

JNUTA statement on JNUTA Public Inquiry against Professor M. Jagadesh Kumar, Vice-Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University

27 OCT
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On 18th September 2017, at around 1 p.m., behind the closed doors of Room No. 225 of the JNU Administrative Block, with barely 20 people present, a fifth of whom opposed it, within the space of a few minutes:

- a) a charge was orally made out against a faculty member who was the Chairperson of a Centre and was not present there or even supposed to be present;
- b) a verdict of guilty and quantum of punishment were arrived at; and
- c) an order implementing that punishment was immediately issued

All of this took place without the faculty member concerned being even informed that she was being charged, without asking her what she had to say on the charge against her and therefore, obviously without hearing it either.

Who was the chief architect of this farce? JNU's esteemed Vice-Chancellor, Professor M. Jagadesh Kumar.

Between 23rd and 26th October 2017, in an open public space like Sabarmati Lawns, with several people present and many others being able to view these on You Tube, a very different process has unfolded and spread over several hours:

a) A set of charges were made out against an individual who is the Vice-Chancellor of a University which were served to him in advance, on 17th October 2017;

b) He was given the opportunity to respond to the charges in writing and also invited to be present himself or through his representative during these proceedings;

c) Detailed written and oral presentations were made in substantiation of these charges by a group of faculty members, which included a range from very senior and distinguished Professors who have served the University for decades to younger colleagues who joined more recently. What was common among them was that each of whom were appointed through a due process and on the recommendations of Selection Committees whose composition was above board;

d) Even though the defendant chose to waive his right to defend himself, his 'defence' on each of the charges was also presented in as honest a manner as is possible – orally as well as in writing.

e) Each day a jury of distinguished and renowned individuals heard the presentations in favour of the charges as well as the 'defence', and received all the written submissions and supporting documents, and thereafter

made their individual and initial observations;

f) And the final verdict and decision on the ‘quantum of punishment’ is still awaited.

Who was the defendant in this process – the individual charged with offences far graver than anything Professor Nivedita Menon was accused of and summarily punished for? JNU’s esteemed Vice-Chancellor, Professor M. Jagadesh Kumar. Who was the architect behind these proceedings? The General Body of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Teachers’ Association!

The difference between these two sets of events separated by just over a month, both involving the same individual but in different ways, tell us the difference between: what JNU is, what it has been, what it continues to want to be; and what the Vice-Chancellor would like to change it into. This reflects a clash between two visions of JNU, indeed of a University, which are fundamentally incompatible with each other. All the specific charges which have been examined in this public inquiry stem from this difference – they are the outcome of a Vice-Chancellor attempting to make an unyielding University conform to his vision and this vision (or non-vision) being what it is, destruction of the University as a University is both a means as well as an end of that process.

Article 1 of the Charge Memorandum dealing with the defendant’s violations of statutory provisions was covered on Day 1 and heard by a distinguished jury consisting of:

1. Professor Prabhat Patnaik, Emeritus Professor at CESP.

2. Akshaya Mukul, Award winning journalist and author.

3. Professor Apoorvanand, Distinguished Professor at Delhi University

4. Nandita Narain, Former President of the DUTA

5. Professor P.K. Yadava, Retired Professor of the School of Life Sciences in JNU.

Articles 6 and 7 dealing with the defendant's role in the dismantling of the GSCASH and his callousness in the matter of the tragic disappearance of Najeeb Ahmed were covered on Day 2 before the following distinguished jurors:

1. Kalyani Menon Sen, feminist activist and writer

2. Bhasha Singh, award winning journalist and author

3. Rahul Roy, Filmmaker

4. Saif Mahmood, Advocate of the Supreme Court

5. T.K. Rajalakshmi, Senior journalist and former President of the IWPC

Day 3 was devoted to Articles 2 and 3 on the defendant's role in undermining the integrity of faculty selection as the damage done to admissions to JNU's research programmes and violations thereby of reservation policies. The distinguished jury included:

1. Professor Utsa Patnaik, Emeritus Professor at CESP

2. Kirti Jain, former Director of the National School of Drama

3. Dr. Gauhar Raza, Scientist and poet

The final set of charges were taken up on Day 4, yesterday – Articles 4 and 5, which accused the defendant of behaving like an autocrat – harassing teachers and assaulting JNU’s democratic ethos. Hearing these were:

1. Vinod Dua, Distinguished Senior Journalist.

2. Professor Zoya Hasan, Retired Professor of Politics from JNU.

3. Professor Anand Kumar, Retired Professor of Sociology from JNU.

4. Bezwada Wilson, prominent social activist and Convenor of the Safai Karamchari Andolan.

All the distinguished jurors who came gave their observations orally and some have also submitted in writing. We expect that more written submission will be forthcoming and these shall all be put together in a final document along with all the written submissions in substantiation of the charges and their supporting documents, and not to forget the “defence” statements. What is clear, however, from what is already available that without exception all the members of the juries acknowledged the massive scale of the damage being done to this public institution by the Vice-Chancellor, and accepted that there was compelling evidence for the same.

Members of the jury spoke about the *Ahankar* (arrogance) which characterizes today's JNU administration and of the intellectual corruption that was growing under its aegis. Describing it as JNU's situation today, it was pointed out that rarely does one see someone having such disdain for the institution he heads and for the faculty and students whose interests he is supposed to protect and advance. That he perhaps needed to do a course on masculinity, and learn more about the social sciences he holds in contempt, were also highlighted. The VC was reminded of the fact that the students and members of the staff of the University are a much more permanent component of the University than the VC. He was also found wanting in his responsibility to not only to ensure adherence to statutory provisions but also that of ensuring that the University function on the basis of a sense of community which represented the diversity of our country and which required it to function with a "ethico-legal" framework. The moral indefensibility of his actions on the question of selection committees, the GSCASH and on M.Phil and Ph.D admissions, and of his inaction on Najeeb Ahmed's case, apart from the violations of statutory provisions involved, was also pointed out. It was observed that a person who is a member of the UGC and often uses its regulations as his weapons of destruction was violating these regulations themselves and the UGC's code of professional ethics. That what the VC is attempting to inflict is a major paradigm shift in JNU which is putting its character as a space of open debate and dialogue under duress was highlighted and the format of the JNUTA public inquiry as the exact anti-thesis of what was being attempted by the VC was appreciated. The fact that such an inquiry had to be held was also said to be sufficient evidence in itself of the fact that there was something seriously wrong in the University.

Put together, what the jurors opined added up to the following:

- 1) Professor M. Jagadesh Memorandum is guilty as charged of each of the charges laid out against him in the Charge Memorandum;
- 2) Taken together they imply that he is also guilty of leading a process that can be unambiguously described as having disastrous consequences for the future of this premier institution as a centre of academic excellence in the widest possible sense of the term; and
- 3) Therefore, Professor M. Jagadesh Kumar is unfit to be the Vice-Chancellor of JNU.

The members of the jury also suggested that a class action litigation or an appeal for a Visitor's inquiry could be the route to achieving 3) in case Professor Jagadesh Kumar does not step down on his own, as a self-respecting Vice-Chancellor should under these circumstances.

All of these observations and the complete final report would be placed before the JNUTA GB, the Competent Authority which initiated this Public Inquiry, for necessary consideration and action. However, JNU is a public institution which belongs first and foremost to the people of the country. We place all the proceedings and the results of this inquiry before the public for its own verdict – and urge upon the representatives of this public to consider what this inquiry has highlighted seriously and to act before it is too late.

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