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PRESS-STATEMENT

The AIFRTE is alarmed by the present NDA-led regime's obstinate and narrow-minded approach towards the academic community in general and in dealing with appointments to cultural and academic institutions in particular. Appointments to institutions of national and state-level importance which are financed by budgetary allocations have always been made by governments in office but it is simply untrue that earlier governments as a rule only appointed 'their own people' irrespective of their suitability for the positions they occupied although one can always find instances to the contrary. What singles out the present government is that it is brazenly insistent on only promoting persons of a particular ideology at the expense of all radical, rational and professionally credible persons. Irrespective of their particular identification with diverse ideologies and standpoints, individuals belonging to the latter group are targeted as being 'naxalites', 'Marxists' or 'Congress appointees' in order to focus attention on ideological predilections and not on the academic excellence and credibility of the persons being targeted for attack. This is then used to claim that those close to the RSS and the present dispensation are justified in being placed in positions for which they are clearly unfit because it is the prerogative of every government to appoint its own people!

The termination of the visiting faculty contract with Dr. Sandeep Pandey by the IIT-BHU highlights this attitude. Dr. Pandey, a distinguished academic and Professor in the Chemical and Mechanical Engineering Department is also a well-respected grass-roots activist, a self-confessed Gandhian, a recipient of the Magsaysay Award (2002) and a leading figure of the Socialist Party of India. He has actively championed the cause of the oppressed and the deprived both in the classroom and in the field. In 1991 he co-founded a non-profit organization focused on Basic Education. Also one of the founders of the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), he was its convenor for close to a decade and is currently Advisor to its Convening Team. However, he is now being accused of being a 'naxalite', of showing the students a banned film on Nirbhaya and other 'anti-national' activities! He has categorically denied the charges but since his accusers include two known RSS associates - the present VC of BHU, who was appointed Chairman of IIT Board of Governors by the MHRD Ministry, bypassing the panel of five names recommended by the Board, and the Dean of Faculty Affairs, IIT-BHU - the decision was apparently pushed through by them. This has led to an upsurge of anger and protest among the academic community and progressive sections of society who are familiar with his commitment to the principle of ahimsa, to his work on basic education and to the student community.

The intransigence of the government on the widely criticized appointments of the Chairman and members of the governing board of the FTII has been condemned across the film and television industry and among the public. Despite the damage already done to the student's professional concerns, the government seems to have learnt nothing from the 139-day strike. Gajendra Chauhan continues to be imposed as Chairman taking charge on 6th January 8, 2016 amid a heavy deployment of riot police and State Reserve Police Force who lathi-charged peacefully protesting students, including girls, and also arrested 23 students. The government refuses to reverse its decision although it has been forced to admit its mistake by having to appoint B.P. Singh, an alumnus, as chairman of the academic council, vice-president of the governing council and vice-president of the FTII Society. This leaves Chauhan essentially in charge of purely administrative matters.

(P.T.O.)

शिक्षा नहीं कोई कारोबार, है यह जनता का अधिकार

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The shocking expulsion from the hostel of five Dalit student leaders of the Ambedkar Students Association at the Hyderabad Central University is illustrative of the manner in which politico-ideological considerations and governmental authority are being abused with impunity to suppress all points of view other than hindutva's so-called 'nationalism'. Among other reasons for the expulsion was the claim that they had opposed the death sentence to Yakub Memon!

The background to this can be found in the decision of the Ambedkar Students Association to screen the film "Muzaffarnagar Baqi Hai". ABVP tried to disrupt the screening and a student of ABVP passed derogatory remarks on ASA students on Facebook and hence was demanded an apology for the same. Mass student anger forced the student to submit a written apology. However, local BJP and RSS supporters joined with ABVP to force the VC to expel the ASA leaders on false allegations, although, a committee appointed by the VC had already given a favourable report finding no fault ASA students. Still, the VC's notice of expulsion, given under pressure, had to be suspended on account of student protests. Subsequently, a letter received from Ministry of Human Resources Development, recommended by none other than Mr. Bandaru Dattatreya, Secunderabad BJP MP and Minister of State for Labour and Employment, calling ASA "casteist, extremist and anti-national" and demanding that the "dynamic leadership" of Smriti Irani, Minister of Human Resources and Development, bring about a "change for the better" in the institution. Following this, a petition was filed by Sangh forces seeking an explanation from the VC on the dissent expressed by ASA on Yakub Memon's case. Buckling under pressure the VC, without seeking any explanations or enquiring into the history of the case, took a decision to expel the Dalit students from their hostels.

These are three instances but cases are multiplying rapidly across the country at different institutions. They indicate a trend which is now becoming unmistakable. **The government's actions represent a real threat to a dynamic academic environment which can only flourish in a democratic environment of free thought and critical, open debate. AIFRTE therefore demands that the RSS/BJP governments cease to push the hindutva agenda in the country's academic, cultural and democratic institutions** and hence the following decisions should be taken immediately:

1. Reverse the termination of the contract of IIT-BHU with Prof. Sandeep Pandey;
2. Reverse the stubborn decision to continue with Gajendra Chauhan and other Parivar supporters in the academic and governing councils of FTII;
3. Reverse the decision to expel Dalit student leaders from their hostels; formal apologies should be rendered by the VC and university authorities responsible for this unconstitutional act.

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