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Press Statement condemning the abusive and threatening public reference on Facebook by ABVP student against Prof. K. Laxminarayana, University of Hyderabad, and the partisan and criminal inaction of the University authorities

AIFRTE strongly condemns the abusive and threatening public reference on Facebook to senior Prof. K. Laxminarayana of the School of Economics, University of Hyderabad by a student, Kaluram Palsaniya alias Karan Palsaniya belonging to the ABVP, at the Department of History of the same university. Claiming to be a critique of an examination paper set by Prof. Laxminarayana for the elective option Economics of Education, the intemperate response of the ABVP student in fact targets a specific question on the impact of 'privatization and saffronization' on higher education.

However, there is more to the highly politically motivated reaction of this student. Prof. Laxminarayana had published a critical analysis of the Justice Roopanwal Commission set up by MHRD to enquire into the circumstances leading to the 'suicide' of Dalit Ph.D scholar Rohith Vemula [*Why Justice Roopanwal's Report is a Travesty?* Economic & Political Weekly, vol. 52, issue no. 46, 18th November 2017]. Vemula's 'suicide' had set off a nation-wide protest and resistance against what was widely perceived as an institutional failure to prevent social discrimination against Dalit research scholars, to address their genuine academic grievances and to prevent rank insensitivity and negligence such as not releasing scholarships for months on end to scholars from very deprived sections of society. In fact, the Supreme Court had asked universities to immediately enquire into the causes of the high number of suicides of students from these sections.

Prof. Laxminarayana's article clearly showed the role of Susheel Kumar, (an ABVP student who posted abusive social media messages branding Ambedkar Students Association (ASA) members as 'anti-nationals' and 'goons' while accusing them of assaulting him), of Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) MLC Ramachandra Rao, and Central Ministers Smriti Irani and Dattareya in pressurizing the Vice-Chancellor and University authorities to reverse the original findings of the proctorial board and instead expel six Dalit scholars from the hostel. This expulsion was widely seen as a form of 'social exclusion' routinely experienced by Dalits in villages. Consequently the expelled students referred to the open area they occupied as *velivada*, the traditional name for the excluded zone earmarked for Dalits.

The Justice Roopanwal Commission, as Prof. Laxminarayana's article forcefully argues, was "appointed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) . . . when Rohith's aggrieved friends lodged a case under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act which was pending against the then HRD Minister, Smriti Irani, BJP minister Bandaru Dattareya and other prominent BJP functionaries and the Vice-Chancellor Appa Rao Podile. Second, the Commission had no Dalit member in spite of it being mandatory to look into the facts surrounding the death of a Dalit scholar..."

(P.T.O.)

शिक्षा नहीं कोई कारोबार, है यह जनता का अधिकार

Contact:

Organising Secretary: Sri D. Ramesh Patnaik, Hyderabad; Mob: 09440980396, 040-23305266; Email: drameshptk@gmail.com
Treasurer: Dr M Gangadhar, Hyderabad; Mob: 09440414073; Email: manchalagangadhar@gmail.com

It looked at no fresh or countervailing evidence, ignored the original proctorial report which recommended moderate disciplinary action against *both* sides, as also the medical reports that gave no evidence of ABVP's Susheel Kumar either having been assaulted or injured as he claimed. The Commission's Report merely repeated the conclusions arrived at by inquiries of subsequent committees which had been instigated by intense pressure from BJP leaders and ministers.

Further, the Report, as Prof. Laxminarayan's article points out, far exceeded its mandate in taking up an issue that could only be examined by the revenue department and not in civil court, i.e. the caste status of Rohith Vemula. In concluding that Rohith was a non-Dalit, the Roopanwal Commission's Report was therefore both "illegal and unethical". From the age of three years, Rohith was raised along with his siblings by his Dalit mother on her meager earnings as a domestic help, as her OBC husband had deserted her *because* of her caste status.

However, the Report 'saved' the BJP ministers and members, and the University's V.C. and other officials from prosecution under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

Against this background, the abusive facebook entry acquires a menacing aspect. We have seen how the Sangh Parivar's Hindutva groups, of which ABVP is a prominent presence within the institutions of higher education, have politically, ideologically and even physically targeted intellectuals and scholars who hold different views which are secular, constitutional and democratic. In an earlier case of use of abusive language on a poster of Dr. Ambedkar, the enquiry committee had felt it necessary to suspend a student for one-and-a-half years as this use of uncivilized language by the ABVP is sought to be made a regular form of assault and public humiliation against any persons who oppose their ideology and misconduct on the campus.

As a faculty member, as a member of the University's Executive Council and as former President of the Hyderabad University's Teachers Association, Prof. Laxminarayana's contribution to the development of the University is well-established. As such, we are shocked that the University has failed to respond to or take any action on his complaint which was submitted to the University's Vice-Chancellor and Chief Proctor on 30th November 2017.

As an active member of the Save Education Committee of united Andhra Pradesh and as the current Organizing Secretary of the Save Education Committee of Telangana, and as member of the National Executive of the AIFRTE, Prof. Laxminarayana is also a leading figure in the all-India education movement. Scholars like Prof. Laxminarayana, who promote and advance democratic struggles for social justice, have been viciously targeted by the Hindutva forces. As such we take this intellectual and personal threat to Prof. Laxminarayana with all the seriousness that it deserves.

AIFRTE demands that

- Kaluram Palsaniya alias Karan Palsaniya, Ph.D student of the Department of History, University of Hyderabad, be suspended immediately for abusing, seeking to defame and humiliate a senior Professor of the University of Hyderabad;
- Authorities should conduct an enquiry as per University policy and rules to decide the quantum of punishment that Kaluram Palsaniya alias Karan Palsaniya should receive;
- University should explain why no action was taken against Kaluram Palsaniya alias Karan Palsaniya following the offence and even after receiving the representation of Prof. K. Laxminarayana on 30th November 2017;
- Criminal proceedings should be initiated against Kaluram Palsaniya alias Karan Palsaniya for seeking to promote ill-will, enmity and hatred towards Prof. Laxminarayana with a view to threatening his life and liberty.

AIFRTE Presidium