. We used to have meetings with UGC Chairperson Vaid Prakash and Smriti Irani. After the meetings, when we spoke to people, especially those from Delhi, they used to say that we should reach out to other universities. I discussed with them that in India there are 46 central universities and how we should reach out to all of them. People started reaching out to other universities of the country after that. I felt good that this movement is not limited to this particular place and is concerned about all the students of the country.

An environment was created whereby continuous protests happened till January 13, after which we returned to our

respective places. However, the attack from the MHRD continued and at the end of 2016, a regulation came regarding seat cuts. This was a big crisis for us researchers – if admissions are not given then obviously there would be no need to give fellowships.

In my campus all these things have been happening till now. In 2014, after the government changed in Delhi, the ABVP and RSS became dominating inside the campuses. The RSS was established in Sindhi, a small place between Nagpur and Wardha, the former being their current headquarters. The vice-chancellor reportedly spent Rs 1.5 lakh for the programmes of the RSS. When we wanted to organise programmes on Babasaheb Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh, Jyotiba Phule, etc, they did not allow us. They branded us Naxalites and anti-nationals when we

sought a hall to conduct a programme. We never argued that the RSS should not get a hall for their programmes, however, as students, we too have the right to be provided the hall when we want to conduct a programme.

For ten years, no election for students' union was conducted in my campus. We made attempts to mend this. The vice-chancellor, Anand Vardhan Sharma, said that elections will not happen in a central university and if we contest elections then who will study? When we took an application and asked questions, they asked us our research topics. We retaliated by telling them to talk about the problem at hand and discuss our research later. After a lot of tussle, a committee was formed which will most probably hand over the students' union Constitution by April 14. The protest is still active. ★★

Mukesh Kumar, Patna University, Patna

'There are 12 universities in Bihar. Only Patna University has labs, library, teachers, students. The rest have no such facilities. In these universities, only exams happen and degrees are given'

In all the central universities with problems related to students, budgets, reservations, etc, the progressive fronts of the country and other students' organisations are taking the initiative to participate in movements and protests. We need to pay attention as well to the condition of state universities across the country. As I am from Bihar, I would like to talk about the state of higher education in the state.

There are a total of 12 universities in Bihar. However, out of these 12, only Patna University has laboratories, library, teachers, students, etc. The rest have no such facilities, not even guards. In these universities, only exams happen and degrees are given.

It is not that the progressive fronts of these universities or student organisations are not fighting. But these struggles are restricted to where there are students and where classes are conducted. I am a student of Patna University. Here, also, struggles are restricted.

In Bihar, there were no students' union elections since the last five years. In 2018, students' unions were formed for the first time after 2012. Before 2012, the students' union elections took place 28 years ago. Finally, in 2012, elections took place after prolonged pressure from the students.

However, the pressure was there for a long time, but, in 2012, there was the political agenda of the BJP-JD-U alliance. The progressive fronts were protesting that the government is working against education, cutting education budget etc. In 2012, YashvantKaniya won via fake voting in Patna University. This was met with huge peaceful protests. There was retaliation and people were sent to jail.

Before 2010, engineering, arts and medical colleges of Patna University were converted into a new university. Those who raised their voice in support of students, especially from the arts colleges, were put into this university so that they can be separated from the Patna University. We saved eight art colleges by protesting with long hunger strikes. Many of our friends went to jail.

When the BJP came to power at the Centre, the state government, now the JD-U-RJD alliance, stopped them. The 12 universities of Bihar conducted students' union elections. The Jayaprakash Narayan University in Chapra came under this process where students got admission during 2012. In Patna University, the 24-hour library facility has been reduced to 12 hours. In such a situation, what is left for a student is to only sit for exams, and even that is conducted every four to five years.

NDTV anchor Ravish Kumar has been reporting that Chapra University has not had a graduate for five to six years; in JP University the number is seven. So those who took admission in 2012 have yet to graduate.

Even when elections happened, in every college the ABVP won using Right-wing propaganda. The ABVP was 'made to win' even where no classes have been happening so that people do not say that Bihar is not serious about education. As all members are from the ABVP, only their agenda and the BJP-RSS agendas, are supported, and people are quiet.

To curb protests, this strategy was used in the 2018 elections. Everyone in this country is well aware of the role of ABVP and about their 'support' for students' issues. This holds true in Bihar. The decisions are taken in a office and the ABVP follows. The RSS office in Bihar decides to celebrate 'Holi' and thereby in the campuses of Bihar, 'Holi' is celebrated. If it is decided that a march is to be held for 'Ram Navami', then, this march is held. Recently, in five districts, during 'Ram Navami', many people were killed and houses were burnt.

Bihar is in a state of acute social crisis with struggling students and struggling people. In this context, talking about an academic calendar to the ABVP will be an act of utter foolishness.

I too contested for the post of general secretary. After the president and vice-president were appointed, we protested that elections did not take place properly

and proxy voting took place. An inquiry committee was formed and they found that the president's degree is from two universities simultaneously - 'Himalayan University' and Patna University. The vice-president was found ineligible to contest according to the Lyngdoh Committee Report. The nominations of the president and vice-president were cancelled. The president took the matter to the Patna High Court where the verdict was to dissolve the inquiry committee that cancelled the nominations as the committee was not in accordance with the Lyngdoh Committee norms, and a new committee should be formed.

After this, using various means and manipulations, the oath ceremony took place for those who got elected. There was no news from the university whether this ceremony ought to be conducted, nor any news of the position of the vice-president.

Since then, there have been regular students' protests. Lathi-charge took place on protestors, 13 students got injured and were admitted to a Patna hospital.

Recently, retired army colonels and brigadiers have been appointed as registrars in these 12 universities and the reservation system is not being followed. In the Maulana Mazharul Haque Arabic and Persian University in Patna, Brigadier Asif Hussein was appointed as registrar. All 12 universities are presented as having a students' mandate in favour of the ABVP and RSS. Hence, anyone speaking against them are automatically

branded anti-student. If someone revolts against this mandate, then the retired army personnel appointed as registrars are meant to take care of the situation.

This is the condition of universities in Patna and Bihar which is paying no heed

to education. We have fought for JNU, DU, HCU and we have faced lathi-charges and we have gone to jail. I request you to consider the condition of the universities in Bihar as well.

★★

Prem Kumar, Nilamber Pitamber University, Medininagar, Palamu, Jharkhand

'Today, the BJP government has completely discarded us'

In this testimony I will be putting forward two subjects – scholarship and elections in my college. Our Jharkhand government reduced the amount of scholarship to half throughout the state. The government completely discarded the ST, SC and OBC students. Today, the BJP government has completely discarded us.

My scholarship has not been released. I approached the registrar and the clerk of my college regarding the delay in my scholarship. The clerk demanded money to submit the scholarship document. I did not pay the money, so the clerk scolded me for not giving him money. He said that he will not submit the document. I even approached the VC. He scolded me and said that he has no time for me and rejected my request.

I am being harassed. I am mentally stressed out. I am not in a comfortable position in terms of my education because I am not getting the scholarship.

Presently, I am in BSc Part 2 with no money and my college has no facilities for quality education. The college only conducts exams and provides certificates. Under such circumstances, how will I get higher and quality education? Since I don't have money, I could not get good coaching and facilities to get high quality education.

I will also talk about elections in my college and how the BJP government has betrayed us completely. In 2016-2017, the ABVP won the college elections. After the election result, we came to know that the ABVP candidate, who won the election, was an ex-student and he had re-joined the college for contesting the elections. An FIR was lodged and we protested against such blatant and unfair attempts. Till date, we have not got any response either from the police or the VC. Today, the ABVP has completely taken over Jharkhand and no one can complain against them.

★★

Ramakanth, Arts College, Patna University, Patna

'The cases are still pending against us. We are safe only because of the support of journalists and others, or else we would be in jail'

I am from the Arts College, Patna University, Bihar. I am a student of Fine Arts, hence, caste is not an issue for us. We do not consider anyone different. Rather, we consider everyone equal, regardless of caste or gender.

The teachers, however, differentiate us into separate categories and create hurdles for us if we belong to the SC community. Our college was established in 1939. We don't have a permanent teacher. Earlier, we had an ad hoc teacher who has been removed. Till now, we are fighting for a permanent teacher, for better conditions for studies, for installing a girl's hostel, etc.

Recently, during some work going on in our college, an outside contractor beat up a student. We demanded justice and eight of us tried to register a complaint. Instead, cases were filed against us and we were suspended.

Our movement became more active after this. We continued protesting through various arts/media platforms such as performances and painting. After the suspension of eight students, exams were conducted – which we opposed. With the help of the Chatra Sangathan, a JD(U) backed outfit, we were attacked and our heads were injured. Seven of us were arrested and cases were filed on the rest of the 80 students. We continued our

fight. We sat on a continuous hunger strike for 15 days in which many students' health got worse and they had to be taken to the hospital.

After this, we were told that the university would like to listen to us. They gave us assurances verbally, told us that they have spoken to the administration, asked us to go to class.

In the university, only students who have an MA degree and an artist can do publicity of their work through exhibitions. The university neither has paintings nor does it participate in national-level exhibitions. They don't do such things because they have the support from the Bihar government. Hence, they don't give importance to such creative activity in an arts college!

The cases are still pending against us. We are safe only because of the support of journalists and others, or else we would be in jail. We are really not afraid of jail because we will raise our voice from there too. We protest on the streets in Patna. When the protests spread to Madhya Pradesh we got calls from officials asking as to why we are we protesting.

We have three demands: there should be permanent staff in the archaeology department. There should be regular classes. And, there should be hostels for all students.

★★

Ramashish Kumar, National Institute of Technology, Patna

'We have already dropped out because we could not pay the tuition fee. By introducing a national scholarship scheme, the scholarship was reduced to half'

I am Ramashish Kumar pursuing my education from the National Institute of Technology, Patna. I am in my final year. I am from Patna. Since I am from an engineering background, I would like to discuss about the SC and ST students who come to study engineering. There are 93 seats in my college out of which 7 are reserved for SC and 6 for ST students. These students usually take admission but they could not receive their degrees. Around 3-4 students either drop out or they are rusticated.

There are two reasons for this. One, they don't get scholarships. And, though admission is done through reservation, they do not receive any facilities from the college. Hence, they lag behind and are not able to complete their degree.

I would like to request the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)

to introduce certain regulations and guidelines so that the students do not face any problem in continuing their higher education. The MHRD should release the scholarship on time in a regular basis.

I am from Bihar and I received a post-matric scholarship to continue my studies. The Bihar government decided to stop the scholarship – our community protested against it. So the scholarship continued. I received the scholarship for two years, but I have not received it for the final year. This July, our session will be completed.

We have already dropped out because we could not pay the tuition fee. By introducing a national scholarship scheme, the scholarship was reduced to half. The tuition fee is Rs 73,000 per year. Since 2016, it has increased to Rs 1,20,000.

★★

Sri Ramulu Munavat, English and Foreign Language University (EFLU), Hyderabad

'It is transparent that there is massive and organised discrimination. The BJP is targeting us openly now, but the discrimination has been happening since long'

We have reservation policies since the last 75 years. And, yet, the universities are unfit to provide quality education to SC, ST and OBC students. The best proof of this is to check out how many ST and SC professors are enrolled in the special categories central universities. In JNU, for instance, there is no professor from SC and ST background in the foreign language department.

I am from the German Department of the English and Foreign Language University (EFLU), Hyderabad. The university is widely known. In Hyderabad, there are three central universities: Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU), Hyderabad Central University (HCU) and EFLU.

I am from a agriculture and labour background. My parents do agriculture and labour work seasonally. I got exposure in the city because of moving to and fro every season. After finishing my 10+2, I did my graduation, BSc from BR Ambedkar College and passed out with a first division. I worked in the BPO sector where foreign languages are in demand. That is how I got motivated towards learning foreign languages.

So as to merely get into the private sector, I started learning Spanish as a part-time student. At that time EFLU was a deemed university called CIEFL. In 2006, Parliament passed a bill and it became a university, but only on paper. It functioned under an old mindset and framework. When I was pursuing Spanish, I was the first person from the part-time department who raised the question: why has EFLU failed to give admission to ST and SC students on the basis of reservation?

They want to lobby by taking students according to their choice, whereas, in JNU and in DU, students are selected and admitted according to the reservation policy. At that time, there was a very good vice-chancellor-Abay Maurya. In 2009-2010, I was a student of Maurya in the Russian Department. He was the first VC who tried his best to follow the rules. Unfortunately, he was not able to hold the position for a longer period. (I remember, in the same year I celebrated the death anniversary of Che Guevera, a Left-wing icon, which was opposed by Right-wing goons.)

From 2010-2015, I joined the integrated programme of German Studies where I fought large-scale discrimination. At the

time of admission, I was selected from the general category in the top 10, but they kept me aside and filled up all the general seats. Then they put me in the ST category. This was discrimination at the time of admission.

Apart from the German Department, other departments do not get scholarships. Whenever students demanded remedial coaching classes, coaching for NET, which are supposed to be provided under the UGC coaching schemes, EFLU came up with excuses that they don't have enough funds and that teachers do not have extra time to spend for the remedial classes.

I filed an RTI asking if the university has ever conducted any remedial classes. Till date, I have not got any reply. It is a violation of the Right to Education Act, SC/ST Act, EFLU Act and UGC Act. When the remedial classes started in the German Department, the moment I filed an RTI inquiring about the remedial classes, the department started targeting me.

In south India, we live in diversity. Eating beef is common. Brahmins also eat beef. I also eat beef.

The department started targeting me saying I am promoting beef and beef festivals. They started targeting my grades by giving me low grades to expel me. My attendance was 85% so they were putting me in the category of an 'ex-

student'. They said I am an 'ex-student'. I immediately went to the police station and filed a SC/ST Atrocity case against the dean of the department. They did not file the FIR immediately. I filed appeals in the National Human Rights Commission and the state commission. It took four months to get the FIR registered. The FIR was filed after one month. The dean took a stay order; he cannot be arrested.

I filed an academic case to get back into the university with the supporting documents – copy of the Right to Education Act and the order of the Supreme Court judgement. I came back to the university and I was able to write the final year exam. I got 68% and managed to sit for UGC NET. I discovered that I was the first tribal student to have qualified the NET and JRF.

It is transparent that there is massive and organised discrimination. The BJP is targeting us openly now, but the discrimination has been happening since long.

After I filed the academic case, the dean filed a defamation suit. I was convicted on January 11, 2017. Thereby, now, I should introduce myself as a criminal – I got 6 months in jail. I have appealed in the Sessions Court and the case is going on. Hence, I am in a dilemma about my life, my academic life and my career.



Structural Marginalisation: Gender

**Vinita Chandra, Professor of English, Ramjas College,
Delhi University**

'What is urgently needed is to talk to young women and men, and to raise consciousness among them so that they realise that the problem of gender-discrimination and sexual harassment is not a women's problem'

Gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment are pervasive in all aspects of women's life from the privacy of their homes to the public spaces they inhabit. Gender-based discrimination occurs because of the patriarchal norms that govern all relations and interactions, and within this structure sexual harassment occurs due to the exercise of power. I will focus on the patriarchal norms in educational institutions that effect women students especially, but, also, women faculty. Gender-based discrimination due to patriarchal structures exists in universities as it exists in rest of the society also. I will discuss these specific areas that make this discrimination in universities unique.

The university is a space where debate and discussions take place, ideas are exchanged and formulated by young people who are on the cusp of adulthood. Usually this happens within a campus

that is populated largely by students and teachers. The university also strives to encourage students towards critical thinking, interrogating received ideas, and exploring new territories. This critical thinking and exchange of ideas happens in a space that should be equally shared by men and women as a meaningful exercise. And, finally, apart from discovering new ideas, students entering the university are at that age when they are exploring the world, often for the first time independently, and are curious and eager to have new and different experiences.

The desire to participate in all that the university stands for requires students to be open to new ideas and experiences, and it is this very aspect of the university that makes women more vulnerable in a patriarchal society. Women are taught by society, from the time they are little girls, to keep their guard up, to be careful about who they speak to, and who they make

friends with. They are taught to mask their sexuality, to walk, talk and dress in such a way that they do not attract any attention to themselves. However, to share the university space equally in order to interact intellectually, mentally, emotionally, or even physically, women have to let their guard down, and the intrinsic patriarchy that defines all gender identities and gender roles inevitably makes them experience the trauma of gender-discrimination and sexual harassment, precisely because of this vulnerability.

Internalised gender-based roles and identities shape interactions among students within classrooms, as well as outside the classroom in extra-curricular activities and informal discussions. Male entitlement to women's bodies as objects that can be stared at or touched without consent causes women to experience discomfort almost constantly, and this fear at the edge of their mind distracts them from focussing fully on academic or intellectual issues. Along with this, women's internalised timidity or lack of confidence, due to the way in which society schools young women to remain silent even as it encourages men to speak up in public, means that men dominate discussions in classrooms and outside, while women feel their voices are not heard even when they do try to speak. It is no surprise, then, that the leaders, the presidents of students' unions, the presidents of extra-curricular societies, etc, are mostly men. The possibility of a free exchange of ideas and equal

discussion is very slim within structural patriarchy, even if it is the university space that endeavours to bring young people together as intellectual equals.

The second level of gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment comes from the format of classroom teaching in the university. When there is a professor in the classroom who delivers lectures standing in front of the classroom, the inequality of power relations is inevitable. The job of teaching happens through the lectures of the professor. Professors not only have the power of their jobs and degrees, they also have the power over the students' minds, that is, the power of making students think in a certain way, to experience knowledge in a certain way. All these lead to an imbalance of power that is so intrinsic that it is especially susceptible to discrimination against the marginalised, especially when the professor is male, but often even with female professors. This is apart from cases of teacher-student harassment, including sexual harassment, physical intimacy or emotional abuse, which are talked about and recognised.

My focus here is on the unique space of the classroom where students come to learn and therefore make themselves extremely vulnerable to the power of the teacher whose often unspoken discrimination scars the learning process and the intellectual development of young women.

Apart from these issues, there are

situations where some male professors create a hostile environment for female students. Women students often talk about behaviour which they feel they cannot legitimately complain about which makes them uncomfortable, for example, by a male teacher giving undue attention to some female students, which makes them uncomfortable through the period of sitting in the classroom and continues outside it. Often, students do not realise that this discomfort is coming from the undue attention of the teacher because they are taught to respect and trust the teacher. Teachers therefore can easily abuse this trust by inappropriately touching students' head in supposed blessing, touching their shoulder, coming close to them in the classroom. All this creates constant anxiety among women students, and this anxiety is itself a kind of structural violence. Knowledge can only be imbibed freely where the mind is without fear and the head is held high.

To be able to think freely women must feel safe as soon as they enter the campus. There can be no freedom of thought or expression when those peers that should interact freely with each other create hostile spaces by staring at women, passing comments, clicking pictures, whistling, stalking, and physically abusing. To this is now added the widespread cyber harassment on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc.

Thereby, it is not just the classroom, but the very campus where women spend a large part of every day and where they should be able to make new friendships,

experience different kinds of relationships, and explore their own potential, that is hostile to them. Women are forced to normalise this systemic violence to their very beings, and to function at a level far lower than their actual potential.

In the last two years there has emerged a much more aggressive and violent form of behaviour by groups of men in an attempt to intimidate women who have begun to speak. It is seen in the hyper masculine political rallies before elections which are a show of physical strength, and it is seen in the way that women are threatened with rape and worse when they speak up. The threat of physical violence against women by groups of men with a political agenda is meant to send out a very stern warning to women who dare to challenge systemic patriarchal structures.

Apart from students, it is very important to talk about the systematic sexual harassment of women teachers. This has increased in the last seven to eight years with the increase of 'contractualisation'. Without job security women fear to speak out against the harassment they face. Women contractual teachers are not only harassed by the administration, but also by other teachers, and sometimes even students. Contractualisation of their labour has made them extremely vulnerable to all sections of the university. While men with ad hoc jobs also suffer due to the power dynamics created by job insecurity, women suffer doubly due to their gender.

It has been two decades since the 1997 Vishakha judgment which ruled that all work places should set up committees to look into cases of sexual harassment, and also to work towards prevention of sexual harassment by undertaking gender-sensitising activities. Delhi University brought in Ordinance XV(D): Prohibition of and Punishment for Sexual Harassment in 2004. This ordinance was formulated by bringing all stake holders of Delhi University together to discuss, debate and fine-tune rules and regulations that would be specific to an open and widespread campus with so many different colleges. Ordinance XV(D) recognised that all students are vulnerable to sexual harassment within the unique power structure of a higher educational institution, and, therefore, was consciously gender-neutral. It emphasised the need for democratically elected committees that were not answerable to the executive authorities. It formulated a system of elections that enabled the process of gender sensitisation at the ground level.

In 2013, when the Act of Parliament on Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) came into place, Ordinance XV(D) was immediately suspended without putting in its place any policy or ordinance. It was only in 2015 that UGC formulated the University Grants Commission (Prevention, prohibition and redressal of sexual harassment of women employees and students in higher education students) Regulations, 2015,

and this regulation was notified to colleges in July 2016. Although colleges received this notification in July 2016, the proctor started writing to colleges to ask them to implement it in March 2017. This gap of almost four years in which no legitimate structure was in place proved hugely detrimental to the work of gender sensitisation in the university. A new generation of students who had never heard of Ordinance XV(D) came to accept that there was no redressal for the systemic sexual violence they had to suffer, not even for specific incidents of actual assault and molestation.

Delhi University to date has not formulated either a policy or ordinance specific to its needs. The UGC regulation has many flaws that the teaching community has been raising but are not being addressed. First, it is silent on sexual harassment of men and the LGBTQ community. Second, it provides for a sexual harassment committee that is appointed by the principal in colleges or by the executive authority. This undermines the independence of the functioning of the committee. Finally, there is no apex body, as there was in XV(D) that is in charge of looking only at sexual harassment on campus, ensuring that the regulation is implemented, smoothening out procedural problems. The proctor has too many other things to deal with to focus on this very crucial issue. Due to this, very few colleges have taken the issue of sexual harassment, its prevention and redressal, seriously.

What is urgently needed is to talk to

young women and men, and to raise consciousness among them so that they realise that the problem of gender-discrimination and sexual harassment is not a 'women's problem', that it arises out of norms of toxic masculinity that impact men even while marginalising women. Gender-sensitisation programmes have to be made mandatory for students, faculty, and the non-teaching staff. The differences between consensual interactions and sexual harassment have to be understood so that patterns of behaviour can be altered. The heartening development in the last few years is that many groups of women, like 'Pinjra Tod', have begun to speak, and have demanded that their voices be heard. However, this is still too little, and the patriarchal backlash from a majority of men as well as the administration has so far ensured that there is little change on the ground.

I have focused my testimony on the discrimination and sexual harassment of women only, but it is equally important

to talk about the sexual harassment of men who do not conform, in behaviour or clothing, to normative ideas of masculinity. Most men do not even recognise the harassment they face as sexual harassment. Along with this are students of sexualities that do not fit in with the heteronormative majoritarian ideas, those with differently gendered bodies, and those who cross dress or express their gender identities in ways that the society considers 'unacceptable'. These are issues that must be discussed as well.

Finally, when talking about gender-based discrimination, it is crucial to interrogate intersectionalities of caste, class, community and race. All these issues need to be discussed in detail to uncover their complexities so as to not commit the error of homogenising discrimination and oppression. These are issues that must be examined alongside the discussion on sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination.



Dipanjali Das, Rampur Anchalik College, Gauhati University, Kamrup

'He called me through a chowkider and told me to stop laughing. Yes, I have a louder voice and I laugh in the common room'

In Assam, there are some colleges which are 'venture level colleges'. These kind of colleges are not there in other states. The venture colleges are in the way to being provincialised. They get first concurrence, second concurrence and after that they get the provincialised status with the government proceeding in the case. Our college has already got first concurrence. Our college was established in 1996 and is affiliated to the Gauhati University. It got its first concurrence in 2005 and is still waiting to get provincialised.

The principal of the college has been harassing me since he took charge in 2014. This is because I was protesting against his mischievous actions against students and teachers. I wrote letters to the prime minister, and to the chief minister and education minister of Assam against him. He is not following the UGC and Gauhati University rules; he is not allowing the formation of students' union in the college. After he became the principal, our college magazine has been stopped because he doesn't want to spend money and he refuses to give any audit report on it.

Whenever we ask him about students' issues, he harasses us, particularly me and other teachers, by sending show cause

notices. In August 2017, when I went to his chamber to put my departure note, he looked at me, making physical gestures, which made me feel very uncomfortable. Then he started singing an Assamese song which means that after seeing you I feel something in my body. I immediately left his chamber; some of my colleagues asked me what had happened, but I was unable to explain. He held the '*pallu*' of my saree. I got so scared that I came out. I didn't say anything but I went home and cried.

In September 2017, he called me through a chowkider and told me to stop laughing. Yes, I have a louder voice and I laugh in the common room. He told me if I don't stop laughing, he will remove me from the college. After the August incident I decided that whenever he calls me in his room I will record everything. Now I have all the recordings, all the evidence is with me. In December 2017, he stopped my salary showing some absurd rules, putting allegations against me which were totally false. I have proof to challenge these allegations.

I submitted a leave application which contained my thyroid report. On February 7, 2018, he showed my thyroid report to the media as a pregnancy report to defame me as I am a single woman.

This happened in front of around 25 people. I told the sub divisional collector of the area about this and she asked me to hold a meeting. On February 16, in the alumni meeting, amidst around 200-300 people, including my students, he repeated the same thing. He showed my thyroid report as pregnancy report. I have the video evidence of the event. After that I filed a case against him; the case is registered under Sections 354, 120-B, 109 and 509 of the IPC.

I will give one more point about what he is doing with the students. In the sessional exams he allowed the students to use unfair means, so that he can get support from them. Last time, when I was conducting the sessional exam, the head

of department gave them the paper beforehand. I have the photo copies as evidence – this was conducted on March 20. She gave the questions and answers to the students on March 12, 2018. When I stopped the students from using unfair means as I was the invigilator, the principal suspended me.

I am here reading out the reasons for my suspension: "Madam, you have been suspended from all the examination duties conducted in Rampur Anchalik College till further orders for using mobile phones, recording videos inside the examination hall and you are asked to return the answer sheets immediately." He took this decision without the approval of the general body. ★★

Mineshi Mishra, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi

'Obviously, there has been suppression. There have been attempts to demonise us; but I don't see myself as a victim'

I am a student of Banaras Hindu University (BHU), residing in the hostel. Being a girl hosteller I started seeing a certain set of rules – we were expected to follow rules that restricted us to make calls post 10pm and there was strong moral policing on what we were wearing. There is one kind of harassment that one faces outside the campus from boys and another type of harassment we witness inside the hostel from the warden and the house-keeper. These hostel authorities will interfere with questions like why are you walking out of the

hostel, what are you wearing? Or, why are you wearing sleeveless tops?

Most of the students don't want to eat food in the hostel. Before getting admission in the hostel, I and other students were made to sign an affidavit that we will not participate in any kind of protest. We were warned with cancellation of hostel admission if we participate in any protest.

I considered the given sanity of debate to always accept the rules as rules and did not focus on the gender binary. When I

was about to finish my first year, the 24x7 library protest was happening in BHU. This protest was supposed to be my first protest. With this protest I had my first interaction with male students; as I am studying in a women's college there is no interaction between men's colleges and women's colleges.

The interaction with male students was shocking for me because the rules which we are facing in our campus were not applicable to them. I found it problematic as to why there are differences in rules for male and female hostels when the students are from the same university! I am not opposing certain rules if it is disciplinary, but, why are they not applicable to the men students when we are part of the same university?

This concern made me approach the other protesters. I mentioned to them that the 24x7 library protest is a good cause; it, especially, helps the day-scholar students who are residing in the nearby villages. However, the 24x7 protest won't help me. This is because the hostel timing for me is 8pm, regardless the present library timing (that is 10pm), or, the proposed demand of 24x7 access to the library. This won't allow me to access the library post 8pm.

After that, for the first time, the protesters wrote down in their bulletin points that library access should be made equal for both male and female students. It was also mentioned that if the library is 24x7 then girls should be given bus services from the hostel to the library. As a response to

this demand, we heard a very shocking statement from the vice-chancellor: "*Ladkio ka raat ko padna avyavharik hai.*"(Girls studying during night hours is unusual/impracticable). The demand was completely denied, the guys were suspended and the movement was crushed.

After this, discussions around gender-discrimination started in BHU. We started realising about the kind of gender discrimination happening in the institutions of education. I was constantly protesting, but in a hidden way. I never showed my face or name anywhere, because I felt threatened. My friends, who were seeking 24x7 library, were all suspended. I did not want to be the next one to get suspended because I was just a graduate student and I was scared. I always made it sure that I am not on camera.

In March, 2017, the UP elections were on. The media was coming to BHU repeatedly. We were asking the media to do a story on us, but they thought it was not a national issue. Thankfully, it was covered in the media and I was asked to show my face, which was a big deal.

However, I decided – I will!

That is how it all started. I did not know that it would become such a big issue. But, it did become.

During that time, the 'twitter trend was used: #BHU shame... gender discrimination... BHU shame. We don't use the long saying in twitter, instead, we

use small terms. Some people modified and edited it and ABVP said it is a shame on BHU. According to them, these girls who have done this and the reporters are 'anti-BHU and anti-national'. A rally was taken out against us and an effigy was burnt at the college gate.

However, somewhere, these incidents just made me stronger, because, despite the opposition, I was also getting support.

There was opposition from the administration and my professors. Professors would be like – when I used to enter the classroom, the professors used to say: "...You must only show up on TV... you have ruined BHU's name... I am ashamed to say that I am your teacher..." There was a statement by the administration and VC that these girls should also be suspended. I remember, after hearing this, I was crying.

There were girls who were facing same kind of opposition from the professors and administration; earlier, they thought nothing could be done about this. These are disciplinary actions. Earlier, I too thought the same. However, now, for the first time, these girls thought something could be done and somebody has spoken up. So they came to me and discussed it – this gave me power and encouraged me.

After that there was no stop. Calls started coming from my family, "Please don't do this, or else they will suspend you." However, I did not feel like going on the back-foot. Hence, I always remained in the front and kept fighting by participating in various protests.

In September, again, there was a molestation charge and we asked the chancellor to address us. Instead, we faced a lathi-charge. I vividly remember the incident – both boys and girls were running towards their respective campuses. The women's campus is the first campus from the gate. We are aware that police can't charge on us inside the campus, so we thought we are safe. I remember one of the boys fell down at the gate while running. One of the girls was trying to support him so that he can run away. Meanwhile, police got the chance to get hold of her and charged her with *lathis*. This attempt of police provoked the girls to go outside and question the police. Section 144 was quickly imposed. The whole incident was very disturbing.

After that, I came to Delhi to protest at Jantar Mantar on the issues concerning BHU. We were also trying to meet the prime minister. We tried a lot to get appointments, but we got no appointment. Once we were going to his office to submit a letter – a demand letter – but, on our way, we were detained. We were taken to a police station. We were threatened.

There are some things I have experienced in BHU. First, BHU is a very Right-wing space and whatever we do we tend to become marginalised. Second, the administration and teachers are generally against us and they will always demean you.

Third, hostel allotment. I faced problems

during hostel allotment. We have to bring our parents for hostel allotments. In my final year, I had brought my parents and I was put in the defaulter entry. This was shocking because I had not done anything to be in default entry. I have no late entry, no fights with anyone, etc. My mother was called and she had to plead in front of everyone. They said that they will remove me from the hostel and my mother begged for my admission to the hostel.

Later, they took in writing from her, "I (Minishi) won't do anything related to protest activity, not even an article on Facebook." They also said that if I tend to do so again, the hostel authorities will take action against me. At that point my mother broke down. She asked me, till the end, even before leaving, not to participate in protests anymore. My mother cried. I have never ever put her in such a situation; in school, my teachers never complained.

I wrote an open letter to my warden that you cannot silence my dissent by using fear. That letter went viral in the BHU portal. After that, my warden had to come down to me to say sorry.

As I been part of so many protests in BHU, the one positive thing I see is that one protest has links with other protests. The 24/7 library issue brought the important question of curfew-timing which was linked to the gender-discrimination issue. This was further linked to the kind of assaults and harassment we faced at the hands of the

administration. Now, we are linking it to a new demand of Gender Sensitisation Committee against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH). I hope, perhaps, one day, we will hold a protest for the establishment of GSCASH in our campus.

It's a long way to go. However, seeing my journey, as a first year student when my phone was snatched away when I was talking after 10:30pm, until now, there is a difference. There are no such rules. In the third year, I have not signed any affidavit stating that I will not participate in any protest. We can see a change in BHU. I see that this is powerful and I think that this power has been achieved because we have thought to fight it out. It was not changing then; now, it has changed.

I believe there is such pride to be a part of change.

Obviously, there has been suppression. There have been attempts to demonise us; but I don't see myself as a victim. I see myself as an activist. I see myself as someone who has emerged powerfully and I am happy to be part of this experience.

I am very happy to inform this jury here of the dissent in BHU which we were able to successfully propagate all over. We have formed a committee called the Joint Action Committee. The committee takes over the issues of BHU and the area around it. We are also collaborating with civil society groups. We are working on different issues, like daily wages inside the BHU campus, or issues related to

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small vendors' shops getting destroyed. We fight for them and teach them how to seek information through the RTI. We look out and fight for issues around us. As students, we are not only fighting within the university spaces – we are also fighting for those who are in vulnerable situations.

I believe that powers are all distributed and powers are not fixed in the world. The ones who are powerful transfer power to those who are weaker so that they can fight for their cause. Similarly, at one point of time, we were weak and we got powers through social workers

who came for our cause and helped us to some extent. Like the advocate who fought the case for us in the Supreme Court, or the journalist who wrote articles for us, or this committee which is giving us the space to talk. This gives us power.

Now, it is our responsibility to take this forward – this power in our spaces. So that we can transfer the power to the marginalised sections. For example, we are teaching them to write RTI applications, because, as students, we are using our education to teach them. That way, we can help them.

★★

Sangeetha, Osmania University, Hyderabad

'I want to do something for the women of my village as there is no value given to education. This is the reason I want to pursue higher education and my decision has become stronger after the casteism I faced at Osmania University'

I am from Osmania University. My hometown, Ukmal, is a backward area in India and home to a tribal population. In Ukmal, education has next to no importance. Educating girls is considered a crime. I am the only girl who was determined to study law. I felt victorious when I got admission in Osmania University to study law, and the permission from my family to do so. In my village, being a woman comes with harassment and women are looked down upon. However, in Osmania University, the harassment takes place both for being a woman and for belonging to a particular caste/tribe.

A senior in the room I was allotted in the hostel told me that as I am from a different caste/tribe she cannot allow me to stay with her in the room. She wanted a roommate who is not from such a community. I had no friends or dear ones except my brother, and I was not allowed to stay in the hostel, so both of us spent four days outside. When I took this matter to the concerned authority, I was instead asked why I opted for higher education, that I should have taken up a Teacher Training Course or any two-year short course that could have ensured me a job and a quick and stable life.

I retaliated by asking, why can't I study the course I am enrolled in? We also want to study! Are we not allowed to match the status they are in?

Instead of supporting me, the authorities lashed back. With such acts and responses, I felt like it was a waste to study at Osmania and decided to cancel my admission. For the four days my brother and I spent outside, the seniors harassed me a lot by pointing to our social status, not talking to me, and saying that I am lesser than them and I got admission because of my ST reservation. While pondering upon the idea of cancelling my admission I thought that this admission is a determining factor of my life. With me as an example, the girls of surrounding four villages in Ukmal might be inspired to come forward and pursue higher education.

With this in mind, I spoke to the senior and told her that this is not only about me but about the whole village which has entrusted me. I requested her to allow me to stay in the room as I have arrived here after a lot of difficulties. She asked me about my concerns and I explained to her

about the situation of women and education in my village, and the struggle I went through to reach here. She liked the conversation and might have felt that I am of good nature. She allowed me to stay in the allotted room and hence I did not cancel my admission.

I have problems with language as my schooling has been in Telugu medium. In most cases girls do not talk to me like they talk to each other. They say, what can they talk about as I from a Naxalite area! One faces harassment for being an ST and even more for being a woman.

The hostel has separate issues. For example, the curfew is 7:30pm and if you get late then parents have to meet the hostel authorities. The mess food is not good in comparison to the men's hostel.

I want to do something for the women of my village as there is no value given to education. This is the reason I want to pursue higher education and my decision has become stronger after the casteism I faced at Osmania University. I seek your help in pursuing my dream.



Ditilekha, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai

'We also realised that the institutes want queer people, but they don't want dissenting queer people'

I would like to talk about the struggles of the queer collective and the fight we have had to create a gender neutral space in the campus. We finally managed to get gender neutral hostels last week, while the demand for gender neutral toilets are yet to be met. TISS is a typical example of how queer friendly policies are used as a marker for progressiveness, which is why we managed to get some of our demands met.

However, in order to get our demands met, we have to be 'good, law abiding students' who do not engage in any dissenting acts which are outside the purview of our immediate primary identity, which is our queerness. A lot of the people from the queer collective actually come from other marginalised locations. However, we are not encouraged to talk about other forms of marginalisation. I would like to put this movement in the larger socio-political context and why the nomenclature of gender neutral hostels and toilets are important to us.

In 2014, the Supreme Court pronounced the NALSA judgement giving citizenship rights to trans persons and the Right to Self Determination of Gender. The drafts that followed thereafter completely disregarded this judgement. They attempted to define the transgender

identity as a homogeneous gender identity without questioning the binary, heterosexual and patriarchal notion of gender, often conflating with the very Hindutva understanding of transgender people as 'Hijra'. This context becomes important in this case because NALSA also mandated that the government should facilitate for access and accessibility of transgender people in educational spaces.

We acknowledge that many transgender persons are pushed out of education at a very young age. Several of us have access to these educational spaces owing to our privilege, but we have been highly invisibilised. Hence, if you have to make this space more accessible for transpersons, it is essential to radicalise the understanding of gender itself.

Most liberal universities would be very happy to put a transgender column in their application form or even give one transgender toilet and/or one transgender hostel. However, this is likely to make a space more inaccessible for trans persons who are going through transphobia, stigma and discrimination that is already prevalent and a lot of people would have to face immense targeted violence and discrimination within the campus.

When we were fighting to make this campus accessible for transpersons, it was important that we do not call this the transgender place. We were conscious of the stigmatisation that this place would bring about. One of the strongest argument, however, was from the feminists and women who said that gender neutral spaces would deprive the spaces that they have tried to create for women within this institute and make an institute inaccessible for women.

Even while the queer collective acknowledged the struggle the women's movement has made to create spaces for women, particularly toilets and hostel, it was extremely important for us to question who this woman was and who needed these spaces. Did this imagination of women ever include the trans woman? Do we have segregated toilets in our homes? Who is seen as the perpetrator of the violence?

We felt that it was the outsider man, who is most probably the lower caste and

lower class man, from whom the upper caste woman had to be segregated. We constantly maintained that segregation is a Brahminical, heteropatriarchal agenda. Hence, we were able to establish a strong alliance with anti-caste groups as well.

When the queer collective built this alliance and we stood active in the TISS strike, we were targeted. We also realised that the institutes want queer people, but they don't want dissenting queer people. As long as we are these nice, queer children who are willing to study, who are married and nice people, who go out and talk only about our identity as queer individuals, we will be accepted.

Interestingly, all these institutes would have a queer collective which would call themselves apolitical. For us, it is very important that we reflect upon our progressive movements and how these spaces are perhaps equally Brahminical and heteropatriarchal in their approach.



Sarbani Chakrabarty, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

'There are several institutions that the university is tempering with but GSCASH was one such institution that was dissolved in a very high-handed manner by the administration, definitely led by the vice-chancellor'

I am the student representative of GSCASH (Gender Sensitization Committee Against Sexual Harassment). Following the Vishakha guidelines and after a prolonged struggle by the entire JNU community, JNU became the first higher education institution to form the GSCASH. The institution has been referred in many documents including in the Justice Verma Committee and Saksham Committee recommendations. Recently, the democratic decision-making process at JNU has been tempered with constantly and it almost disappeared. There are several institutions that the university is tempering with but GSCASH was one such institution that was dissolved in a very high-handed manner by the administration, definitely led by the vice-chancellor. After its dissolution, the GSCASH was replaced by the ICC (Internal Complaints Committee). According to the Shaksham Committee recommendations, institutions like ICC have to be divorced from any position of power. But, in JNU, the chief proctor was made the chairperson of ICC. The very morning before she was selected she had issued notices to various student activists as chief proctor. The students of JNU did not have any faith in the ICC and thus against the mandate of the

administration, we went ahead to conduct election for GSCASH. Even though there is contestation, the JNU community at large still accepts the GSCASH and we still receive many complaints and try to intervene in our capacity.

A recent incident of sexual harassment has come to light in JNU from the School of Life Sciences. Even when GSCASH was functional we noticed that science schools are such areas where students do not feel comfortable to come out and talk about sexual harassment and discrimination that they face every day. The science schools have lab work and experiments every day. The students are extremely dependent on their supervisor's recommendations. They do not have the environment to come out and talk about discrimination and harassment. But, in this case, one complainant's mail unfortunately leaked in the social media and media. The complainant had written about the accused and how she was harassed and discriminated every day.

Once the mail leaked, many people facing sexual harassment every day for more than four to five years, thought that they should now come out and register complaints. They decided to approach GSCASH instead of the ICC. Together, we

filed eight FIRs at Vasant Kunj Police Station. Surprisingly, however, the next day only one FIR was lodged with the rest of the complainants' names being endorsed in it. We then protested outside the Vasant Kunj police station to file separate FIRs with intervention from teachers as well as various women's organisations. The police was forced to file eight separate FIRs and took 164 statements. The complainants, however, are still facing difficulties as the police is neither cooperating with the complainants nor receiving their calls. The police seems uninterested in conducting investigations.

At JNU, the administration called all the complainants informally and asked them to submit whatever evidence they have to the administration and the administration will decide whether the accused is guilty or not. This move by the administration is illegal. From the very

first day the JNU community - complainants, students' union, GSCASH, teachers - have been demanding the suspension of the accused as his presence in the campus will not ensure a free investigation. But the administration is completely silent and has done nothing. I was served a notice from the administration for writing 'Suspend Choudhary' on the wall of the building on the road. It is highly shameful of the JNU administration to not suspend a serial sexual offender but suspend those protesting against him.

Although the GSCASH is being contested in court, the matter of the complaints has still not been taken to court. The complainants, however, have approached a lawyer. I believe the dissolution of GSCASH has to be linked to the larger question of how the middle class perceives gender and how patriarchy operates in our society. ★★

Structural Marginalisation: Region

Gertrude Lamare, former Assistant Professor, Shivaji College, Delhi University, New Delhi

'Even student groups and student' unions in central universities have the minimal, equivalent to zero - North-East student candidates'

This is a great burden on me, that is, to represent the North-East, considering the diversity of the population, opinions and experiences. The term itself has a problematic history. However, I suppose when it comes to structural experiences, especially outside the North-East, it is somewhat overlapping.

In that sense the north-eastern identity is an imposed one. I am deposing the testimony under the broad theme of region, but our experiences are more of racialised forms of discrimination. This is manifested in various forms, in more overt or subtle ways.

The most striking episode is the infamous dossier that was passed by the JNU administration in 2016. It was directed towards the students from Kashmir and North-East – for their alleged 'anti-Indian' activities. The administration also alleged that there were 'anti-Indian elements' from the North-East and Kashmir staying on campus, eating beef etc,– it was

outrageous. The very reason that an official dossier like this, drafted by the university, could actually surface, was because of the current dispensation. However, if we see historically, structures of discrimination had been in place for a very long time in the city, even before Modi. Perhaps now it is just more pronounced.

The most common one is on the difference in eating habits and language. I personally was asked to alter my accent, apart from being forced to learn Hindi and speak in Hindi, because, apparently, my students will not understand the way I speak. This is just a little anecdote that I have shared.

The government, as part of the donor ministry, a particular ministry (which is supposed to look after 'development' in the north-eastern region), has allocated a lot of funds towards the integration of north-eastern students in central university spaces, across the country. This is manifested in the form of setting up of

north-eastern departments or courses, and North-East cells. For example – even in universities like Jamia Millia Islamia and JNU in Delhi, where there are a large number of north-eastern scholars and teacher, still, the north-eastern courses or north-eastern departments have very niche platforms to prosper. All of this is done in the name of integration and exchange.

Witness the amount of segregation, even in classrooms. Moreover, there is a difference in the way the administration and teachers address students who belong to the ST category or come under a certain quota. Some colleagues of mine, who are teachers, have said in a meeting organised by the North-East cell that in order to deal with racism in Delhi, one has to really *assimilate* and not assert one's regional or ethnic identity. Thus, one colleague said, "Learn Hindi, start eating the way they do, and, more importantly, dress the way they do; stop wearing slightly revealing clothes. If you do that, you are fitting into the conception that they have of you (people from the NE) anyway, so you should rather challenge that by being more like them." Such a situation and perception troubles students. At one point you are telling us

to be ourselves, but in order to survive we can't really be ourselves.

Even student groups and students' unions in central universities have the minimal, equivalent to zero – North-East student candidates. Being an ex-student of JNU (we can apply all our stereotypes attached to this institution), I can say that it is not as liberal and inclusive as it seems in terms of representation. Even now, I don't think there is anyone from the North-East in the students' union. I feel the situation in Delhi University is similar.

There is great alienation, even among progressive groups, in terms of representation and participation. Even the platforms which are supposed to be progressive and liberating are not addressing these issues.

Regarding the introduction of the north-eastern discourse into the academia, this is a tricky affair. This is because people don't know how to handle it. Whether it is people from the North-East, or people from outside, it is still paraded as an item to be sold. The funding comes in so you just need to sell it in academic spaces. This is how it is being perceived. ★★

Debojit Gogoi, Delhi University, New Delhi

'Chowmein is not my name. It's your racist mind which makes you think so'

“ Assam is in Agartala, Aizawl is perhaps somewhere in Manipur. Shillong is a state, whose capital is Guwahati. Not to forget, Arunachal does not exist. Oh yes! Cherrapunji or Mawsynram was never in North-East India.”

Let me give you a tour of how I was treated in the so-called ‘Mainstream India’.

After I took admission in Delhi University last year, me and my friends from North-East India had fallen into the vicious circle of racism facing strong hate comments on our food, confused nationalities and judgments, starting from the day of orientation. The royal treatment, like a foreigner, pushed me into a mixed emotional state of mind. I thought, should I be happy, angry or sad?

Many students, including both classmates and seniors, were fascinated to know more about the North-East region and I being a native of that region faced multiple sets of ridiculous questions. I would like to throw light on some of those instances.

A third year senior had one fine day asked, “Are people safe there?” Another had asked, “Why do you look chinki?” A classmate questioned me, looking at my shorts in college, “Why do you wear undergarments to college?” The fourth

had something else to ask. He said, “I believe, I should not ask for the consent of any north-eastern girl.” I asked, why? He replied, “Since they smoke and drink, they will give in.” A guy from another department had asked, “Do you eat all the animals?”

I was baffled after I was introduced to this mindset of people across India. I replied to them. I didn’t stay quiet. People in North-East India are very safe. They live there, breathe there, work there and are happy there. I don’t look chinki; or, chowmein is not my name. It’s your racist state of mind which makes you think so.

I do wear undergarments. However, under my shorts. Yes, wearing shorts to college during summer does not mean that I don’t have etiquette. I do have. Sorry, you are mistaken. Not everyone from the North-East drink or smoke which is similar to any other part of the country; not everyone in Delhi either drink or smoke. And, most importantly, even if they do, that does not mean they have no dignity or are easily beddable.

We do not eat all animals. There are some which we eat and it’s better if I don’t share and talk much about it because if I do your racist and hate comments will definitely welcome me.

Many people think that everyone from North-East India is a beneficiary of the

SC/ST quota and it is very easy for us to get admission under quota reservation. No, it is not. Many are from general and OBC backgrounds as well. And even if majority of them are from SC/ST background, that does not mean that they are less intellectual.

I believe talking about intelligence is a major debate altogether. Many, including some of my teachers, have this conception that the educational opportunities are minimal, infrastructure is poor and these are the reasons why students from the North-East migrate to distant places for higher education. To some extent, I agree. But, then, I feel like reminding them of Tripura and Mizoram.

I kind of felt terrible talking to them. The vegetarian students in my class are even scared or perplexed to talk to me. It has never happened before. This is a new phenomena for me. I never did believe that people still reserve their comments to address someone 'chinki' because of their Mongoloid facial features. I was in utter shock -where has their geographical and historical knowledge gone?

It is okay for me that I eat rice thrice a day because having '*chapattis*' do not make me feel gratified. But they don't understand. I even stopped carrying lunch because they think I might get pork, beef or some other 'non-edible' animal in my lunchbox. I don't speak Hindi usually and they have problem with that too stating that it's the national language of the nation. I retort, "Then, what are those other 16 different languages on paper used in the Indian currency to denote its value?"

I feel it is high time to learn and accept the diverse cultures, traditions, food and languages of all the regions of the country, those that justify Indian diversity aptly, rather than being prejudiced. Sensitisation of youth in all spheres is the need of the hour. Marginalisation in institutions based on region has become more significant which has further clustered the whole 'groupism agenda' in institutional spaces.



Shenganglu Kamei, Ambedkar University, New Delhi

'However, the discrimination and marginalisation of a student based on one single identity is quite stark. I believe universities are supposed to provide a safe space for all people'

I finished my graduation from Miranda House in Delhi University and I am currently enrolled in Ambedkar University, Delhi. At Miranda House, I was giving my end-semester practical exam. There was a technical issue with the computer lab. When I approached my teacher regarding this, the teacher refused to acknowledge it as a technical issue, and, instead, blamed me for lack of practice and not attending class. I had to ultimately leave the room for which I was awarded a zero in my practical, an issue that was never addressed.

Looking back, I realise that maybe my department in Miranda House had nothing to offer me in particular. My experience of the time is more or less forgettable. There was always an issue of groupism. The mainland students would group themselves and, in the end, only six students from the region called North-East were left behind. Mainland students would never genuinely share notes and instead question why we are not coming to class or not paying attention in class. I wonder why it is so easy for teachers and students alike to belittle us based on our identity. It's uncomfortable that this identity stays with us throughout and we can never erase it.

My experience at Ambedkar University

is a little different than that of Miranda House. Let me start by explaining how I select clothes for the university. This may seem irrelevant but at Ambedkar University you can notice eyes paying attention to even the simplest of *kurti* or *salwar kameez* or even a *bindi* you are sporting. I feel uncomfortable. For me it is just clothes, but for them this is exotic – a tribal girl wearing a traditional Indian dress.

At Ambedkar University, I have learnt how to be politically correct at all times and I am conscious of the fact that the crowd is politically charged. I do not understand why is it that when discussions on power or hierarchy in the Indian context take place, the issue of North-East is never discussed. It is always about caste, *savarna*, Dalit oppression, etc. Why do the students have to go and literally beg teachers to discuss even one reading on the North-East? There is no equal opportunity, ST/SC cell or a North-East cell in particular at Ambedkar University and hence no way to ask for redressal if we face discrimination.

We have requested the administration for an equal opportunity cell. We have requested the administration to make the 'Queer Collective' official on campus, but the administration has thwarted it for this

or that reason; for example, they argue that the collective is based on identity. A simple thing like a gender neutral toilet on campus is a necessity for every queer person. The university has not even acknowledged queer persons on campus.

I believe no person carries a single identity within oneself. However, the discrimination and marginalisation of a

student based on one single identity is quite stark. I believe universities are supposed to provide a safe space for all people, especially students. I do not think that the administration at Ambedkar University can ever live up to the needs of the people. Indeed, the administration has to address these issues urgently and seriously.

★ ★

Satarupa Chakraborty, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

'When the crackdown happened on student leaders of JNU in February 2016, a dossier was circulated and released in the media with a blanket statement targeting particularly the students from North-East, Kashmir and women, Dalits, Muslims'

JNU is not perfect. However, when compared with conditions in other higher education institutions in the country, JNU is in a better state. This is because of certain major interventions and policies that were made possible due to prolonged students' struggles. JNU has had an inclusive admission policy ensuring deprivation points on the lines of region and gender. But, with the advent of the BJP government, we have witnessed major attacks on JNU in an effort to dismantle those policies which help people from different marginalised sections of society to be admitted.

JNU students have been raising the concern over the issue of discrimination. Through a statistical analysis of data, the Naffey Committee had to acknowledge the fact of discrimination persisting in

JNU. We have discovered that if someone hailing from the marginalised sections scores good in the written exam for JNU admission, they perform poorly in the viva examination. There are various reasons for this but the committee identified a pattern of discrimination and put its recommendations before the JNU administration and academic council.

However, the UGC Gazette, 2016, was forcibly implemented unilaterally in JNU, and the deprivation points as stated in the JNU's admission policy were scrapped. The Naffey Committee's recommendations have also not been implemented. The outcome is that the reserved seats are completely not filled, and JNU didn't have admissions in large centres for MPhil/PhD for an entire session.

When the crackdown happened on student leaders of JNU in February 2016, a dossier was circulated and released in the media with a blanket statement targeting particularly the students from North-East, Kashmir and women, Dalits, Muslims, etc. Here is an excerpt from the dossier: "Over 300 Kashmiri and North-East separatist activists are staying illegally in the hostels of JNU. They are the main force behind organising anti-India activities, protest demonstrations, talks and lectures by separatist leaders in the JNU campus. Beef-eating festival, Mahishasur Diwas and hate Hindu campaigns are the regular features in hostel activities and various seminars/lectures organised by known anti-Hindu and anti-Indian elements.... North-East students, Muslim students and other anti-national elements are in the vanguard of this anti-Hindu movement."

This page of the dossier in itself attacks students from the North-East, Kashmir, Dalits, Muslims, women and other minorities. Many people asked the administration to inquire about the people involved in preparing and

circulating such a shameful dossier. Till date the administration has not taken any action.

I remember, in 2014, Nido Tania, a student from Arunachal Pradesh, was murdered in Lajpat Nagar, Delhi. This was because some 'mainland Indians' felt that his hairstyle and clothes did not match with theirs. After that there were protests and students took over the streets. From what we experienced, there were police brutalities.

When we speak of racial discrimination it is important to identify such incidents. When we talk about marginalisation it is important to look into how the marginalisation was made possible. There are structural discriminations even in higher educational institutions, as it exists in our society. To fight discrimination, challenging and fighting the structural discriminations is an imperative. When we identify the fact that racial bias exists in our society, what we need to demand is an anti-racial discrimination law which is currently absent in our country. ★★

Structural Marginalisation: Religion

Umar Khalid, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

'For a Muslim, even before 2014, you are either a fundamentalist/terrorist or a vote bank. The moment you refuse to be the latter, you slip into the former. This is the distinctiveness of the Muslim second-class citizenship'

All of us need to think about the question, whether the Muslims of this country are a part of this nation or not? The people coming to study in the university from different minorities and labouring classes, who are already low in number, are being thrown out from the universities. The RSS is quite open about their animosity towards reservations for SC, ST, and OBC, but the BJP cannot be so open about it due to political compulsions, even though they are working silently to destroy reservations. However, there is an agenda BJP too is quite vocal about – from Guru Golwalkar to Narendra Modi. This is with regard to their systematic ideological offensive towards the Muslims.

The BJP has full majority in Parliament and on a daily basis they perform this offensive in the name of 'Love Jihad', 'Ghar Wapsi', or even what is unfolding in many parts of the country presently around the festival of 'Ram Navami'. The attacks on the universities also take on a distinct anti-Muslim character in contemporary times.

As has been said before, there are already very few Muslims in these universities and even they are being driven out. In a recent debate in the *Indian Express*, a highly-respected intellectual wrote that to remain consistent with liberal politics it is very important for the intellectuals to not only speak on majority communalism, but also minority communalism. The examples that he cited, of the things that liberal intellectuals should speak about, were certain social conservative practices among the Muslims like wearing a skull cap or a *burqa*. This is not at all a convincing argument and several people have already countered it.

Even though the examples cited about may not elicit any serious engagement, I, for one, don't deny the existence of several conservative practices and consciousness among Muslims today. However, as social scientists, historians and public intellectuals, it is important to contextualise it with the systematic persecution of Muslims in this country,

leading to segregation and ghettoisation, particularly over the past three decades. When Muslims are pushed into a situation where they are living only with members of their community, this also reflects in their consciousness and their political, social and cultural associations.

To be counter-factual for a moment, one can only imagine the more tolerant and cosmopolitan society we would have had if the trajectory of our social polity had been on different lines over the last three decades. The prejudices within the minority, also, more importantly, of the majority towards them, might have been far less. However, the religious majorities of our country have internalised the prejudices and stereotypes that they have been fed through mass media, cinema, popular culture etc, which then makes it easy for the BJP and RSS to use hate as a political weapon.

Though Muslims are not responsible for this situation, education could have helped a large section of the Muslim community to make sense of their existence and expand their imagination and world-view beyond their immediate lived reality. The truth is that Muslims have very less representation within universities for many decades. The Sachar Committee Report presented this truth a decade ago, which, till then, was the best kept public secret of our country.

However, today, the extreme forms of violence on Muslims do not allow demands to rise for citizenship issues like public education. Right now, the focus of

most groups working among minorities is on ensuring security from communal violence, lynchings, etc. With the relegation of other very basic demands, the country's largest minorities, that is, Muslims, are forced towards further backwardness.

I would like to put forward two cases to elaborate how deeply internal prejudices towards the minorities make certain forms of witch-hunt possible, and the consequences it has for the community. The first example is mine and the second one is that of the missing student from JNU, Najeeb Ahmed.

To come to the first, three of us, Kanhaiya, Anirban and me, were arrested in February 2016 in the, by now, infamous 'JNU sedition case'. Kanhaiya was arrested ten days before us. Anirban and I were arrested together. The prejudices were expressed very clearly during our time in police custody. Anirban was asked, "Mr Bhattacharya, Khalid doing all this, saying 'Pakistan Zindabad', is understandable, but how are you here too?"

Facts were of no concern at the time, and they were forgetting their primary narrative. They were cursing each other.

We were questioned where we were hidden for ten days? So, at 12-1am at night, for two days, we were taken around the city to find out where we were hiding. I decided not to say anything. Anirban was in a jeep ahead of mine with five policemen accompanying both of us. I do not know the locality they took us

to, but there was a Muslim dominated area nearby behind which there was a jungle. A policeman in my jeep spoke over the phone to a policeman in Anirban's jeep saying that I am not telling them where I was hiding. Anirban later told me that the policeman in Anirban's jeep told the one in mine over the phone that if I don't speak up, they will take us to a jungle and kill us in an encounter.

Perhaps, they would not have done the encounter. But the fact that it was said reveals something that someone from a certain community can be encountered, so to say, is encounterable. And this was said with the express purpose of softening up Anirban, so that he would reveal something!

Among the three, only I received special treatment from the media because of my religious identity. I would not have been shocked if I was called a Naxalite by the media because that is the usual branding they do of the Left, especially the non-parliamentary Left. But they branded me as an Islamist, connected me to Pakistan and Pakistan terror groups, to Jaish-e-Mohammed, and invisibilised my decade long Left activism. I do not even have a passport and am facing difficulty getting one made due to this case.

They were sending a message not only to me but also to a large section of Muslims getting educated or who aspire to be educated. They were telling us that we are condemned to live in a ghetto and cannot even think of coming out of our ghettoised existence. If we do so, then we

will be pushed back again. We will only be a Muslim at the end of the day, and by extension a terrorist.

I do not deny the fact that I was attracted towards Left politics primarily because of my lived reality as a Muslim. Coming to the university allowed me to detach myself from that immediate identity and see things in a larger historical perspective. I think I am one of the very privileged few within the community to have access to the university and meet people from other religions, regions, languages, and shape the world-view accordingly.

It has been two years and no charge-sheet has been filed in this case. The court case has not even started and I believe that in the coming days unless the government does not feel that they would gain any political capital, the case might not start at all in the court. And even if it does, just like the Ram Temple court case that has been going on for so long, the 'JNU anti-national slogans case' will also go on for 30 years as political benefits can be reaped from this.

In between all of this they have found ways to keep me alive in the popular imagination by vilifying me. A different kind of violence was done with the discourse on television after the violence in the Ramjas incident. The Centre is completely involved in this, the way it was in shaping the Bhima Koregaon narrative. Three of us were arrested but I am the only one in discourse – this shows the deeply internalised Islamophobia.

Indian Campuses Under Siege

The other case is that of Najeeb Ahmed. Najeeb has been missing since 15 October, 2016 and nothing is being done in that investigation. On the day of his disappearance, I met his mother for the first time in the night. With a lot of pain, she said, "If I find my child, I will not let him study in JNU anymore. I will take him home with me. Najeeb's father is bedridden for many years after an accident and I was the one working hard and helping him gain that level of education. I funded the education. When he applied in the universities, he was selected in Jamia Millia Islamia and JNU. I wanted him to go to Jamia and told him that there has been so much controversies recently regarding JNU, so it is not safe there. He insisted to go to JNU and said that it is the best university, so he should go there when he has the opportunity."

She cursed herself that day about making him study and then letting him study in JNU. She regretted not sending her son to Jamia because had that been the case Najeeb would still be with her. Najeeb was beaten in public, there are ample witnesses among students and guards regarding that. Afterwards, when he disappeared, a fabricated story came out that Najeeb had initiated unprovoked violence against ABVP students, as ABVP had red threads tied to their wrists. Najeeb was presented as an intolerant Muslim, a fundamentalist who could not think. A propaganda against him was propagated and on a wall or table of a hostel it was written, 'All Muslims are Terrorists'.

No attempts were made to find out about Najeeb by the media or look at Najeeb's mother's struggles. Instead, the media presented a fabricated story that Najeeb used to search ISIS videos on internet even when the police denied that nothing of this sort turned up in their investigation. These journalists have till date neither apologised nor denied the claims they made, nor has there been an institutional apology. The evidence that linked me to Jaish-e-Mohammed is the same used in Najeeb's case, and that evidence is nothing but our name, our immediate identity.

I am not saying that only a Muslim would face the brunt of the attacks today. In fact, the erstwhile 'pseudo-seculars' are now being referred to as 'anti-nationals' under which anyone can be branded and targeted, irrespective of their religious identity. However, for the Sangh Parivar, Muslims are the original and foremost villains. Without a doubt you can find the same kind of social marginalisation within JNU among the Dalits and Muslims. And we should not lose sight of certain specificities.

The first is that due to a century-long assertion of Dalit and Ambedkarite movements, from before and after Ambedkar, it has become an acceptable category to do politics, even though it is a very difficult category. But, it is very difficult to articulate Muslim concerns beyond a nationalist paradigm, and this dates back to even before freedom of India. For a long time, the ghost of partition weighed heavily on the Muslims

when they sought to articulate their concerns. If you said something which was not a part of the ruling establishment or consensus of the time, then it was immediately taken that you are advocating for another secession.

Our generation today, fortunately or unfortunately, does not directly carry the burden of Partition. But the burdens and traumas that we carry are different and have their own complications. I grew up experiencing it quite closely - people being picked up on false terror charges, incarcerated, tortured, released after several years and arrested again, picked up again. So, when the JNU episode happened, my parents were really concerned, but they were not that surprised. It did not shatter any illusions about our society for them.

All of this has made any kind of articulation very difficult without being dubbed as a fundamentalist, terrorist or separatist. For a Muslim, even before 2014, you are either a fundamentalist/terrorist or a vote bank. The moment you refuse to be the latter, you slip into the former. This is the distinctiveness of the Muslim second-class citizenship.

When we talk about Rohith Vemula no one denies the fact that the persecution he faced was because he belonged to a particular community. But, when we talk about Najeeb, there is an effort to distance Najeeb from his Muslim identity despite the fact that he was cursed and beaten because of that identity.

The day after the Bhima-Koregaon incident, Rahul Gandhi tweeted that Bhima-Koregaon is a continuation of the attack on Una and Saharanpur and it only shows BJP's Brahmanical mindset. However, in most cases of lynching and communal violence against Muslims, you do not see the opposition taking a stand. What does this signify? When I ask people about this they say if you question this strategy you are playing into the BJP's hand. However, are you not playing into their hand by not saying anything?

Basic citizenship rights have been relegated to the background due to the kind of violence taking place on a daily basis. However, despite the violence, or perhaps because of the present predicament, there is an emerging intelligentsia among the Muslim community asking important questions. They are asking whether we are equal citizens of the country or have we been reduced to second-class citizens.

Does the Constitution apply to us as well, or, is there a separate rule book that the State has - to deal with the minorities? Will there be any outrage when we are linked to Pakistan, asked to go to Pakistan, beaten up, and lynched?

These questions might not be visible in the mainstream political discourse, but they are being asked and raised every day. This is not even about what faith you believe in, but about your identity. If you have a certain name, an environment of fear will be created around you. They do it by filing fake cases and peddling false

narratives through media and social media.

To conclude, let me say that these questions are inherently not about Muslims, but about democracy. If this violence keeps going on, we will never

be able to come out of the quagmire we find ourselves in. The future of our country and democracy does not only concern the Muslims alone, everyone has a stake in it.

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Adeel Hamza Sahil, former vice-president, Allahabad University Students' Union

'I was banned from the Allahabad University campus till August 15. I was suspended and served a notice on June 14, 2017. Even after that, I kept fighting. Then my suspension was extended and I was removed for 5 years'

I want to thank the organisers who have organised such a tribunal. For the first time today it feels that there is someone who wants to listen to our pain. I am grateful to you for doing this to heal our wounds.

I am the first Muslim to be elected as the vice-president of Allahabad University in 128 years. This makes me happy, but it makes me sadder. It makes me sad because when I was in school, studying with all the other students, I did not know who is a Hindu or a Muslim. However, when I grew up, I went to the university and told my best friends that I want to contest elections in Allahabad University. Then I was told that you are my brother, you are a Muslim, you can contest elections, but you cannot win. Tears rolled down my eyes that day when a friend who used to sit with me together and have food with me, who never made me feel that he is a Hindu and I am a

Muslim, said that you are clever, you are a Muslim, when I said that I wanted to contest elections.

I want to talk about the enquiry against me. On April 28, 2017, we held a protest at Allahabad University whose agenda included four demands. There was a meeting at the guest house where our vice-chancellor and professors were also present. It is shameful for me to tell this that our professors, who are our teachers, have their pet goons which has become a trend in Allahabad University. They sent these goons to pelt stones at us and do lathi-charge when we went there to gherao the guest house. There were two vans stationed at a distance from each other and we were told to get out of one van and move to the other van, one by one, because that van was small and so many people could not be taken to jail in that small van. There were around 500 policemen standing in between these two

vans and we would be beaten several times with lathis when we moved from one van to the other. Almost 22 students, including me, were put behind bars at the Naini Central Jail for 26 days.

My mother was worried that her son is in jail. But I kept fighting for the rights of my fellow students and did not back off. After we came back from jail after 26 days, a student was beaten up outside the Allahabad University premises. When some of my friends protested against this incident at Allahabad University by burning the effigy of the current chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath. I was not present there. I want to ask that in which section of the Indian Constitution is it mentioned that the effigy of the chief minister cannot be burnt to protest against his policies? And even if an effigy was burnt, I was not the lone person present there, so who else was served a notice?

I want to read out a line to show what kind of notice is written to us by our proctor who is our teacher (He has written that you are being notified that on 11.06.2017, leading a group of people, you started a funeral procession and burnt the effigy of 'Hon'ble Chief Minister' within the premises of the university, and circulated this widely through newspapers. These kind of

activities done by you are (*asamvidhanik-unconstitutional, avaidhanik-illegal, adharmik-unreligious, anyatharthik-unobjective*, because Yogi Adityanathji is the thinker and publicist of a great ideology and religious observer, *dharmachar*).

You are our teacher, you show us the path, and you are telling us that Yogi is *dharmachar*. So you are directly proving it that you are his loyalist. And, yet, we continued our fight.

I was banned from the Allahabad University campus till August 15. I was suspended and served a notice on June 14, 2017. Even after that, I kept fighting. Then my suspension was extended and I was removed for 5 years. I was just a student studying BA and MA at the Allahabad University. My degree is on hold even today but I am still fighting because I exercise my rights.

Today, Allahabad University, known as the Oxford of the East, which produced four prime ministers of this country, is far away from its repute of the past. This is a worrying issue today. It is very sad that our professors and administration discriminate against us on the basis of religion and caste for their own personal interests.



4

Annexure

Tribunal's Concept Note

One of the primary purposes of education has been the creation of an active citizenry. This requires inculcating the ethos of critical thinking and creativity, to reflect on real life-challenges and opportunities. It is in this context, that educational institutions have always provided space for the right to freedom of opinion, expression, association, assembly and dissent within their structures. These are also the values that are upheld and guaranteed by the Constitution of India.

With the advent of globalisation, one has witnessed the degeneration of the focus of education from its primary purpose of shaping an active citizenry, to that of building up a workforce that caters to the requirements of a market-based economy. The process of privatisation of education made it imperative to dismantle the State-funded public education systems, wiping out the basis of a Welfare State.

The reform and rectification of the inconsistencies and deficiencies of the existing public education system is used as a smokescreen to further saffronisation, homogenisation and corporatisation, and pushing aside the primary purpose of education as free, rational and critical thinking.

In any democratic and civilised society, the university is a repository of young and budding intellectual opinion, more often than not also being the bedrock of voices of sharp critical dissent. In an age of homogenisation and majoritarianism, students' movements, who provide a voice of dissent, are not only being targeted and criminalised but also being discredited and maligned, with a view to influence public perception and to quell any opposition to State action and policies. The trend encapsulates a broader agenda to wipe out the spaces that cherish differing opinions and is an attempt to control Indian intellectual life.

While the fundamental right and freedom of expression is enshrined in the Indian Constitution, and is recognised as an integral part and fabric of the Indian democracy, the State has left no stone unturned in silencing voices of dissent and creating a negative perception of the students' movements by spreading false propaganda and fake news through the corporate media.

Contribution of Students' Movements in India

World over, students' movements have played a crucial role in combating anti-democratic forces, initiating important

political discourses and creating a new breed of thinkers, who have shaped important policy changes and decisions.

In India, students' movements were an integral part of the pre-independence freedom struggle and posed a formidable force to counter the British colonial rule. Post-independence, student's movements have initiated various national debates and have been a significant voice of dissent, shaping changes in domestic policies in the country. The contribution and efforts of students' movements in the Nav Nirman Andolan in Gujarat, which led to widespread agitations across the country, the JP Movement, the Naxalbari struggle, the formation of All Assam Students Union (AASU) etc. and their strong opposition during the Emergency, have been duly recognised and appreciated in the history of Indian democracy. Post Emergency, the students' movements, particularly in parts of the north-eastern region of India and in Kashmir, continue to play an active role in addressing socio-political concerns. Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi students have also organised themselves and are at the frontiers of challenging discriminations on campuses and in society. The students' movements have also played an important role in various labour movements and class struggles across the country. Undoubtedly, the critical role played by the students' movements have shaped Indian democracy.

Students' movements continue to play an important role in Indian democracy,

questioning and critiquing anti-people government policies and State action, and constitute a formidable and necessary voice of dissent and opposition, outside and inside the realm of parliamentary democracy. It, accordingly, comes as no surprise that they are subject to interference, repression and State action from the ruling governments.

Current scenario

The past 30 months or so, under the new political dispensation at the Centre, has witnessed a peculiar attack on Indian educational campuses. Those universities that came into being through statutes that ensured not just their autonomy but also their being embodied – in theory and in practice with the constitutional values and vision where equality and non-discrimination was key – have been subjected to such attacks. These universities, over a period of time, were exercising the vision of equity and non-discrimination with the gradual implementation of affirmative action to ensure that students from rural, marginalised and discriminated backgrounds made it to the institutions of higher learning. However, the dual assault of aggressive neo-liberal policies – that have ensured a cut in scholarships in institutions of learning – accompanied by an ideological assault of an authoritarian character, have rendered campuses in India today the focal points of a resurgent democratic movement with student leaders and student associations who do not fall in line with the majoritarian vision.

Indian Campuses Under Siege

On the one hand, the neo-liberal policies and privatisation of education by the State is making it impossible for Dalits and other deprived sections to enter into higher education, on the other hand, those who are able to make it are being targeted and attempts are made to silence them.

Today, it is the centres of higher learning in India that have become the battleground for the foundation of Indian democracy and all it stands for. The government is engaged in constant attacks on students, teachers, employees, intellectuals, university autonomy and academic freedom across India. Aggressively pursuing its Right-wing authoritarian agenda, it has attacked democratic voices from India's educational institutes, including by using the criminal law mechanism to file fabricated cases, the worst even being the law of Sedition (Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860) being used against them.

The recent events that have unfolded under the new regime, clearly indicate the State's intention to destroy premier centres of higher education to thwart intellectual political oppositions.

The government at the Centre imposed its loyalists on institutions like the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and Film & Television Institute of India (FTII). The government is giving a freehand to Right-wing ideology by suppressing alternative politics at campuses like Hyderabad Central

University (HCU), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi University (DU), Jadavpur University (JU), Allahabad University and Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai (TISS). While the government tried to brand both JNU and HCU as "anti-national", the recent Ministry of Human Resources and Development (MHRD) rankings had to recognise them amongst the top 4 varsities of India.

Other campuses under attack include the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (IIT-M), Banaras Hindu University (BHU), National Institute of Technology, Hazratbal (NIT-H), Gauhati University, Pondicherry Central University etc., where the university administration, while openly endorsing Right-wing ideologies and government diktats, thereby compromising institutional autonomy, has given immunity and protection to Right-wing student groups, thereby encouraging them to launch attacks on alternative political views.

Given the current scenario and the increasing attacks on educational institutions in India, the People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space (PCSDS), through its Permanent People's Tribunal on Shrinking Democratic Space (PPTSDS), has decided to organise a 'People's Tribunal on Attack on Educational Institutions in India'.

Terms of Reference

1. To record and enquire the repression, surveillance and administrative

actions which the students, faculty and employees of institutes of higher learning are subjected to.

2. To record and enquire the deliberate criminalisation of students and teachers in various parts of the country.
3. To investigate the undermining of the Constitution and constitutional values in the creation and/or subversion of existing laws and policy changes, and to make a comparative

study of the laws/policies in other countries on this subject.

4. To record and enquire increasing government and State interference vs. autonomy of the institutions.
5. To record and enquire the discrimination with respect to students from Dalit, Adivasi, OBC, minority communities, the North-East and Kashmir especially on issues related to admission, scholarship and evaluation.

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Background Note

Right-wing Assault: An Orwellian Empire

Democracy, in a broader sense, is shrinking due to certain structural reasons. Those reasons are neither isolated nor mutually exclusive to each other. In India, where social inequalities are deeply entrenched, education is largely seen as a leveller and a means for the marginalised to achieve social mobility. After the 1970s, when education was brought under the concurrent list, there is a constant process to centralize the education system. However, the current regime since 2014 has ushered in new challenges to the democratic space of the academic community of this country.

The roots of the present policy paralysis in higher education in India can be traced back to the colonial period. That crisis continued to exist because education has never really received the deep, serious, central attention that it should have in a society that was being recreated and reconstructed after independence. There was a tendency to let things carry on as they had existed before. Basically, the pattern was to use the same kind of institutions and structures, and not question them. The higher education system, which was designed during the

colonial period, continues more or less in the same trajectory and within the same paradigm, despite the fact that it had imaginative and enduring islands of excellence like JNU, BHU, Allahabad University, JU, HCU, DU, among others, which, themselves, are currently under concerted and relentless attacks by Right-wing forces, backed by the Indian State.

Among academic disciplines, the social sciences, particularly, is facing repeated assaults because it provides a rational and critical analysis of society and the government's policies.

Privatisation and Globalisation

In the era of globalisation, the turn towards privatisation and commercialization of education in India has been marked by two aspects. One is the strong push to ensure that education becomes a tradable commodity and thus does not deserve any State support. Agencies like the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has been heavily critical of State-funded 'public education' in India and has constantly pressurised the Indian State to reduce it and allowing foreign universities through the General Agreement on Trade and Services

(GATS). This has led to policy implementations by the government with the emphasis that higher education does not deserve any State support. There is reduction in funding for research to Council of Scientific and Industrial Research(CSIR) labs, as well as universities; research fellowships have been reduced, non-National Eligibility Test (NET) fellowship by the University Grants Commission (UGC) is mostly irregular, post-metric fellowships are not being distributed to students in the absence of allocations from the Centre, NET exam schedules have been changed, and education is increasingly being centralized. This list can go on.

The second aspect is the brazen enthusiasm of various governments to privatise existing educational institutions, which has been reflected in plan documents like the 11th plan. The result is the mushrooming of private institutes in all spheres of Indian education. The proportion of private-aided schools increased from 15% in 1993-94 to 30% in 2004-05¹. Concomitantly, there is an increase in the number of private colleges. By 2015, nearly three-fifth of student enrolment in higher education was in private institutes². Many of these private institutes have been tied to government universities. This, significantly, reduced the scope for profit-mongering. The solution was the conversion of many of these institutes into deemed universities whose numbers have increased from 26 in 2005 to 109 by 2009. Overall, these changes have had an overtly positive

outcome. Due to the widespread increase in the number of educational institutes, the gross enrolment ratio has increased. However, this has come with significant costs. The access to these institutes, which are profit-driven, is limited to only certain sections of the society.

According to data from the National Sample Survey, 2014, approximately, 44.81 million people – 16.6% male and 9.5% female – that is, Indian undergraduate students aged between 18 and 24, are too poor to pursue higher education. As many as 34.2 million students were enrolled in institutions of higher education in 2014-15, according to the report of the MHRD-All India Survey on Higher Education, 2016. Out of them, nearly 22 million students (65%) are enrolled in private institutions in various courses. It is needless to state from which economic background the majority of students (65%) came from. According to the 12th five-year plan document³ of the erstwhile Planning Commission, while government-owned institutions of higher education increased from 11,239 in 2006-07 to 16,768 in 2011-12 (49%), private sector institutions recorded a 63% growth in the same period from 29,384 in 2006-07 to 46,430 in 2011-12.

The onslaught of privatisation and globalisation on education has been aggravated under the present National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Centre. The present central government is in the process of preparing a new National Policy on Education.

Indian Campuses Under Siege

There are two documents available in this context: the TSR Subramanian Committee report, and a document titled, 'Some Inputs for Draft National Education Policy 2016' drafted by the MHRD. In 2017, the central government appointed a committee headed by K. Kasturirangan to draft the new policy. The basic approach of the documents available is undemocratic, arbitrary, non-transparent and muddled in approach and perspective. The documents propose closure of 'public schools' by declaring them as 'unviable'. The documents advocate for a total withdrawal of the government from higher education by arguing for full freedom for market forces in running and formulating policies with respect to higher education. The central government has already started implementing new initiatives in line with the proposed new policy. This includes, for example, a move to establish 'worldclass' institutions which have no provision for reservation and scholarship based on social and educational backwardness, and appointments of faculties based only on 'merit' while refusing to provide for reservations at any level.

Moreover, the UGC issued a directive envisaging the creation of autonomous colleges which would have substantial freedom in the matter of admissions, curricula and the fees they charge. This means that the kind of corruption which has prevailed in a rampant manner in some so-called 'self-financing professional colleges' with their

'capitation fees' and 'management quotas', will now be generalised to the higher education sector as a whole. This autonomy in the matter of fixing fees, which would necessarily entail a jacking-up of fees, would exclude vast numbers of students belonging to deprived economic backgrounds from institutions of higher education, unless they are willing to take large student loans. That is, if they take such loans, then, given the mass unemployment that prevails in the country, a large number of them will be unable to pay back the loan. This may lead to mass suicides, individual trauma and collective distress, as in the case of the peasants in the rural countryside. Indeed, this potential crisis itself will deter them from taking loans and hence prevent them from accessing higher education altogether. The idea of a fee-based education system is fundamentally inimical to democracy.

In a decision by the MHRD to provide autonomy to 62 higher educational institutes, instead of democratically discussing this decision in Parliament and addressing various concerns of stakeholders, it unilaterally decided to impose this via the UGC.

The UGC notification which deals with autonomy is unambiguous on the meaning of autonomy. The university will have autonomy to start new courses, new centres, off-campus centres, incentivise talented faculty by additional pay etc. However, it categorically states that no funding will be provided by the government. A cursory look on the clauses make this evident.

Clause 4.2 of the notification states: "Universities may start a new course/ programme/ department/ school/ centre in disciplines that form a part of its existing academic framework, without approval of the UGC, provided, no demand for fund is made from the government on account of starting the new course/ programme/ department/ school/ centre." Clause 4.3 states: "Universities may open constituent units/ off-campus centres within its geographical jurisdiction, without the approval of the UGC, provided it is able to arrange both recurring and non-recurring revenue sources and does not need any assistance for the same from the UGC or the government." Clause 4.8 states: "Universities, while following the pay scales as laid down by the Commission, shall build an incentive structure to attract talented faculty, with the condition that the incentive structure shall have to be paid from their own revenue sources and not from (the) Commission or government funds."

Mobilising funds for these purposes can be possible only through self-financing. It is clear that self-financing would invariably result in changes in the fee-structure and increased role of private players. This would mean that only a privileged few can access higher education in India. Doors of public universities, which are already closed to marginalised sections due to the draconian 2016 UGC notification, will forever remain closed. The UGC notification also states that universities

can have increased collaborations with private players. However, private players are not innocuous entities. They have their own market-centric agenda rooted in profit. They would have no incentive in supporting critical studies, resulting in reduced fund allocation for departments like Women's Studies, Social Exclusion, etc.

The government has also been proposing to introduce legislation in the name of educational reforms to put in place a single regulator for higher education in place of UGC, for a complete overhaul of the higher education regulatory bodies and more governmental control, thereby attacking even the existing autonomy of institutions and promoting privatisation of higher education.

However, all these developments have evoked outrage among students, teachers and the academia across campuses, from TISS to IIT. This is also because there has been a tremendous surge in fees in many campuses – a disproportionate burden of this phenomena has been transferred on to students from marginalised backgrounds.

The impasse is not limited to students only. Many teachers have no permanent jobs and they are called ad-hocs. Many of the best minds which could have gone to teaching have perhaps left academics, some have gone abroad, while others have chosen non-academic professional fields of employment. Students in higher education are not seeing any career prospects, with many of them stressed out with frustration.

This difference between provincial universities and central universities has been growing for a very long time. It started 65 years back, when the funds allocated for a central university were four times more than the funds allocated for a state university. The crisis that is mounting in premier institutions now has already been going on in state universities since the 1980s.

Before the state universities, this trend first started with affiliated colleges. These colleges were not only a strong base for higher education since the 19th century, they were geographically diverse. These colleges have been instrumental in allowing first generation learners to enter higher education since the last eight to ten generations and in making Indian democracy deeper. On the contrary, in the current scenario, even the reports of the National Knowledge Commission or other reports of the UGC are blaming the affiliated colleges for bringing the academic standards down.

Saffronisation of Education

Handing over education to private and corporate forces also mean handing over the federal provincial rights over education to the central government which has been done as a part of the political strategy of consolidating the monolithic discourse in the country – a nation devoid of diversity and plurality. This is nothing new as it has been happening since the days of Emergency. However, the trend is becoming strong and explicit in recent years. In fact, the

current regime's stark and consistent non-performance in the economic front has been masked by the diversionary tactics of aggressive Hindutva and saffronisation of the socio-cultural and educational spheres. Moreover, privatisation, in this context, does not necessarily mean private big business. Privatisation also comprise of those who are struggling to build their hegemony over the education system for political mileage. The school network under Vidya Bharati, a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) affiliate, falls under this arrangement.

Educational and cultural institutions are being communalised. Institutions like the UGC, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), ICHR and Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) have RSS men, or those pliable to Hindutva, appointed as heads. Central universities like JNU, HCU and Pondicherry Central University have come under vicious attacks as efforts to change the course content, discipline teachers and assaults on students' unions and organisations have been organised systematically and relentlessly. History is being re-written, and secular and scientific historical work is being rejected. The attack on scientific institutions and science stems from the regressive Hindutva outlook. Outlays for scientific institutions and research have been cut. Anti-science views based on obscurantist and religious dogmas are being officially promoted.

Besides, the Indian school syllabus was largely secular. Students used to imbibe the essence of secularism, democracy and composite, pluralist cultures in the syllabus. Even if one studied, merely to pass the exam. That is why there are concerted attempts to communalise education.

The agenda of communalisation of education has been taken forward further by individuals entrenched in responsible administrative and governmental posts. Rajasthan's Minister for Primary and Secondary Education issued a direction asking all schools in Jaipur to get their students attend a five-day Hindu spiritual and service fair. There was a VHP stall in the fair which distributed pamphlets on 'Love Jihad'. Central ministers are propagating theories against established scientific principles and scientific temper. These kind of statements by several ministers, including the prime minister, has been witnessed earlier also. The Minister of State for Human Resource Development, Satyapal Singh, is the latest in this 'group' and is directly related to the future of the education system of India. He has claimed that the theory of evolution put forth by naturalist Charles Robert Darwin was "scientifically wrong"; he has advocated that it should be changed in school and college text books.

The second danger of the saffronisation of higher education in India today is more sinister and damaging. Since communalism is closely intertwined with casteism in our country, both

representing an attitude of mind that is imbued with contempt for the oppressed and the marginalised, the communalisation of higher education goes hand-in-hand with the strengthening of caste prejudices.

Recently, 62 institutes of higher education were given full autonomy. The timing of these notifications is perfect from the view-point of RSS. They have appointed their men in almost all the leading universities in the country, giving them a free hand in deciding different courses.

Saffronisation, of course, means the imposition of one culture only, and this includes language. The central government and institutions are misusing their power to impose diktats on the use of Hindi, with other directives on education and culture which are an onslaught on the states' rights in a federal multi-cultural and multi-linguistic society.

Structural Marginalisation Based on Caste, Gender and Religion

Elementary education in India started undergoing certain positive changes after the 1990s. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), started in 2002, and the Right to Education (RTE), was passed around 2009. For the first time in India's history, these two national projects have brought those sections in the loop of higher education who could never have dreamt of reaching these academic thresholds earlier. These sections are the first crop of expansion in elementary education and

include a large number of female students, including adivasi, Dalit and minority students.

However, this has also been the period when the State has officially declared that universities must mobilise their own financial resources. This makes the whole situation extremely complex. While student intake inside universities has started reflecting social diversity, financial starvation makes it untenable for the universities to support this diversity in the long run.

Since 2014, with the advent of the current regime at the helm of affairs, a rabidly upper caste, supremacist, regressive, anti-poor and anti-Dalit political formation has been enjoying unbridled power in India. The very meaning of education has been reduced to wasting the tax-payers' money. Institutional discrimination based on caste, gender, religion, region or language is a reality in educational institutions across the country. In 2011, the Thorat Committee tabled its report on caste discrimination in higher education and made strong recommendations to uplift the status of lower caste, minority students and teachers. However, till this day, not only does caste-based discrimination still exist within institutes of higher education in India, but, there has been a consistent effort to exclude students belonging to deprived sections from higher education. The project is to diminish the inclusive space of the academia, while, essentially, reserving the right to education for the wealthy and the privileged.

Recent government policies with a clear thrust on privatisation and saffronisation of education have had a severe impact on students from the marginalised communities. The reservation norms are not followed in many institutions and this negative process has increased in the last four years. As per the MHRD report 'All India Survey on Higher Education, 2016', Scheduled Castes (SC) students constitute 13.9% and Scheduled Tribes (ST) students comprise 4.9% of the total enrolment. As many as 33.75% students belong to Other Backward Classes (OBC), 4.7% students belong to the Muslim Minority and 1.97% belong to other minority communities.

From fund cuts and seat cuts in research, to doing away with government fellowships and subsistence charges for the marginalised community – these are glaring examples of the shrinking inclusive space in the education system in India. The number of scholarships granted in a scheme meant for higher education, 'Merit Scholarship for College and University Students' for SC/ST/OBC has gone down from 13,898 in 2014-2015 to 8,361 in 2015-2016, a shocking drop of 40%. The scholarships for vocational and technical education meant for SC/ST/OBC students were 2,062 in 2014-15. The number was NIL for 2015-16. The central government budget was Rs 3,347.9 crore for the scholarship scheme in 2017-18; it was reduced to Rs 3,000 crore in 2018-19, despite massive arrears in undisbursed scholarships.

The ministry of social justice and empowerment informed Parliament on

February 2, 2018 that the pending scholarship claims from states for SC students amounted to Rs 6,824.5 crore. The states of Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra are each owed over Rs 1,400 crore. This is part of a chain of events occurring across educational institutions in our country, whereby, gradually, drastic changes are being made to facilitate ‘Brahminical’ ideas.

The right to education is being throttled everyday and institutions are focusing less on infrastructural development to accommodate every section. An educational institution serves as a harbinger for inclusive ideas in a heterogeneous yet unified society. It must be kept in mind that such incidents are not isolated events. Indeed, they are a symptom of misplaced priorities of the government, in a country which is being plagued by atrocities on women, minorities, Dalits and the marginalised sections.

Patriarchy has always restricted women and girls from having an equal footing with men in an unequal and male-dominated society. However, after protracted and hard struggles, if women are able to enter the university spaces, the male-chauvinist and dogmatic ideology of the Hindu Right is leaving no stone unturned to reverse this. While the government is claiming to create gender equality under the empty rhetoric of ‘Beti bachao, Beti padhao’ – it is suppressing the voices of women who are striving towards an aspirational life of dignity, equality, progress and justice. The

massive and spontaneous uprising of girl students in BHU against sexual harassment and discrimination, which was supported by students across the country, is a case in point.

The Supreme Court of India, in its ruling on the Writ Petition (Criminal) Vishaka vs. State of Rajasthan (1997), has categorically stated on the need for prevention and deterrence of sexual harassment at the work place. Since then, there have been modifications as per newer developments such as the SAKSHAM guideline by UGC (2013), Justice JS Verma Committee Report and Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (2013). However, very few institutions still have an effective Gender Sensitisation Committee against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH). This is a clear manifestation of gender insensitivity and irresponsibility on the part of administration of these institutes. Among the institutions if it does exist, how much they are active is also under question.

In this context, the manner in which successive governments have allowed women’s studies departments to hang by the thread with their faculty positions being tied to each plan, never being made permanent and having to wait for sanction of funds each year, is indicative of the low importance being given to the study of institutionalised discrimination against women in Indian society. This needs to be addressed. Equally significant, when the BJP comes to power there are moves to rename women’s

studies as family studies, as happened in the Vajpayee regime, and, more recently, it was suggested that women's studies could ensure the production of "*sanskari bahus*" by the vice-chancellor of Barkatullah University, Bhopal.

After the 'institutional murder' of Dalit scholar Rohith Vemula, a talented PhD scholar in HCU, one of the strongest demands has been to constitute an Act against such organised discrimination in educational spaces. The framing of the 'Rohith Act' with urgency, in consultation with academicians, civil society activists and students, is yet to be done. There is a need to constitute effective measures from the school level to address institutional discrimination and create grievance redressal mechanisms in the spirit of the Rohith Act.

Discrimination faced by Students from Kashmir and North-East

Repression and continued civilian killings in Kashmir is a matter of deep concern. More dangerous is the narrative being built regarding students from Kashmir in other parts of India. Two Kashmiri students were assaulted by a mob in Mahendargarh, Haryana. These students, who belong to the minority community, had gone to offer Friday prayers. It was only after the students tweeted and former chief ministers Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti of Jammu and Kashmir intervened and urged the chief minister of Haryana to intervene, that a case was registered. This also exposes the sorry

state of affairs of the law and order situation in Haryana where the chief minister's intervention is needed to register an FIR.

This is not an isolated incident. There have been many incidents in the recent past. In 2016, 'Pakistan zindabad' slogans were found written at the Central University of Haryana, Mahendargarh. Kashmiri students were charged and forced to accept the offence. Similar incidents have taken place in Rajasthan, UP and other parts of the country where people from a particular religious community are being targeted and assaulted.

There is a general atmosphere of hatred and violence in the entire country in the name of religion, caste, ethnicity or gender. The whole nation and the central and state governments are aware of the forces behind these attacks, and, yet, the organised mobs and perpetrators continue to enjoy complete impunity. On the contrary, in a dark and sinister irony, often, the victims are charged with false cases – harassed and hounded.

Similarly, students from the north-eastern part of India also face relentless racial discrimination of various kinds. According to the Bezbarua Committee report, 86% of people from the North-East face racial discrimination in the rest of the India. Out of the total migration from the North-East, majority of them come to Delhi and elsewhere in India for higher education. One reason for this exodus is the absence of institutions of excellence

in the North-East. Indeed, Delhi has been seen as the worst offender among the metro cities when it comes to racial discrimination against people from the North-East.

The Jamia Millia University Report mentions that about two-thirds of the women surveyed frequently suffered varying forms of discrimination in their daily lives. Most common forms of discrimination relate to over-charging of taxi and auto fares, lewd comments, teasing, molestation and being mistaken as foreigners at tourist spots, marketplaces, museums etc. Discrimination, sexual harassment, physical assault by local landlords and property dealers are also frequently reported, particularly by women of the North-East. Based on the recommendations of the Bezbarua Committee, there is a proposal to amend the provisions of the Indian Penal Code relating to "promoting or attempting to promote acts prejudicial to human dignity" and "words, gestures or acts intended to insult a member of a particular racial group".

Significantly, few cases of sexual harassment, violence and even deadly attacks make it to the media. However, for the north-easterners who live in other parts of the country, especially in northern India, the abuse and discrimination is consistent and relentless.

Criminalisation of Dissent

There is a continuous attack on education and educational institutions today under

the patronage of the BJP government at the Centre. Since 2014, the attacks on freedom of expression and democracy on campuses and attempts to crush democratic and intellectual/academic cultures in educational institutions have been rampant and routine. Attacks on JNU, HCU, FTII, BHU and IIT-Madras, among others, featured prominently in media debates; they became subjects of national concern and witnessed concerted and resilient struggles by students and teachers across campuses.

There have been countless incidents all over the country. For instance, DU's Ramjas College Literary Society witnessed organised violence by Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), literally backed by the Delhi Police for two consecutive days when they actually captured the college campus. The violence was also unleashed against girl students on the streets of DU with the worst of sexual abuses and threats of physical assault. The literary society had organised a seminar on 'Cultures of Protest' on February 21, 2017, where JNU student leader Umar Khalid, among others, were invited to speak in what was a collective seminar of the students and faculty of Ramjas College. Due permission was taken. It goes to the credit of the students that despite the vicious violence, threats and abuses, they resisted in the classical tradition of non-violent and peaceful protest, and were not intimidated.

In another incident, Gurmehar Kaur, a student of Lady Shri Ram College in

Indian Campuses Under Siege

Delhi, was threatened so brazenly that she had to lodge a complaint with the Delhi Commission for Women and needed police protection. Her crime: she stood for freedom of intellectual and academic expression and the right to debate and discuss, and expressed her dissent against the violent tactics of the ABVP.

This series of attacks continue unabated. The pattern has strengthened with the university administration and the public authorities, including the law enforcement agencies, acting in collusion, thereby giving total impunity to the perpetrators and those who indulge in mob violence.

There is a systematic attempt to curb any voice of dissent by the present administrations of various universities and educational institutions, backed by the RSS-BJP. The brutal suppression of dissent by the State machinery and by RSS-BJP sponsored mobs has a method in the madness. We have seen suppression of dissenting voices – from students and youth to peasants and workers. The ABVP pelted stones in the Literature Society Fest at a seminar room in Ramjas College on 22 February 2017, injuring several students and teachers. Students of Panjab University were charged with sedition for protesting against fee hikes; documentary filmmaker Divya, whose acclaimed film 'Kakoos', a searing documentary about manual scavenging, was arrested for her participation in a students' protest in 2009.

Historians are not allowed to speak in public platforms, books are banned arbitrarily, film screenings and public discussions are not allowed in campuses, the critical media is crushed or blocked by jammers, neutral journalists are hounded or forced to resign, only sycophants are allowed to function, articles or media programmes critical of government policies are not allowed to be published/screened, surveillance has marked a new high – in what is being termed as micro-management of a sinister Orwellian empire.

MPhil and Phd students were not allowed to submit their thesis in JNU, despite court orders. Arbitrary and exorbitant fines have been put on students for peaceful assembly and protests in JNU, among other acts of the hounding of teachers and students.

This is a direct attack on the liberal and progressive inheritance of campuses across country, against the freedom of expression and the intellectual ethos of a democracy.

Students' Union in Educational Institutions

Education is not an instrumental process, but a transformative process that is conducive to equitable, just and sustainable social development. Education should promote nation-building, uphold the constitutional values based on secularism and justice, and foster the multiple pluralism of religion, language and ethnicity that form

a part of Indian democracy. The teaching-learning process should be designed as a critical and creative activity. This also implies the growth of a campus culture that is democratic, plural, secular and egalitarian, where social justice is assured and no one is discriminated on the basis of caste, class, sex, gender or creed. In such a structure, primary decision-making on all academic matters should vest with the larger academic community in which students are the biggest in number.

The recent process of undermining student politics began in 2006 with the recommendations of a Supreme Court-appointed committee, headed by former election commissioner JM Lyngdoh, tasked with framing guidelines on students' union elections in colleges and universities. These recommendations have weakened democratic student politics via a range of restrictions. Besides, the IITs, IIMs and several other campuses don't even have effective students' unions.

Recently, two committees, formed by the present government, submitted their draft reports⁴. The basic approach of the documents available is undemocratic, arbitrary, non-transparent and muddled

in its approach and perspective. The documents consciously discard integrating secular values and deny democratic organisational rights to students, teachers and employees.

Peaceful, democratic and independent expression and conduct is the right of students. To form unions and associations, to assemble, to discuss and debate in public platforms, to protest peacefully, to demand justice, to participate in the management of educational institutions and in all activities connected with the academic and other aspects of student life, is also a right of students.

The understanding among students in contemporary times is clear; a multiple fight is to be waged. Not just against the periodic attacks on campuses by Right-wing forces backed by the State, but also against the privatisation of higher education (in the form of reduced funding, increase in fees and discontinuance of waivers and support), and the assaults on the principles of social justice, freedom of intellectual/academic expression, and in support of affirmative action. This is crucial, to preserve the progressive and secular essence of Indian universities.



Footnotes

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Jury's Interim Report

Released on April 13, 2018 at New Delhi

People's Tribunal on Attack on Educational Institutions was held at the Constitution Club of India, New Delhi, on April 11-13, 2018. The tribunal was organised by the People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space in India (PCSDS). The jury panel of the tribunal comprised Justice (Retd.) Hosbet Suresh, Justice (Retd.) B.G. Kolse Patil, Prof Amit Bhaduri, Dr Uma Chakravarty, Prof T.K. Oommen, Prof Vasanthi Devi, Prof Ghanshyam Shah, Prof Meher Engineer, Prof Kalpana Kannabiran and Ms Pamela Philipose. Prof Romila Thapar was the Chair of the plenary session of the tribunal.

Testimonies of 120 students and teachers from close to 50 institutions and universities¹ spread across 17 states² were considered by the jury panel; 49 testimonies were deposed orally at the tribunal. Along with these testimonies, there were 17 expert submissions³ on all thematic⁴ issues.

Broad observations based on depositions

The centrality of higher education to the survival of Indian democracy, was the

theme of the two and a half days of the Tribunal. This why the higher education system must itself be the space where the freedom to think, explore, discuss, and also to dissent, is maximised. Higher education institutions must be open to all sections of society, particularly those marginalised in multiple ways. Ample evidence of the significant deepening of the crisis over the last four years was provided. Alarm bells are ringing loud and clear. Retrieving and rejuvenating the higher education to conform to our constitutional values must be the nation's top priority.

Privatisation of Education

We have observed through depositions made by students, teachers and experts that there is a systematic onslaught on the very idea of higher education in India. The recent decision by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development to grant autonomy to public institutions is an example of how the state is seeking to ensure that students from poor and backward communities are driven to the periphery and denied access to equal, quality and affordable education. In the name of autonomy, vocationalised and

market friendly courses are now being promoted.

Consequently, we found that across the country, institutions that once had good representation of SC, ST and OBC students are now in danger of losing their presence, precisely because these institutions have introduced fee structures that are completely unaffordable. We found that students are in a state of desperation. The diversity of representation of students in some of these prestigious institutions are in danger of being undermined by unaffordable fee structures introduced during the recent past.

Along with this are certain entrance models imposed by the Centre that have worked against the interests of local students. A case in point here is that of a brilliant dalit student, Anita from rural Tamil Nadu, who was very keen on studying medicine but couldn't because of the new model of entrance test called NEET. Entrance exams like this is a deliberate attempt to homogenise access to higher education that disproportionately and negatively impacts SC, ST and OBC students. This is also an attempt to undermine the federal structure. She filed a case in the Supreme Court but lost all hope, her heart and committed suicide when she lost the case.

Structural adjustments in higher education has had many negative impacts on students and teachers. The rising adhocism of teaching staff has created uncertainty among the teachers and

undermined critical thinking of both staff and students. For example, since the mid 80s there have been very few permanent appointments in the universities in Madhya Pradesh and the University of Delhi is believed to have 5000 vacancies at present. This has severely impacted the quality of education and the capacity for questioning. Ironically, when the state had a lower growth rate it was spending more on education. Today the government is abdicating its constitutional responsibility in funding education. Today we are witnessing not only the privatisation of higher education but also its corporatisation. This has impacted directly on country's literacy level which is stagnating at 75%. In the process, state universities have been reduced to examination boards.

Saffronisation of Education

We have noted that along with this privatisation, there has been a rise of socio-cultural conservatism. Local cultural resources have been appropriated by the Hindutva forces in order to buttress their own presence in local educational institutions. For instance in Assam, there are 500 RSS controlled schools under the name of Shankar Debo Shishu Niketan - 1.6 lakh students are accessing these institutions. The secular philosophy of Shankar Debo has in this way been taken over to project the Hindutva ideology. What we are witnessing is an increasingly homogenous and conformist academic culture.

While essays such as Ramanujan's 300 Ramayanas have been knocked out of the syllabus, the Sanskrit department of the Delhi University is said to be undertaking a "thorough" study of history to prove that Aryans were indigenous to India. We were told that RSS's eight point guide to education is now providing the programmatic framework for these shifts. This is impacting both students and staff. An example cited from one of the prominent universities of Uttar Pradesh where teachers who had no academic qualification have been appointed to positions of authority on the basis of their affiliations with Hindutva outfits. What has been extensively documented is that any dissent or opposition to such efforts to distort history has led to severe crackdowns on students and teachers, a trend that has been accentuated since this government came to power. The ABVP has been privileged in many ways within the universities. For instance, in one case in Bihar these students were the only ones who have "acquired" 75% attendance showing how they are privileged in order to disempower other students.

There has been systematic restrictions on student elections and all efforts to form student unions in many states.

Criminalisation of Dissent

From the testimonies given, it became clear that suppression of dissent has taken various forms like legal action, disciplinary action, coercion within the universities against students and teachers on the basis of their dissent. This has often

taken the form of denial and diversion of entitled funds to targeted students, teachers and departments. This is done with the deliberate intention by the authorities to create an atmosphere of fear and terror within the academic community. In many cases, with unprecedented presence of police and intelligence are particularly targeting vulnerable students especially Muslims, dalits, women and people from marginalised communities.

By placing like-minded people in high posts in the administration, the authorities are being enabled to execute the commands of the government, to attack dissenting students and professors.

The academic community has been subjected not only to physical brutalities and humiliating discriminatory comments, but also to extensive surveillance, inside and outside the campus. The criminal justice system is being used against students and teachers, the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution are being systematically violated and any kind of non-conformity is being criminalised under the guise of one version of nationalism. Labels like "anti-nationals", "terrorists", "deshdrohi", "enemies of the state" are freely used to intimidate students and teachers.

Structural Marginalisation Based on Caste, Gender, Religion and Region

We have observed that there has been intensification of structural

marginalisation of students and teachers belonging to Dalit, tribal, religious minorities, north eastern states, Kashmir and gender based discrimination, including persons belonging to the third gender.

Dalit and tribal students are denied sufficient access to institutions of higher education, including hostels. They are subjected to humiliation based on their identities in the campuses. There is double discrimination in the case of Dalits in the form of decrease of quantum of funds along with every day discrimination faced by them due to their caste identity. When it comes to Dalit female students, the intersection of caste and gender is an additional discrimination and aggravates the situation. In terms of reservation and benefits for OBC students.

By denying reservation and scholarships to these marginalised groups, the learning system is being closed to these communities. It is outrageous that the educational funds and scholarships for the marginalised section is being used as a political tool to seek electoral gains. The geographical distribution of tribal population restricts their access to higher education severely. As the scholarship polices are being linked with new fiscal policies; it is very clear that the banking sector is now being encouraged to provide educational loans to students while they are being denied scholarships. These loans will not only make them enslaved financially but also become a bonded labourer for several years.

Sexual harassment exists systematically in institutional spaces through discriminatory patriarchal practices and intimidatory tactics to reduce them from participating in political activities. Institutions have gender insensitive practices including the failure to understand the discrimination of queer and transgender.

However, there is a spirit of 'Rejection of victimhood' among the Dalit students. Although they are intimidated they have not given up and are fighting back. During the protests demanding extended hostel timings for girl students in a prominent Uttar Pradesh university, the Vice Chancellor reportedly said that "It is unnatural for girl students to study at night".

Breaking down on internal mechanism like Internal Complaints Committee and Sexual Harassment Committees has led students to seek extra institutional mechanisms like courts for redress. Women students are particularly targeted and intimidated, physically and sexually attacked during public protests, which is a patriarchal act by state agents.

Kashmiri students and teachers are doubly stigmatised for being Muslim and Kashmiri. They are also often dubbed as 'anti-nationals', 'Islamist terrorists', 'Pakistani agents' etc. Systematic racist targeting of students from north-eastern states in public spaces are increasing and they also feel estranged due to their identity as tribals. The attacks and discrimination are primarily racist but

have undercurrents of their religious and tribal identities.

The content of knowledge is unfortunately from upper caste teachers in most of the colleges who are attached to majoritarian ideologies and hence classrooms become laboratories where

the minds of young students are being moulded in a certain way. There is no diversity in the learning system.

These trends unless addressed pose a profound danger to the very fabric of Indian democracy. ★★

(Footnotes)

1. Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi University, Jamia Millia University, Jadavpur University, Presidency University, Kolkata University, National University of Juridical Sciences Kolkata, Guwahati University, Tata Institute of Social Sciences Guwahati, Assam Women's University Jorhat, Assam University Silchar, other colleges in Assam, Banaras Hindu University, Allahabad University, Lucknow University, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Central University Lucknow, Aligarh Muslim University, other universities in Uttar Pradesh, Tata Institute of Social Sciences Mumbai, Film and Television Institute of India Pune, Indian Institute of Technology Mumbai, Mahatma Gandhi University Wardha, MS University Baroda, Central University Gujarat, Gujarat University, Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, National Law University Bhopal, Hyderabad Central University, English and Foreign Languages University Hyderabad, Osmania University Hyderabad, Madras University, Pondicherry University, Periyar University Salem, other universities in Tamil Nadu, Patna University, other universities in Bihar, Central University of Haryana, Punjab University, Vanasthalipatna Rajasthan and a few others from Karnataka, Odisha and Jharkhand.
2. Haryana, Punjab, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan.
3. Prof Krishna Kumar, Kanhaiya Kumar, Prof N Raghuram, Prof Nandita Narain, Prof Apoorvanand, Dr Akhil Ranjan Dutta, Dr Karen Gabriel, Dr Abha Dev Habib, Sucheta Dey, Dr Surajit Mazumdar, Dr Partha Sarathi Ray, Adv Mihir Desai, Adv Vrinda Grover, Prof Kanchallaiah, Abhay Xaxa, Dr Vinita Chandra and Gertrude Lamare.
4. Impact of privatisation and globalisation on education, distortion of history and syllabus and saffronisation of education, students unions and elections on campuses, criminalisation of dissent and, structural marginalisation in educational institutions based on caste, gender, religion and region.

PCSDS Guiding Document

People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space

Adopted in the First National Convention of People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space held in New Delhi on May 21-22, 2016

Background Note

1. The political climate in India, as has emerged over the past few years presents a serious challenge in that it clearly fosters an aggressive and intolerant public sphere wherein existing civil society space is fast shrinking, akin to what was experienced and witnessed during the time of emergency. A dangerous discourse legitimised by both State and several non-State actors has gained credence, a discourse that alleges that human rights defenders, who are working to ensure justice and dignity for victims of past and ongoing violations and abuses, for already-marginalised, discriminated and struggling populations and communities, constitute a serious threat to the 'national interest.' These forces have fostered an antagonistic attitude towards human rights defenders: instead of accepting that HRDs are partners to the deepening of democracy, in which task the articulation of human rights violations

and necessary dissent is part, an attitude of open and aggressive hostility has been adopted towards them. This has gone hand in hand with a systematic dilution of laws and practices meant to ensure justice for already-marginalised communities and populations.

2. As a direct consequence, these defenders are now subjected to a growing number of overt and covert acts of intimidation and violence all across India, preventing them from carrying on with their activities. Recent instances of attacks indicate a new pattern of retaliation both from State and non-state actors who range from organisations affiliated to ruling dispensations, to intolerant religio-political formations, to vigilantes targeting sexual minorities, to outfits justifying institutionalised discrimination and to mafias allegedly promoted by corporates indulging in land grabbing and environmental degradation. These instances assume the form of

criminalisation, violations by law enforcement agencies and abuses by private actors with whom these agencies often brazenly collude.

3. Thus, human rights defenders and members of their families are facing threats to their personal and physical security. They are being profiled, harassed, intimidated, ill-treated and subjected to hateful abuse in the media. Their physical security and lives have been threatened in a systematic manner. They are arbitrarily arrested or detained and a number of cases filed against them, their offices raided and files stolen or confiscated; and in extreme cases, they are tortured, made to disappear or even killed. HRDs are the victims of State repression, often charged with fabricated cases, with instances of the State manipulating the judiciary, and have also been witnessing direct threats of authoritarianism, fascism and majoritarian Hindu nationalism.

Some recent instances demonstrate that those strong dissenting voices have found the freedom of expression, association and assembly of not just human rights defenders, but also of writers, artists and certain sections of the media are severely curtailed or threatened.

Some of them face increasing surveillance, through, for example phone-tapping, by state agencies, of their telephones and electronic

surveillance of their mails and postings of social networking sites where they are also trolled and subject to hateful abuse by a variety of non-state actors. The new level of impunity accorded to the perpetrators, the absence of any serious level of accountability and the justifications indulged in by several members of the ruling dispensation are simply galling. Despite the increasing number of complaints and cases registered over the attacks, there has been very little or no action on the ground to formally charge, try and convict those responsible or prevent future attacks, leaving the defenders and members of their families far more vulnerable than ever and unable to carry on with their activities towards ensuring justice for the already-marginalised communities.

4. A number of human rights defenders are increasingly finding themselves isolated in their struggle(s); with this experience of isolation in the public sphere, many of them are being compelled to curtail or scale down their activities rendering them invisible. A number of them have been forced through this marginalisation and lack of solidarity and support, even forced to fully withdraw from the public sphere, rendering the process of ensuring justice for the struggling populations and communities difficult or even impossible. Those continuing to carry on with their work, undaunted, face

increased risks and violence. Yes, defending the defenders and halting the shrinking of civil society space have become crucial and urgent tasks in today's India.

5. In the past too, several initiatives have addressed this serious issue. A number of organisations have developed expertise in key areas such as documentation, urgent-action alerts, counseling for the defenders and their associates, legal aid and helped them access the United Nations' system including its Special Procedures system and the focal point for the defenders at India's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Several of the cases thus highlighted remain pending with the NHRC and need continuous monitoring. Nevertheless, the current context calls for an initiative which needs to be more than reactive and short- or medium-term. A new initiative needs to be inclusive taking on a range of concerns and issues of discrimination; it needs to be pro-active, self-monitoring, long-term and permanent. There is a felt need for the setting up, at the national level, a permanent, credible and inclusive body comprising of eminent persons of civil society and human rights experts to address this issue. A body which can be effective at the national, regional and local mechanisms to defend the defenders themselves. Such an effort can help ensure that these defenders carry on, without fear or insecurity, with their work of ensuring justice for the marginalised populations or communities whose rights are being violated. It can help halt the shrinking of civil society space.
6. As part of this new initiative, several human rights organisations, democratic rights' activists, concerned individuals and people's movement have suggested setting up a new body which will consist of eminent persons from the citizenry and experts on a range of human rights issues. It will have three major objectives: of highlighting ongoing attacks on India's visible and invisible human rights defenders, ensuring protection and justice for them and halting the shrinking of civil society space. It can have the mandate of functioning in a permanent and long-term manner; it can function as a people's human rights commission and evolve its own jurisprudence (and a legal arm to ensure justice, recommend removal of draconian laws and reform existing practices) in line with the country's Constitution as well as international human rights law and standards. It can access, advocate and cooperate with the State and international institutions wherever necessary in the interest of protection of human rights and ensuring justice. It can hold regular sittings at the national, regional/territorial and local levels – to document ongoing attacks on

human rights defenders, record their testimonies, publish research based on evolving patterns, issue alerts anticipating oncoming attacks in certain territories or themes, raise individual cases and territorial or thematic concerns in this regard, campaign for justice and, in this process, carry on advocacy with international and State institutions. Apart from monitoring its own activities on a periodic basis, it can perform public audits of the State institutions including monitoring of those cases already lodged with State and international institutions so that those facing higher levels of risk do not find themselves isolated, insecure, threatened and unable to carry on with their work.

7. In the backdrop of India's changing political climate fostering an intolerant public sphere, and the rapidly shrinking civil society space and increasing harassment and criminalisation of human rights defenders, an initial meeting of individuals and civil society organisations was held in New Delhi

on August 17, 2015. Following the decision of this meeting to seek larger participation and mandate on the issue, a '*National Consultation on Shrinking Democratic Spaces in India'* was held on October 11, 2015, where, after day-long due deliberations, it was collectively agreed to take forward the discussions at regional level. Subsequently six regional and state consultations were organised with a wide range of civil society organisations and individuals in Bilaspur, Guwahati, New Delhi, Bangalore, Bhubaneswar and Ranchi. During these consultations a tentative common agreement emerged on the nomenclature of the process. That the process should be tentatively proposed as 'People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space' (PCSDS) and a larger national convention of the PCSDS be organised in New Delhi on May 21-22, 2016. It was also agreed that a draft guiding document on the PCSDS be formulated and circulated among all stakeholders for further consolidation and refinement in order to take the process forward. ★★

Preamble

Defining Human Rights Defenders

1. We believe that 'Human Rights Defenders' (HRDs) are individuals, groups and associations, committed to defend and uphold all human rights and fundamental freedoms. HRDs work towards elimination of all forms of violations of human rights and protect and promote fundamental freedoms of peoples and individuals, including principles of democracy and secularism. Further, HRDs through their works and engagements, in any form and medium, promote, protect and realise, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. HRDs address any human rights concerns, which can be as varied as, for example, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, extrajudicial killings, prisoner rights, militarisation, social and structural discrimination, employment and livelihood issues, forced evictions and displacements, access to basic necessities for dignified human life, ecology, environment, people's rights over land and natural resources, discrimination on the grounds of gender, caste, ethnicity, religion, faith, ideology and sexual preferences and, rights of indigenous peoples, etc. HRDs seek accountability and

transparency of public institutions and private sector. The definition of HRDs is as inclusive and broad it could be to include students, workers, trade unionists, RTI activists, whistleblowers (state officials), lawyers, journalists, artists, activists, professionals etc. HRDs' work often involves criticism of government/state policies, laws and accords, and non-state actors.

Objective

2. Respond to and advocate the issues of freedoms of opinion, expression, association, assembly, dissent, protest and all other rights, including harassment and criminalisation, of all HRDs, as outlined above.

PCSDS: Structure, Mandate and Membership

3. There will be two tier structure proposed for the process. *People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space (PCSDS)* is the main body, a larger umbrella organisation of which *Permanent People's Tribunal on Shrinking Democratic Space (PPTSDS)* would be a body specifically taking up and

addressing cases of defenders. PCSDS will be membership-based body whereas PPTSDS will be mandated by PCSDS and will consist of jury panels of eminent people drawn from various sectors of society. PPTSDS will periodically look into the instances of shrinking democratic spaces within a given framework as mandated by the PCSDS.

4. PCSDS would be a membership based body of individuals and organisations who agree and accept to defend and uphold all human rights and fundamental freedoms. PCSDS would bring on board the strengths of human rights movement and build upon it towards the said objectives.
5. Any person can apply for membership based on the eligibility criteria laid down in the charter.
6. The individual membership of any member of PCSDS and the right to represent any organisation member of PCSDS, would cease to exist upon being appointed to the PPTSDS.
7. PCSDS would generate financial resources through membership and supporters.
8. Since members of PCSDS will be from across states, all members from within a particular state would form the **State General Body**. State General Body would elect representatives for the **National General Body**. The **National General Body** would elect the **National Executive Committee**.
9. PPTSDS would respond to the issues of freedoms of opinion, expression, association, assembly, dissent, protest and all other rights, including harassment and criminalisation, of all HRDs, as outlined above, by taking up the issues forwarded by PCSDS Secretariat, studying them, holding sittings and coming out with reports.
10. PPTSDS is proposed to have periodic sittings in all regions and nationally and special sittings as deemed fit by PCSDS. PPTSDS as per the requirements would also appoint an *amicus curiae*. PPTSDS would also scrutinise the performances of National and State Human Rights Institutions and all Courts with regard to the said objectives of the PCSDS.
11. The members of the PPTSDS would be approved by the National General Body of PCSDS. The State General Body shall also have the right to recommend / nominate jury members of the PPTSDS. PPTSDS would comprise a wide range of reputed individuals, including former members of judiciary, with a commitment to human rights, from diverse thematic fields, regions and identities hence making the composition inclusive of expertise in a range of issues.

Secretariat

12. The PCSDS secretariat would implement the decision making processes, receive and process complaints/cases and engage in proactive roles, maintain information flow between various concerned bodies and members. The secretariat would also undertake the ongoing work of the PCSDS, research, publications, campaign, advocacy, media, training facilitation, database maintenance, relevant information, coordination with pro-bono legal aid lawyers etc. The PCSDS secretariat would also coordinate with PPTSDS Registry for undertaking PPTSDS activities. The PCSDS secretariat in

coordination with the State Executive Committee would also encourage and assist human rights defenders to bring forward their complaints/cases as per the respective thematic issues to the PPTSDS Registry.

Registry

13. PPTSDS Registry would focus its efforts on legal research to deal with complaints/cases which would eventually be looked into by the PPTSDS. PPTSDS Registry along with the legal researchers would also have thematic experts who would be engaged from time to time as per the requirements of the complaints/cases that would be looked into by PPTSDS.

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Charter of PCSDS

1. Membership

1.1 HRDs being either organisations/ individuals can become member of PCSDS if such organisations/ individuals are committed to the objectives of PCSDS. Such organisations/individuals should also agree to abide by the rules and regulations of PCSDS.

1.2 All members (organisations/ individuals) of PCSDS from a particular state would constitute the **State General Body**.

1.3 An individual can represent both an organisation and self in PCSDS.

However, the principle of one person one vote would be followed in all the procedures.

1.4 An application for membership would have to be made to the **State Executive Committee**, which would vet such application as per the stipulated norms/mechanisms and accept / reject such application after due consideration. The decision of the State Executive Committee in this regard would be reported in the State General Body meeting.

1.5 Any application for membership can also be received by the National

Executive Committee, who shall forward the same to the respective State Executive Committee for assessment. In the absence of the State Executive Committee, the application shall be considered by the National Executive Committee.

- 1.6 Any dispute or complaint regarding member(ship) would be looked into by the committee set-up for the purpose in accordance with the stipulated procedures which would place its findings and recommendations before National Executive Committee for appropriate action.
- 1.7 The members of PCSDS would have the right to elect or to be elected to the State Executive Committee and National Executive Committee through the process laid down for State General Body.
- 1.8 The members would have the right to receive communication and other relevant information related to issues discussed by the PCSDS.
- 1.9 The members would have the right to submit to the State Executive Committee cases / issues recommended to be taken up by the PCSDS.

2. Eligibility Criteria for Membership

- 2.1 That the incoming member accepts the charter documents of PCSDS in totality and shall provide a declaration to that effect.

3. Cessation of Membership

- 3.1 The membership of PCSDS shall cease in the following circumstances:
 - 3.1.1 By resignation;
 - 3.1.2 By dissolution of the organisation;
 - 3.1.3 By default, in payment of membership subscription if any, for three consecutive membership subscriptions;
 - 3.1.4 By expulsion on account of its acting against the interests of the PCSDS provided, however, that resolution confirming expulsion of the member shall be passed by the National Executive Committee on the recommendation received from the committee set-up for the purpose in accordance with the stipulated procedures which would place its findings and recommendations before National Executive Committee for appropriate action. The decision of the National Executive Committee in this regard would be reported in a National General Body Meeting; The National Executive Committee shall ensure that sufficient opportunity of hearing is provided to the member facing such expulsion;
 - 3.1.5 By not attending either three consecutive meetings of the State General Body without a week's prior intimation of their absence to the State Executive Committee.

4. State General Body

- 4.1 The State General Body would meet once in a year
- 4.2 The State General Body would have the powers to:
- 4.2.1 Elect a State Executive Committee
 - 4.2.2 Elect representatives to National General Body
- 4.3 The State General Body would be convened with 21 (twenty-one) days clear notice to the members. An emergency meeting can be held by serving 7 (seven) days' notice. However, in case of specific agenda, a special State General Body meeting can be convened in between two regular meetings of State General Body. Special State General Body can only be called on the requisition of one-fifth members of the State General Body.
- 4.4 The quorum for the State General Body shall be one-third members of the State General Body. If quorum is not established at a scheduled meeting, the meeting shall be reconvened to another date with 7 (seven) days' notice.
- 4.5 The reconvened State General Body shall take up all the functions mentioned in point 4.6 but not point 4.2 above, i.e. take up the business regarding organisational matters such as election of members to the State Executive Committee and recommendation of members to the National General Body, at any reconvened meeting without satisfaction of the requirement for 1/3rd quorum.
- 4.6 The State General Body shall conduct the following business:
- 4.6.1 Confirm the Minutes of the previous meeting;
 - 4.6.2 Action taken arising from the Minutes of the previous meeting;
 - 4.6.3 Review responses by PPTSDS to the matters from the State;
 - 4.6.4 Approve the financial statements and accounts submitted by the State Executive Committee;
 - 4.6.5 Any other matter brought forward by the members.
- 4.7 The matters arising would be decided by a simple majority vote.
- 4.8 No organisation/member shall act as proxy.

5. State Executive Committee

- 5.1 The State Executive Committee would consist of one representative for every five members in the state. For states with less than 15 members, the State Executive Committee would consist of one representative for every three members in the state.
- 5.2 The State Executive Committee shall hold meetings once in three months.

- 5.3 The State Executive Committee will approve memberships and maintain a register of members.
- 5.4 The State Executive Committee would submit the minutes of the meeting and proposals for interventions to PCSDS secretariat.
- 5.5 The State Executive Committee would call for meetings of State General Body once a year and Special State General Body.
- 5.6 The State Executive Committee would identify, discuss and forward cases and issues to Secretariat of PCSDS for interventions required in the state.

6. National General Body

- 6.1 The National General Body would consist of one representative for every ten members in the state. For states with less than 10 members, the National General Body would consist of 1 representative from the state.
- 6.2 The National General Body would meet once in two years. However, in case of specific agenda, a special National General Body meeting can be convened in between two regular meetings of National General Body. Special National General Body can only be called on the requisition of one-tenth members of the National General Body.
- 6.3 The National General Body would have the powers to elect a National

Executive Committee. Special National General Body will not have the powers to elect National Executive Body.

- 6.4 The National General Body would be convened with three (3) months clear notice to the members by the Convenor/Secretary of the National Executive Committee. However, an emergency meeting can be held by serving one (1) month notice.
- 6.5 The quorum for the National General Body shall be one-third members of the National General Body. If quorum is not established at a scheduled meeting, the meeting shall be reconvened to another date with One (1) month notice.
- 6.6 The reconvened National General Body shall not take up any function mentioned in point 6.7, without satisfaction of the requirement for 1/3rd quorum.
- 6.7 The National General Body shall conduct the following business:
 - 6.7.1 Confirm the Minutes of the previous meeting;
 - 6.7.2 Action taken arising from the minutes of the previous meeting;
 - 6.7.3 Review responses by PPTSDS;
 - 6.7.4 Approve the financial statements and accounts submitted by the National Executive Committee;
 - 6.7.5 Any other matter brought forward by the members;

- 6.8 The matters arising would be decided by a simple majority vote.
- 6.9 No organisation/member shall act as proxy.

7. National Executive Committee

- 7.1 The National General Body shall elect from among its members the National Executive Committee. The elected National Executive Committee will have the right to nominate members which it deems required for the functioning of the National Executive Committee.
- 7.2 Nomination Committee may be appointed to receive names from State General Bodies for elections on the National Executive Committee. The panel of names nominated shall thus be put to vote. Those receiving largest number of votes, but not less than thirty percent of the total number of members present and voting at the National General Body shall be declared elected as per the specification of size of the National Executive Committee to be determined by the National General Body.

- 7.3 The composition and character of National Executive Committee shall be as inclusive as possible. The National Executive Committee shall have a size proportionate to the size of membership of the National General Body. For the time being, it shall not be more than ten percent of the total National General Body of the

organisation; and each National General Body shall determine the size of the membership of the National Executive Committee.

- 7.4 The National Executive Committee so elected will elect/appoint from among its member(s) either a Convenor/Secretary or such other office-bearer(s) as it may deem fit from time to time for the duration it may find necessary to do so, and will assign responsibilities and tasks accordingly.
- 7.5 The term of the National Executive Committee shall be for two years. However, no member shall continue on the National Executive Committee for more than two consecutive terms.
- 7.6 If the office of any member of the National Executive Committee is vacated before the term of office expires in the normal course, the resulting casual vacancy may be filled up by the National Executive Committee and any person appointed under this clause shall hold office only up to the date when the member she/he has replaced would have held office.
- 7.7 The National Executive Committee shall hold meeting twice a year, and, if necessary, an emergency meeting of the National Executive Committee shall be convened. The meetings of National Executive Committee should be convened with a prior notice of minimum two (2) months by the convenor/secretary of the

National Executive Committee. The emergency meeting of the National Executive Committee should be convened with a prior notice of minimum fourteen (14) days.

7.8 The quorum of the National Executive Committee shall be one-third members of the National Executive Committee. If a meeting is held up for want of quorum, it shall be adjourned to another date, after prior notice of minimum seven (7) days, when it will not require any quorum.

7.9 If any member of the National Executive Committee remains absent for two consecutive meetings, without assigning any reason(s) in writing to the convenor/secretary, she/he shall be treated as ceased to be the member of the National Executive Committee and the respective State Committee shall be free to nominate another member to fill in the resulting vacancy thus created in the National Executive Committee. Any person so nominated under this clause shall hold office only up to the date when the member she/he has replaced would have held office.

8. Powers and Functions of the National Executive Committee

8.1 The National Executive Committee of the PCSDS as above constituted, shall be subject to the Rules and Regulations of the PCSDS, be the highest Executive Body of the PCSDS

and shall be responsible for organisation, general superintendence, direction and control of the activities of the PCSDS and shall exercise all the powers of the PCSDS not otherwise provided for in these rules and regulations as are necessary or expedient for the management of the PCSDS.

8.2 The National Executive Committee shall look after the growth and work of the PCSDS, in conformity with the policies, perspectives and programmes adopted by the National General Body. The National Executive Committee shall have the power to propose bye-laws to pursue the objectives of the PCSDS, provided such bye-laws are approved by a two-third majority of votes at the National General Body. Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing powers, the National Executive Committee is empowered:

8.2.1 To appoint members to the Secretariat of PCSDS and Registry of PPTSDS, comprising of co-ordinators and other staff who shall be responsible to organise/execute programmes as per the directions of the National Executive Committee, from among the members of the General Body or a suitable person from outside. The National Executive Committee shall fix the remuneration and other benefits of the co-ordinator(s).

8.2.2 To print, publish, issue, and exhibit

any journals, periodicals, books, papers, pamphlets, advertisements, reports, lectures, souvenirs and other reading matter for the advancement, promotion and diffusion of useful knowledge and information concerning the works and activities of the PCSDS and PPTSDS, its objects and concerns.

8.2.3 To delegate all other powers of the National Executive Committee to the President and/or the Vice-

President(s) and/or the Secretary and/or the Treasurer and/or duly authorised agent or agents appointed by the National Executive Committee as may from time to time be deemed necessary or expedient.

8.2.4 To do all such acts and things as are incidental or conducive to the implementation of the above or any one or more of them and as specified in the charter documents.

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Secretariat Details

1. Secretariat would assist the National Executive Committee to implement the decision taken by the National General Body.
2. Secretariat would facilitate the decision making processes and, maintain information flow between various concerned bodies and members.
3. Secretariat would also undertake the ongoing work of the PCSDS, research, publications, campaign, advocacy, media, training facilitation, database maintenance, relevant information, coordination with pro-bono legal aid lawyers etc.
4. Secretariat will receive and process complaints/cases from the membership of PCSDS, engage in proactive roles to identify complaints/cases falling under PCSDS mandate and forward the same to the Registry of PPTSDS for further intervention.
5. Secretariat, if need be, will also assist the Registry of PPTSDS, to obtain further facts and information from the PCSDS membership.
6. Secretariat would also coordinate with the Registry of PPTSDS for undertaking PPTSDS activities.

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Terms of Reference for PPTSDS

1. PPTSDS panel for every sitting would comprise a minimum of three and a maximum of seven members listed on the PPTSDS panel list.
2. PPTSDS panel would comprise of at least one member who has required expertise and experience in the concerned thematic area and one panel member from the geographical region. However, availability of the panel members would be primary condition in the composition PPTSDS panel for its sittings.
3. PPTSDS panel would, if required, appoint a sub-committee, hold bench sittings and appoint *amicus* as whenever required and deemed fit by it.
4. PPTSDS panel for every sitting would be assisted by the Registry of PPTSDS through research, documentation, complaint/case listing and compilation and all required coordination for holding PPTSDS panel sittings.
5. PPTSDS panel would hold its regular sittings on a quarterly basis. PPTSDS panel would also hold special sittings as and when deemed fit by the PCSDS.
6. PPTSDS panel during its quarterly sittings would be furnished by the Registry of PPTSDS with researched and documented socio-political analysis of the context with reference to the PCSDS objective and complaints/cases within the purview of PCSDS objective. PPTSDS panel after every sitting would submit to PCSDS a comprehensive report on the complaints/cases that were taken up for that particular sitting. This report would also include commentary, recommendations and further suggested actions on the complaints/cases looked into by the PPTSDS panel.
7. PPTSDS panel after every sitting would come out with interim findings and recommendations document. The comprehensive final report by the PPTSDS panel would be submitted to PCSDS within a period of 15 days. PCSDS would then further submit the report to all concerned.
8. PPTSDS panel would also accept oral and written submissions from the members of PCSDS. PPTSDS panel would also accept submissions through video conference if required in some cases. PPTSDS would also accept material evidences, photos, videos, etc. for cases it deems fit. PCSDS would also appoint, in case of need, experts and lawyers, to represent the complaints/cases before the PPTSDS panel.
9. PCSDS, if required, would also invite international observers to the proceedings of PPTSDS through video conferencing. ★★

PCSDS National Working Committee

Andhra Pradesh : Ravi Rebbapragada

Assam : Bondita Acharya

Bihar : Santosh Kr Upadhayay

Delhi : Priya Pillai, Anil Chaudhary

Gujarat : Rohit Prajapati, Krishnakant

Himachal Pradesh : Himanshu Kumar

Jharkhand : Dayamani Barla

Karnataka : Akhila

Madhya Pradesh : Dr Sunilam

Maharashtra : Teesta Seetalvad, Lara Jesani

Manipur : Babloo Loitongbam, Mary Beth

Meghalaya : Agnes Kharshiing

Nagaland : T. Limanochet Jamir

Orissa : Narendra Mohanty

Pondicherry : Sugumaran

Punjab : Surinder M Bhanot

Rajasthan : Kailesh Meena

Tamil Nadu : Ramesh Gopalskrishnan, Henri Tiphagne, SP Udaykumar

Telangana : Hema Lalitha

Tripura : Anthony Debbarma

Uttar Pradesh : SR Darapuri, Ravindra Singh

Uttarakhand : PC Tiwari

West Bengal : Shaktiman Ghosh, Kirity Roy

People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space (PCSDS) is a national level membership based body and formed with the objective to respond and advocate the issues of freedoms of opinion, expression, association, assembly, dissent, protest and all other rights, including harassment and criminalisation, of all 'Human Rights Defenders' HRDs. PCSDS believes that HRDs are individuals, groups and associations, committed to defend and uphold all human rights and fundamental freedoms. HRDs work towards elimination of all forms of violations of human rights and protect and promote fundamental freedoms of peoples and individuals, including principles of democracy and secularism. Further, HRDs through their works and engagements, in any form and medium, promote, protect and realise, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. HRDs address any human rights concerns, which can be as varied as, for example, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, extrajudicial killings, prisoner rights, militarisation, social and structural discrimination, employment and livelihood issues, forced evictions and displacements, access to basic necessities for dignified human life, ecology, environment, people's rights over land and natural resources, discrimination on the grounds of gender, caste, ethnicity, religion, faith, ideology and sexual preferences and, rights of indigenous peoples, etc. HRDs seek accountability and transparency of public institutions and private sector. The definition of HRDs is as inclusive and broad it could be to include students, workers, trade unionists, RTI activists, whistleblowers (state officials), lawyers, journalists, artists, activists, professionals etc. HRDs' work often involves criticism of government/state policies, laws and accords, and non-state actors.