

Statement on violence and intimidation in Delhi University and other universities

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The JNU Teachers Association condemns in strongest terms the violence and hooliganism perpetrated in Delhi University by the ABVP over the last two days, reported widely in the media. What is also worrying, along with the violence unleashed is, that by all accounts, the police seemed unwilling to control the violence and remained a mute spectator. The events at Delhi University are part of a larger pattern by which the university as a space for freedom and the adventure of ideas is being attacked by.

The Delhi University Incidents

The latest event in this series of attacks on the universities in Delhi University unfolded in two related episodes. Two JNU students, Umar Khalid and Shehla Rashid, were invited to speak at a seminar on “Cultures of Protest”, organized by the English department of Ramjas College. On 21st February, the seminar was not allowed to begin and hooligans went on a rampage: stones were thrown on the seminar hall, the electricity connection to the hall was cut, the students and teachers were locked inside. The college principle was forced to cancel the talks by both JNU students, as the police expressed an inability to guarantee their safety and

protests, in what is a serious infringement on their fundamental right to speak and express their thoughts and opinions in any part of the country.

The second episode in this event of ABVP orchestrated violence happened yesterday (22nd February). Some students and teachers of Delhi university had given a call for a march from Ramjas College to Maurice Nagar police station to protest the previous day's violence and the police inaction and to file FIR against the perpetrators of the violence. After 1 pm on the 22nd, when the protesters had gathered near Ramjas college, violence was again unleashed by the ABVP that went on for hours. Many students and teachers of the university were roughed up, media persons were attacked and their equipment damaged. In these incidents, some of our colleagues, including Dr. Prasanta Chakravarty of the English Department, were injured and had to be taken to the hospital. By most media accounts. it is also clear that police, while present at the site, appeared to unwilling to take any action against the perpetrators of the violence, and chose to look the other way most of the time.

The grand design

In the last couple of years, the universities in India have witnessed a consistent pattern of attack on the universities as spaces of the adventure of ideas and freedom of thought by the votaries of Hindutva wherein the student wing of RSS, the ABVP plays the role of their foot soldiers. This was seen in Hyderabad Central University, Jadavpur University, JNU, the Central University of Haryana, Mahendragarh, JNV University Jodhpur, and latest in Delhi University. In a similar incident, Dr. Rajshree Ranawat of the English Department of JNVU, Jodhpur, is being hounded by the same

Hindutva fascists along with our colleague Prof. Nivedita Menon. Dr. Ranawat has been suspended by the Jodhpur University. Her “crime” is that she had invited Prof. Menon to speak at a national seminar. In a similar incident last year, the students and teachers of the Central University of Haryana, Mahendragarh, were hounded, harassed and threatened for performing a play by Mahashweta Devi! What is common in all these incidents is that all cultural and intellectual programmes, all thoughts, ideas, and forms of expression perceived to be objectionable by the Hindutva forces are threatened and in effect forcibly stopped using violence, threat, and the use of various means of intimidation. As a matter of fact, any ideological-political formation that doesn’t agree with their ideas of nationalism and patriotism feels threatened by the continuously haunting spectre of being called “anti-national.” This is an extreme form of intolerance that needs to be resisted and rebuffed by all means at our disposal as a responsible academic community committed to the democratic pluralism guaranteed in the constitution.

Another worrying aspect of this pattern is the state’s abdication of its responsibility as a protector of constitutional rights of the citizens. The protection of citizen’s fundamental rights should be the default position of the state authorities. Unfortunately, in most of these case, what we have seen is just the opposite of this as the police, in most cases, have miserably failed to perform its constitutional duty by either remaining mute spectator to the unfolding violence and intimidation or as seen in some cases, by siding with the perpetrators. Institutions of higher education in fact need special protection as they are spaces for the adventure and experiments in ideas, and freedom of thought and discussion is the very prerequisite of research and experiment in ideas.

Like teachers across the country, the JNUTA finds that there is a grand design underlying this orchestration of violence against freedom of speech, thought, and expression—the extermination of the very idea of university. The JNUTA expresses its profound solidarity with the teachers and students of the Delhi University and stands in unequivocal support for the defence of our fundamental rights.

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