



RECONSTRUCTING EDUCATION

for Emancipation

AN ORGAN IN SUPPORT OF FREE AND EQUITABLE EDUCATION FROM KG TO PG AND IN RESISTANCE TO ALL FORMS OF TRADE IN EDUCATION

QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF ALL INDIA FORUM FOR. RIGHT TO EDUCATION (www.aifрте.in)

EDITORIAL

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Here it is, after quite a while, a fresh issue of REE for you. With the germs of lumpenism and hate politics rampantly nibbling away every bit of the foundations of our society, the importance of placing education on the agenda is more than ever before. The class-gender-community chasms have widened during the epidemic years. The profiteers and political looters have ruthlessly enhanced their power during this period. New policies were designed with these objectives in mind and significant sections were removed from the syllabi. Communalism got a boost and as a consequence the atmosphere of hate and violence keeps growing all across the country. Other than articles looking critically at the New Education policy, this issue has thoughtful write-ups on the worsening conditions of violence in Manipur and elsewhere in the country. We also include a report on the recent activities of member organisations of AIFRTE.



Clearly there are voices against communalism all across the country. The communal forces are damaging the constitution with haste. There is a clear indication of a march towards destroying the soul of the constitution. In such a situation, the fundamental values driving the struggle for education based on equality are under severe attack. And it is imperative that AIFRTE gives a clarion call against the present rulers and their politics and associates with democratic efforts to remove them from power. This could have been a subject of debate a decade ago, but today there is no space for debate on this. Articles by Madhu Prasad and Shivani highlight this issue. A serious debate is needed on the New Education Policy and Ajay Gudavarthi and Kuldip Puri are moving it forward. Other articles similarly voice the concerns of our times.

We have lost a few committed social activists in recent months. Sanjeev Mathur, an active worker of AIFRTE in its early stages, passed away at the end of June. The forum sincerely mourns and expresses condolences on his untimely demise.

We request all like-minded comrades to be associated with REE and send us material for future issues, so that we can bring out the issues in time. Many member organisations have not sent us any reports this time and we are unable to present them in true light. We hope that we will have more contributions in number for future issues¹.

Image source: <https://blog.ipleaders.in/intolerantly-tolerant-india-new-identity/>

¹ The views expressed by the contributors are their own and they may not necessarily agree with those of the editors.

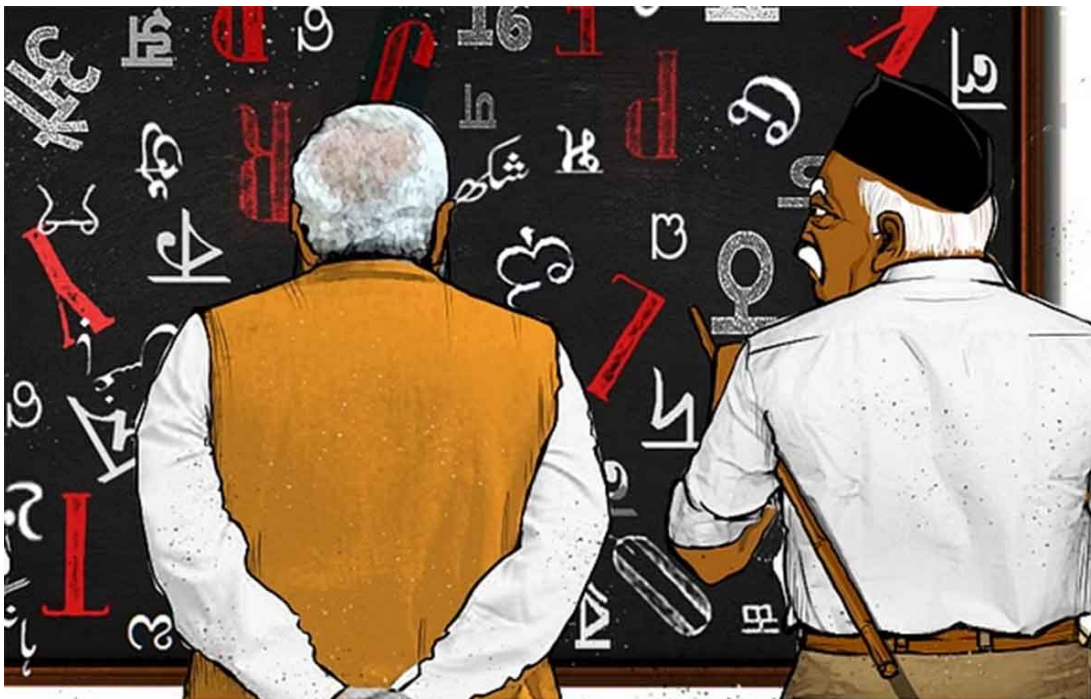
Decimating schools to accommodate Shakhas

- MADHU PRASAD

The hide-and-seek game being played with the national education policy is over and the agenda behind it is now clear.

Beginning with the more than four hundred page Subramanian Committee report, which was neither accepted nor released to the public by the Union government, the GOI suddenly released its own 68-page document. After the then Rajya Sabha MP Sitaram Yechury publicly exposed the fact that it was taken out verbatim from an RSS document, Education Minister Javadekar immediately withdrew the document stating that it had been released 'by mistake'! Another almost two years later the Prof. Kasturirangan Committee's report came out. However, during the COVID pandemic a National Education Policy (NEP 2020) was passed by the Cabinet without being presented in Parliament or being sent to a select committee. With no transparent debate among academicians or reference to the states as was constitutionally required since education comes under the concurrent list of subjects, the NEP 2020 began to be implemented in a haphazard manner through executive decisions and through central institutions including the University Grants Commission (UGC), the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the National Testing Agency (NTA) and the like.

There were strong critical objections to the policy, to the manner of its implementation and the unseemly haste to push it through come what may. Institutions were threatened that central funds would be withheld if it was not implemented by the next academic session. Teachers at both school level and higher education were intimidated and bullied not to speak out against the policy and responses by unions were sought to be suppressed. In spite of continuing opposition, institutional



administrations were literally forced to implement the policy even if it meant their having to resort to using emergency powers to do so.

Chaos was created at all levels of the education system with structural, pedagogical and curriculum changes being pushed through without preparation, planning or resources. A system already in crisis with 50% to 60% shortage of faculty and lacking physical infrastructure was being pushed over the brink. Teaching was to be done through hybrid modes of online and offline functioning

irrespective of the lack of access to devices and connectivity. Anganwadi workers were to receive online 'training' for taking on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) responsibilities! Merger and closure of schools was happening across the country so that 'school complexes' could be made to 'share' what were in fact non-existent 'resources' resulting in a further dropping out of children who were losing neighbouring schools or being crammed into 'merged' schools.

Although there is now much talk of lessening the burden of learning and breaking away from methods of 'rote' learning, there will now be all-India exams at Class 3, 5 and 8 as well as board exams at Class 10 and 12. The former will decide whose 'education' stops at 'numeracy and literacy', who goes on to 'vocational training' (these two categories would cover approximately 85 to 90 percent bahun children) while the latter will determine who completes higher secondary. But to get to higher education even the less than 10% 'elite' students will have to sit for a centralized entrance exam (currently compulsory only for central universities, it is proposed to be extended across the country). Coaching classes are booming, 97% of Delhi University admissions are from CBSE schools this time and the number of women students have dropped alarmingly.

Why is the education system being systematically destroyed and learning being kept out of reach for the vast majority of India's children? Why is it not being reformed to facilitate universalization of compulsory education for all? What does the government hope to gain from this worsening of the existing crisis in education?

The answer lies in the NEP 2020 inspired position paper on "Knowledge of India" (KI) (January 2022) including 'Indian Knowledge Systems' (IKS). Several 'Guidelines' have since been issued for the introduction of such courses in schools and higher educational institutions and also for training teachers to impart instruction. Centrally selected and well-funded research projects are already underway to discover 'scientific' support for ancient ritual practices. The focus is on what are termed 'Vedic' achievements in ancient India in all spheres of knowledge from the sciences, mathematics, astronomy (including 'astrology'), medical sciences, social organization and governance, art, aesthetics, architecture etc., and on the Sanskrit language in which these are accessible. Ancient texts, such as the Puranas, Smritis, the epics, Vedas and Upanishads are the core source materials. Gurukuls and temple schools are venerated as the proper institutions in which this knowledge was transmitted (apparently without caste exclusions) and preserved.

This fanciful picture is placed in the framework of what is identified as the proper historical 'narrative', one which is not tainted by the ideology of 'invaders and colonisers', so that Bharatiyata is to be rediscovered and IKS are to take their rightful place *above* and *prior to* the rise of modern science, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution. The historical narrative must display "steadfastness in protecting the civilization". The role of Hindu kingdoms and dynasties has to be emphasized instead of elaborating the achievements of the invaders and colonisers. And so we are told, in flagrant violation of historical evidence, that "Buddhism started declining" as a "direct result of these invasions"!

The document claims that being colonized "for a thousand years" has apparently confused a "group of our intellectuals" who make ancient civilization "responsible" for social wrongs by "misinterpreting" ancient texts (like Manusmriti) thereby leading to a loss of "traditional" patterns of employment. So we must see caste divisions and oppression as a form of societal harmony and stability! This blatant support for Brahmanical principles of social organization and its ideological propagation of caste hierarchies in daily life is seen as the foundational Bharatiya Dharma which is to be glorified and strengthened by the new historical narrative.

The IKS/KI is nothing else but the promotion of the ideology of the RSS shakha in the entire education system. It will be a compulsory add-on to the curriculum for which time has to be allocated although it will not be examined and graded along with other subjects. Every school and educational institution will have a 'cell' to organize the instruction of IKS/KI and its other activities, including displays, debates, quizzes, etc., and physical training and yoga. Every school library will have a special section on IKS/KI with books and other reading material.

Of course the teachers imparting such instruction cannot be expected to be drawn from the existing colonially inspired education system. So they will have to be drawn from RSS/Sangh Parivar organisations, from the 'community' and from the 'family', that are compatible with IKS ideology. Frequent workshops will require to be held to 'sensitise' them to the needs of the NEP 2020.

Even the very idea of re-vamping education on this basis would require a well-researched account of ancient Sanskrit texts. This is a massive intellectual task and hardly one that can be achieved without 'burdening' researchers, teachers and students! It is particularly problematic because Brahmanical ideology itself grew out of sharp conflicts with the Lokayata Charvaka materialism, and the Sankhya Yoga and Naya Vaisheshika realisms. The anti-caste and anti-ritualist Buddhist and Jain philosophies of social organization were frankly anti-Brahmanical. The rich body of Prakrits and Pali literatures are a recognized tradition distinct from and at variance with the Brahmanical Sanskrit literature.



Thus the attempt to glorify Brahminism by portraying India's ancient civilizational history as a homogeneous continuum, until the advent of the 'invaders', is itself a deeply biased and prejudicial account that is hardly conducive to being the basis for a modern critical system of education.

In fact the position paper itself, while it seems unaware of the irony of its stand, states that recovering Bharatiyata requires the Indian presence of a Joseph Needham who produced an

extensive study of the civilizational achievements of Chinese science and technology! However, far from following in his footsteps, IKS/KI moves in the opposite direction.

In the absence of serious research on the actual achievements of early civilizational philosophers and thinkers, not to mention the completely neglected medieval philosophical monotheisms and their sociological and linguistic impact in the spread and development of Prakrits, the ideologically motivated and unsubstantiated 'shakha propaganda' about a 'golden age' of Brahmanical achievement remains just that – propaganda.

It is this shakha-based propaganda to which the mass of India's children will be subjected as the public system of education is crippled without resources and the constitutional commitment to providing quality education on the part of the Government is simply brushed aside.

The privileged elite, of course, will increasingly buy their education abroad or at foreign campuses located in India with the unregulated freedom to profit and repatriate.

-Published originally in 'Sabrang'

The author is a member of the presidium and the spokesperson of AIFRTE .

Image source 1: <https://sabrangindia.in/decimating-schools-to-accommodate-shakhas/>

Image source 2: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/kerala-planning-to-ban-rss-shakhas-in-temples-across-the-state/story-ZkucTMK8GqI8fgy1kqNXHM.html>

NEP: Reading between the Lines

-Ajay Gudavarthy

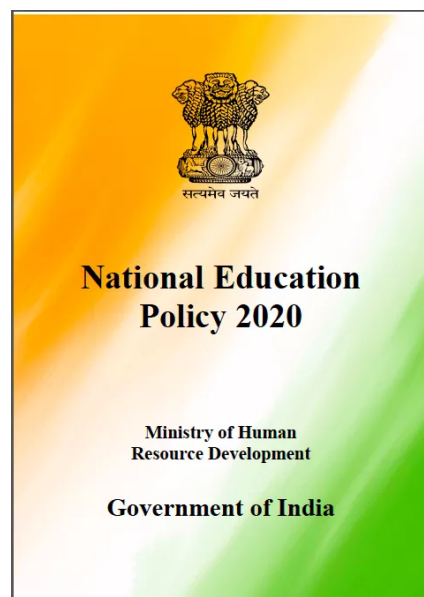
National Education Policy, 2020 is a crafty policy document that needs to be read between the lines. RSS has already claimed that the document reflects sixty per cent of its programme. However, one needs to also focus on certain core issues of knowledge, education and pedagogy that the document by default touches upon, even as we resist the discriminatory implications implicit in the policy statement. Most critiques of NEP may not have easy resolutions to contentious issues and therefore the debate on education need not be lost sight of in offering a critique of the policy suggestions in NEP.

First, the document begins by enlarging the scope of education beyond `cognitive capacities such as critical thinking and problem solving- but also social, ethical and emotional capacities and dispositions`. This brings in the much needed question of life skills necessary that modern education system needs to impart. Much of the technical knowledge and skill sets on current education do not equip us in terms of everyday social, cultural, emotional and ethical issues that we face. Cognitive capacities are divested from normative concerns. The document touches on an important way of combining the two. This however raises the question as to can morality be imparted by and through a state policy? Can personality buildup and emotional constructs be part of curriculum? What are the social consequences of state-induced and policy-oriented moral precepts? Does it not lead to totalitarian, monolithic and majoritarian constructs? Though the document lays emphasis on diversity, it is clear as to how RSS visualizes morals and values as part of linking `nation-building` to `character-building`.

There is every possibility that dominant, caste-Hindu cultural-moral worldview that the RSS vouches for would be made part of the curriculum as the document refers to Vedas and Upanishads but not Buddhism and Charvaka. But this does not mean there is no need for including some discussion on values, ethics and emotions. They cannot be presumed to be merely of individual persuasion while cognitive capacities constitute collective and standardized knowledge. Inclusion of focus on morality and ethics has mostly been considered by progressives as either majoritarian or as conservative because of external control it induces over individual freedoms. But moral and emotional basis of knowledge remains important for all societies and they cannot be left out of the purview of education. Philosopher, Martha Nussbaum argues, `how can a decent society do more for stability and motivation than Locke and Kant did, without becoming illiberal and dictatorial in the manner of Rousseau?

Second key policy suggestion of the document is its emphasis on vocational education becoming part of the curriculum. It states it would be mandatory for all children to learn vocational skills and training such as carpentry, crafts, and others that involve manual `labour` `in order to eliminate harmful hierarchies among and silos between different areas of learning`. This again, I think, is a key issue. Including the idea of hands-on manual working skills in the policy can be potentially radical move in a society besieged by the prejudicial contradistinction between mental and manual labour. In fact, modern caste system is reproduced more through the mental-manual than ritualistic modes. Including manual skills can be argued to lead to dignity of labour that is missing in India, unlike Europe.

However, the mandatory provision for vocational training when read with the various options of exit that are offered in NEP, even in school education opens possibility of reading how the agenda of the RSS is being fulfilled not by breaking hierarchies but reinforcing them. It states, `in particular students would continue to have the option of exiting after Grade 10 and re-entering in the next phase to pursue vocational or any other courses available`. By imparting vocational education and allowing children to drop out of schooling at various levels with certificates would only reproduce existing social hierarchies and opportunity structure. Instead of dignity of labour it might reinforce caste occupations and create a pyramid like social structure where higher education is reserved only for privileged caste Hindus and economically powerful social classes. This is part of the social imagination



of the RSS that they refer to as *Samarastha* but it has an urge to return to the age-old system of *Varnashrama dharma* with caste groups being hierarchically organised.

This however, again opens up the larger questions. While it is well taken that opportunities for higher education should not be closed for any social group but does it also mean that everyone necessarily pursues higher education? What are the job opportunities that can be created at higher ends of the society? It is known that after 1970s the rate of displacement of labour due to primitive accumulation is higher than the jobs created through industrialization and expansion of the service sector. How then do we re-link education and employment without reinforcing social hierarchies?

Third key aspect is that of graded autonomy. Graded autonomy includes provision for degree-granting colleges. It states, 'HEIs delivering education of the highest quality as laid down in this policy will be incentivized in expanding their capacity'. Here again, quality remains an important and much needed focus. However, by suggested link between quality and incentivized funding, it could be argued that autonomy is more a synonym for self-financing than freedom from administrative control. Further, if quality and performance are the criteria then how do we help those regional/state universities and colleges that suffer on account of poor infrastructure? Wouldn't it result in further punitive action against those institutions that already suffer from poor quality education, leading to more centralization and decline in public funding of higher education? Autonomy seems to be an acronym for privatization of higher education, in the name of quality.

Critique of privatization in India has often served in side-stepping the much needed debate on quality and work ethic. Indian institutions suffer on both counts. It is a fact that most institutions, including primary government schools offer poor quality education, due to not only reasons of infrastructure but also poor work ethic and commitment. Even private institutions have continued to offer poor quality education. Now how do we improve quality uniformly is a huge question that needs to be raised by those supporting public education. How do we make teachers more professional is often side-stepped by those in arguing these to be more of excuses to privatise higher education in India.

Finally, this document lays emphasis on multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary education. It states, 'Single-stream HEIs will be phased out over time, and will move towards becoming vibrant multidisciplinary institutions or parts of vibrant multidisciplinary HEIs clusters, in order to enable and encourage high-quality multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary teaching and research across fields'. This again was a much needed experiment awaiting higher education in India. Much of cutting edge education and research across globe is happening through multidisciplinary approach. Many of such experiments for various reasons have remained non-starters in India.

Here again, given the thrust and recent experience under the current regime, multidisciplinary has been a ruse to undermine humanities and social sciences, and encourage natural sciences. This is again for ideological reasons that RSS considers social sciences in India to not suit its frames and social composition of sciences allows its presence better in institutions of higher education. In institutions like JNU, recently sciences and centres for Engineering and management courses were started more as a way of undermining and undercutting funding for centres of social sciences. This should not however stop us from debating other possible ways of continuing experiments in multidisciplinary.

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The Intervention of Technology in Education

Kuldip Puri

The COVID-2019 pandemic has caused serious disruption to the education process across the world. Schools, colleges and universities had to be closed for several months. The education of the students suffered a lot. In order to overcome the break in education at that time, efforts were made to arrange education through online means for students sitting at home. In the difficult times of the pandemic there was no other effective alternative to total reliance on digital technology. Two major limitations of this type of education were revealed. First, that such education cannot be accessible to all. It was limited to those students who had access to the internet along with a computer or smart phone and the number of such students was very small. Second, that it cannot at all be said with confidence that it could provide quality education. The study 'Locked Out: Emergency Report on School Education' conducted in August 2021 in 15 states and Union Territories by economic expert Jean Dreze confirms the above facts.



Image source: <https://www.kinteract.co.uk/blog/the-digital-divide-and-technology-in-schools>

The new Education Policy-2020 released under the shadow of the pandemic by the Government of India claiming to bring a revolution in the field of education advocates a major intervention in technology education. According to the policy statement, the Indian education system has not been able to keep up with the rapid changes in the field of technology with the advent of the Internet. This weakness has put us at an individual and national disadvantage in a highly competitive world. According to the policy, the effective way to emerge from this crisis situation is to keep integrating the ever-evolving digital technology with the education process. In the same vein, senior representatives of the Union Ministry of Education, who support the full adoption of modern technology in the process of reading and teaching, have written that the epidemic has given a boost in the field of education and a bright future is brought quickly in front of us, that we never conceived. If there was no epidemic, digital technologies would not have been used so much in education. Many of our teachers would have retired before using digital technologies. Learners would be deprived of a large amount of diverse new content in their own languages or different digital forms of education (Anita Karwal, Rajneesh Kumar, The Hindu, 16 September 2021).

Such over-enthusiasm towards the intervention of technology in education needs to be scrutinised in the light of some of the issues raised by UNESCO's 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report. The underlying question is the lack of solid and indisputable evidence regarding the impact of technology adoption on education. Most of the evidence of its positive effects comes from the richest countries. Much of that evidence is based on research conducted by parties selling technology equipment. It is natural to question the reliability of such evidences derived from the market system. In addition, educational technology equipment is replaced every three years on average. Evaluating the impact of such rapidly changing tools on education becomes almost impossible. It seems that the

decision about the use of technology in education is based on the availability of the technology rather than its utility for an area of education. This sometimes makes the technology in use a hindrance rather than an aid in education. The main purpose of education gets marginalised.

It is claimed that technology helps in ensuring that easy access to education for all. It is true that education imparted through online media during the pandemic helped to make up some of the loss in education when schools were closed. It has also been revealed that there was potential to reach more than one billion students worldwide through open and distance education methods. But statistics also reveal that globally almost one third of all the students remain deprived of this facility. Seventy-two percent of these dropout students belong to the extreme poor. This may have been due to their lack of equipment and technical and economic barriers. When access to the necessary materials and the Internet becomes rare, the right to education also becomes a victim of inequality. The strength of the claim to ensure easy access to education for all also weakens.

Technology promises to provide a personalized education for each student. A single child can seamlessly set his own learning path with the help of his digital device without going to any school or college every day. This understanding is contrary to the basic concept of education. There are also social dimensions to the education process. Students should be provided with solitude as well as vibrant schools and colleges, opportunities to learn and understand issues by mixing with fellow students, dialogue with teachers, open playgrounds, good libraries and modern laboratories. No better substitute for these basic needs of education can be possible. Even before such large-scale arrival of technology, the developed countries of the world had already provided quality school education for their children.

It is not necessary that a student sitting in front of a machine in his room or a corner away from the teacher and the institution will have good learning standards. For example, an analysis of 2 million students in the United States showed that students who were only given distance learning instruction had a deeper learning gap. A study by the Program for International Student Performance (PISA) revealed that indiscriminate use of information and communication technology or use of inappropriate technology has a negative relationship with student performance in examinations. According to the research conducted in fourteen countries of the world, the closeness of students with mobile phones distracts them from studies and adversely affects their learning process. Almost a quarter of the world's countries have banned the use of smart phones in schools.

The supremacy of technology in education has changed the meaning of going in depth and thoroughly investigating the subjects. Generally, cutting-edge technology is limited to students mastering the basic questions-answers of different subjects, uploading the work assigned by the teacher at home and receiving feedback from the teacher in return. Its role in inculcating independence and critical thinking in students is close to null. A UNESCO report says that the adoption of technology in many countries, along with the absence of provisions to protect data, has put the privacy of students and teachers at risk. This whole situation can create problems for democracy and human rights.

In all this happening, the interests of commercial and private institutions are dominating. Education Policy 2020's invitation to private institutions to invest in the education sector has pulled education into the realm of business faster than ever before. The goal of imparting quality education to the masses and the pursuit of commercial interests in education run in opposite directions. In this situation, it would be a better education policy for low and middle income countries to focus on mobilizing infrastructure in educational institutions than investing more capital on technology. Technology is an important tool in the process of education, not its destination.

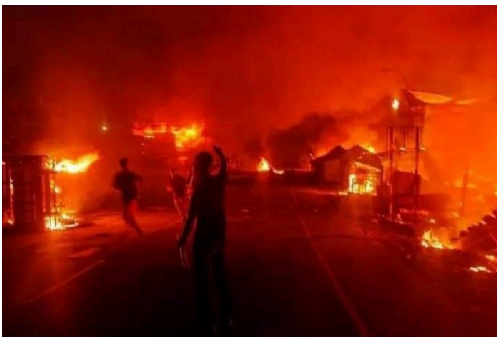
(translated from the original in Punjabi by Google)

- The author is a retired Professor from Panjab University and is a well-known educationist.

Manipur : The War Within

MADHU PRASAD

On May 3, 2023 a protest march by the Kuki-Zo tribes from the hill districts of Manipur against a High Court order directing the state government to consider, within weeks, giving Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the majority Meitei community who inhabit the valley, turned violent. Since then almost 200 people have been killed or are missing, hundreds of houses have been burnt down and thousands of Kukis and Meiteis have been forced to leave their villages and stay in hastily set up relief camps. Even as thousands of central reserve and paramilitary forces are in the state, armed citizens who have looted state armouries for guns and ammunition, exchange heavy fire and volunteers are manning bunkers set up on national highways and barricading entry to villages. Meiteis in their thousands have begun to flee from neighbouring Mizoram where they feel threatened for having been identified as the aggressors against the Kukis.



The issues of land rights, (Kukis, Nagas and other ST occupy the hill districts that constitute about 90% of Manipur's geographical area, while the 53% majority Meitei community dominates the valley), of poppy cultivation in the hills and allegations of narco-terrorism, have erupted into what looks more like a civil war dividing the former, largely Christian communities and the latter predominantly Hindu Meiteis with a small section of Muslims. Hundreds of churches, temples, shops and public buildings continue to be vandalized and burnt down and vehicles torched. Shockingly a Kuki legislator was beaten almost to death, and the homes of two legislators were razed to the ground.

In this situation where the state has proved incapable of controlling the violence or protecting its citizens, where the police either claims to be "helpless" or is openly accused by the victims of being in league with majority community mobs, where neither life nor property are secure, and the Kukis are demanding a separate administration for the hill districts, the state government claims that "normalcy" exists, and the Union Home Minister routinely proclaims that no one has been killed for five, ten or fifteen days until the next round of violence breaks out.

They were our only source of information as the Internet had been banned for two months, and the media was more focused on the achievements of the Prime Minister's foreign tours. On Manipur the PM was absolutely silent. Only now, when angry locals asked where he was, or when opposition politicians questioned his failure to provide a healing touch by visiting the state, or to dismiss the incompetent BJP government in Manipur and impose President's Rule to control the lawlessness, are statements being made that he had in fact been "carefully monitoring" the situation from Paris, the United States or some other foreign location.

A video that went viral as it emerged more than two and a half months after the May 4th barbarity it recorded, caused unprecedented shame and outrage across the country and indeed across the world. It blew the cover of 'normalcy' being promoted by the "double engine" governments at the Centre and in Manipur. It exposed them as having fallen far short of even human decency and a basic concern for human dignity.

Two Kuki women under police protection were handed over to a thousand strong mob of Meitei men. They were stripped naked, viciously and publicly molested, paraded through the town and then gang-raped. A zero FIR was registered only fourteen days later and no action taken on it until the outrage exploded over the viral video in mid-July.

Shamelessly, Manipur Chief Minister Biren Singh could only claim in his defence that "such incidents" keep happening so presumably he cannot be expected to follow through on all of them. And

PM Modi shocked the nation by standing on the steps of the Parliament and stating that assaults on women were unacceptable whether they occur in “Rajasthan, Chattisgarh or Manipur”! This is an appalling statement coming from a PM who still has not spoken up about the specific charges of sexual harassment brought by our award-winning women wrestlers against the BJP MP who until recently was chief of the Wrestling Federation of India.

This was also Modi’s sole mention of Manipur after three months of violence and lawlessness in the state and he still refuses to address the nation through the Parliament on the issue. However, the message to BJP’s troll army, its leaders, MP’s and legislators was loud and unambiguous. Since then the tongue-tied BJP brigade has been vociferous in its attack on opposition-ruled states where cases of sexual molestation have occurred.

Given the hold of patriarchal dominance across states and communities in India, one can see the horrific incidents of May 4th as a case of aggravated gender violence in the context of troubled conditions prevailing in Manipur. However, facts seem to belie this conclusion and indicate that the situation is not that simple. Firstly, the women had escaped from their village which had come under attack. Secondly, the police had found them hiding and said that they would take them to safety. Finally, the police took them towards a mob that was roaming freely in the area and handed them over. Then they vanished and left them at the mercy of the mob. This indicates not just incompetence but appears to be a case of complicity; complicity which is suggestive of behaving with impunity both on the part of the police and the mob. The fact that no action was taken on the zero FIR’s for weeks until the video surfaced and went viral only strengthens this conclusion.



The Supreme Court expressed shock at what it found to be complete lawlessness and a breakdown of constitutional mechanisms in the state even as the Biren Singh government and the Union government tried to pass off the events as being ‘normal’ under the circumstances even though well over a lakh central forces have been moved into Manipur.

The “systemic” and “unprecedented magnitude” of sexual violence against women in Manipur, the Chief Justice observed, is being perpetrated against the background of the “communal and sectarian

strife” that has engulfed the state. Social activists and political leaders from the opposition who have visited Manipur have compared the state to a ‘conflict zone’ and even to a descent into a state of ‘civil war’. It is in the context of this intensified confrontation between ethnic and religious communities, where the state government itself is seen to be taking sides, and where the central government and the Prime Minister are refusing to take steps either to be seen as standing with the people, or even to defuse the situation, that the enormity of the Manipur crisis and the full horror of the torment of its women, must be comprehended.

Unfortunately we have experienced such conditions over the years in the country. The genocidal massacre in Gujarat in 2002 was inconceivable without state support. The Bilkis Bano, Gulberg Society and Best Bakery cases were encounters highlighting a situation where over two thousand cases had to be shifted out of the state of Gujarat to Maharashtra so that some hope of justice could be guaranteed. The recent release by the Gujarat sessions court of the eleven men convicted for the rape and murder of women, children and men in the Bilkis Bano case, the outrageous garlanding of these criminals by members of the ruling BJP and the reference to them as ‘sanskari’ Brahmins made a mockery of the system of justice. The hounding of Zakia Jafri, whose husband was decapitated by a mob that killed 96 people and burnt down homes in the Gulberg Society, and of activist Teesta Setalvad still continues with full support from the state and central government.

An even more threatening trend is the prevalence of mob lynching which is fast spreading across the country. With impunity, mobs are mobilized by right-wing organisations, usually linked ideologically and by their membership to the Sangh Parivar (or sometimes to other fundamentalist groups), to hand out ‘instant punishment’ to the minorities and dalits for ‘crimes’ like conversion, inter-caste marriage, ‘love jihad’ and cow slaughter. Little attempt is made by the authorities to prevent

them from assembling or from arming themselves not only with swords and sticks but with firearms as seen in the communal confrontation in Mewat's Nuh district in Haryana. They rape, torture and kill the targeted 'others' in their homes, on the streets, in fields, on trains and in fact in all public places. The police take no action against them, the public either fails to intervene or some sections in fact support them and political parties that share their ideology not only applaud them but when in power like the present regime actually defend and exonerate their actions.

This amounts to nothing less than a complete collapse of a system of law and justice and of any conception of legitimate rights of the people. An ideology, religion, caste, race is empowered and allowed or encouraged to become so dominant that its actions appear to be beyond any law as it brutally imposes its will on the 'others'.

Under such circumstances, we are faced not only with specific violations of the laws aimed at providing protection against gender, caste, ethnic, religious, and other forms of discrimination and oppression, but with the disintegration of the very systemic structure of governance that characterises any 'civilized' society. Even if the rights of its peoples are severely limited or unequal, as in the case of slave or caste divided societies and entrenched gender oppressive cultures, there is a systemic arrangement which determines the peoples 'expectations' and the exercise of their 'agency' in either resisting or negotiating the conditions of oppression.

However, when there is a breakdown of such norms of governance – a breakdown seen in what one identifies as fascist regimes in modern times - one cannot simply take recourse to routine modes of protest and resistance to defend oneself in the hope that one can rely upon political, legal and even ethical institutions of society. The collapse in fact 'hollows out' such institutions and more often than not they will fail us even as it appears that we have failed them.

Manipur, after more than three months, remains in a crisis situation. Just yesterday (3 Aug) another armoury has been looted, bringing a fresh supply of arms and ammunition among civilians. In the context of the failure to find solutions to the problems, desperation is growing among the population and the threat of a spread to other north-eastern states is real. Mizoram has already faced its impact.

The gravity of the situation has to be recognized. The reaction across the country to the continuing communal confrontation in Haryana in a district that has been free of such conflicts since independence is troubling as the state government appears to be focusing on the minority community as initial aggressors, but fails to adequately take note of provocation from heavily armed members of a supposedly 'religious' procession. The recent shocking incident of an armed police constable on duty in a train shooting dead his senior officer before going through three compartments to identify and shoot dead three innocent Muslim passengers while shouting blatantly communal slogans, is evidence of the fact that India is on the brink of an abyss.

Manipur has apparently been allowed to fester because corporates are interested in mining the rare precious metals in the hill districts which they cannot access as long as Kuki-Zo tribals alone can hold the land. Haryana has been ignited because elections are due in a few months and the impact of the farmers struggle is to be undone to the benefit of the present regime. A recent study provides data that communal hatred and riots consolidate votes for the NDA. Are these self-serving maneuvers reason enough to destroy the country?

Unite on the people's issues of employment, health and education!

Defend our Constitutional values and rights!

Defeat the fascist forces that seek to fragment the country on the basis of caste, creed, gender, ethnicity, language, region and disability!

- The author is a member of the AIFRTE Presidium and its Spokesperson

Image source 1: <http://thecsrjournal.in/opinion-who-is-responsible-for-manipurs-present-condition-manipur-violence-government-pmmodi-hindi/>

Image source 2: <https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/three-tribals-belonging-to-kuki-zo-community-shot-dead-in-manipur/cid/1965614>

Communalization of Education – What is Our Work as Educators?

SHIVANI TANEJA

Right-wing politics is invading lives not only in theoretical conversations and physical changes, as an aspiration of Ram Mandir and change of names of towns, but also in how we relate to one another. As we enter an academic space, we notice that this has blown up in many ways; it is beyond university spaces where there has been an apparent and visible conflict within the arena of student politics, but is a day to day matter of school life and childhood.

This article attempts to outlay the communalizing of schools based on the author's field experiences, secondary research, current news, and explores the role we should play as educators.

Spread of Hindutva Ideology – RSS Working Ground

RSS affiliated schools, such as Vidya Bharti, Ekal Vidyalaya, Saraswati Shishu Mandir are widespread in their reach. Their stated objective as seen on their website is of promoting Hindutva; this means a glorification of Hinduism as the only religion in India. Thus the curriculum followed here primarily aims at generating animosity against other religious groups even at the cost of distorting facts. For them, patriotism implies hatred towards another religion, than a belief in constitutional and progressive values. The writer herself has experienced hearing an 8 year old boy studying in such a school in Bhopal saying that he would like to grow up to defeat the enemies from the West (i.e. Pakistan). An analysis of the books being used in the Ekal Vidyalayas in Assam and Vidya Bharati Schools across the country show that the boundaries between mythology and history have been blurred, with the hidden curricula of locating religion and traditional practices (that are gender-skewed also) within the school practices.

As state and national elections draw near, we are also reminded of the comments by erstwhile HRD minister Murli Manohar Joshi about the BJP victory in the 2004 Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, "An important factor, which few people have taken into account, is the work done by the Vanvasi Kalyan Manch and the Friends of Tribals Society in the Adivasi areas. Work had been going on but it's matured now." Twenty years later, this has been fully entrenched. We see that these RSS-backed schools in tribal districts across many states have been pushing forward the agenda of the 'Hinduization' of tribals. In 2016, Operation Beti Uthao uncovered a silent racket trafficking tribal girls from Assam and Manipur to Gujarat and Punjab for Hindu indoctrination. In present times, with an overwhelming communal atmosphere having entered all our public spaces, children don't need to be isolated for brainwashing. This comes in easily.

The adivasi was never a part of the Varna system and along with dalits, were considered 'Avarna'. But the Hindutva groups have been working on 'Ghar Wapsi' of the tribals. This may be from an animistic religion as many have kept a distance from organized religious institutions, but also from Christianity to Hinduism. This is done through the indoctrination process adopted in the schools, where the Hindutva ideology and worldview is enforced.

Capitalist and political clout is also taking forward this agenda to suit its various purposes. Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences is a school that boasts of a population of 30,000 tribal students. In this sanskritized culture, children are distanced from their own community roots. KISS has been further opening up schools in other districts in the state of Odisha; the Mayurbhanj school has been opened with the support of the mining conglomerate, Adani.

As tribal children are alienated from their culture and roots, the grounds for exploitative land practices and a Hindu rashtra becomes fertile. The use of tribals in attacking Muslims or Christians cannot be also overlooked in this game. The Gujarat pogrom in 2002 where the Bhil adivasis with OBC Hindus from Dahod were responsible for the attacks on Muslims was a big example of this change. But now this animosity and inflated pride in Hindutva symbols is not limited to geographies or large-scale events but shows up everywhere. A fact-finding in Seoni and Satna in incidents of mob lynching in which the author was a part, we saw that Gond tribals and dalits (school drop-outs) were part of the cow vigilante groups and regularly attacking Muslim men, and a tailor had died in the Satna incident.

Religious Fundamentalism playing out in Secular Education Spaces – Ganga Jamuna HS School

We see a cleansing process occupying the school spaces. By stripping away Mughal history and Muslim contribution from our textbooks, there is a systemic effort that nothing Islamic or more specifically nothing positive about Islam stands out in any space. This then is manifesting itself in crude forms on the ground, which we meet face to face in schools.

The Madhya Pradesh election year is throwing up many instances where we see the school being used as a playground for communal politics. In the past two months since schools have opened after the summer break in June, we hear of incidents in different parts of the state where teachers have been harassed for asking children to not have long tilaks on their foreheads. Such news is coming in from different districts at regular intervals (Indore, 8.7.23; Dewas, 21.7.23, Shahjapur, 22.7.23, Dewas, 5.8.23) as well as from other states as Haryana. This shows this to be a systemic plan than a spontaneous reaction.

The suspension of Ganga Jamuna School in Damoh (Madhya Pradesh) is worth examining to understand this phenomenon. Even though recognized as a minority educational institution by the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (MHRD, GOI) in pursuance of Article 30 of our Constitution, the school has come under attack for having a uniform which included a head scarf.

The local government official committee gave the school management a clean chit, noting that there was no forced compulsion on students to wear a headscarf, but the overnight attack by the right-wing forces made things impossible. Social media trolling instigated by the NCPCR Chairperson, Priyank Kanoongo, resulted in political big-weights jumping into the fray of attacking anything associated with being Muslim. One such example is the song '*Lab Par Aati Hai Dua*' penned by Mohammad Iqbal (who has also written "Saare Jahan se achcha Hindustan hamara" in the 1920s). The song is a child's prayer for humanity and is also part of the government prescribed school textbook. But against all logic, the Chief Minister of MP announced in a rally that he would not allow a school which sang this song (as was seen in a video of an annual day function with children adorning the tricolour flag) to function. Similar reactions around this poem have been reported from Uttar Pradesh where the headmaster of a government-run primary school was suspended following complaints by members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad claiming that the headmaster's decision to allow it to be sung was 'anti-national'.

One sees disdain for Urdu even from people sitting in Child Rights Commissions who hold that even the possession of an Urdu textbook is suggestive of a religious conversion. Annual Programs have been discredited because of using the Muslim form of greeting people, 'Salaam Alikum'. Not only is this attitude disrespectful of any language and culture, it goes against our Constitutional provisions. Urdu is part of the 22 official languages in Schedule 8 of our Constitution and is offered in schools recognized by the M.P. Government as part of the three language formula. Ganga Jamuna HS School offered this as a third language, after English and Hindi.

Further, the fact that the three staff members under question had married into a Muslim family much before they joined the school, or even before the school was opened, has been completely overlooked and biased reporting against them in the media impacts families is not only irresponsible, but ethically and legally incorrect. It has been alleged that the school forced them to convert for getting a job. It is evident that our state does not believe in the women's agency in choosing their partners and religion.

All this has been done when the school can boast of a 98.5% pass for Class 10 where the Pass percentage in the state of M.P is at 63.75%. The hurdles of formal academic learning in first generation school-goers has been overcome through sensitive teachers and management to get this result in socially excluded groups. It seems that a healthy friendship across children of varying religious groups and/or the achievements of minority children was an eyesore.

Since June 11, now for over 10 weeks, three members of the staff of Ganga Jamuna HS were confined for over 10 weeks in jail before they could be granted bail, as charges continue to mount up with pressures and inducements at the local level work as stakes are high for a poll-bound state.

Impact - Warped Understanding of Muslims amongst Children

Recently, the author was part of a collective effort² to explore how religion plays out in library spaces. Experiences were coming in from the hills as well as the plains. I would like to quote some of the more startling anecdotes that show how distorted realities have become – A library teacher from Himachal Pradesh wrote in to share that as he read ‘Ismat’s Eid’, by Fawzia Gillani-Williams, a simple story about a well- intentioned man who has an amusing miscommunication with his family. In the story, he buys a burkha for his wife. As the story was being read out, someone in the group of class 4 children raised a hand and asked what a burkha is. Before he had a chance to respond, another student piped up from his seat “this is what those Pakistani girls in Bangalore are fighting about!” We had another experience from a library space in Madhya Pradesh where children were surprised to know that their librarian was a Muslim, going further to comment that you are not like a Muslim. “Didi, you don’t appear to be a Muslim. Your name, your nature, your clothes, do not show you are a Muslim. You are so friendly, we find it easy to talk to you.” Another anecdote on these lines was in a discussion space to understand the concept of universality for child rights. We showed photographs of many children to elaborate that children of all backgrounds, irrespective of socio-economic conditions, are entitled to a set of rights. There was a vehement reaction by a young participant that a child evidently a Muslim, by his attire, should not get these rights as he is a ‘terrorist’.

In the attacks in schools in Madhya Pradesh, Bajrang Dal and ABVP activists have entered classrooms and have children blast out ‘Jai Shri Ram’ and ‘Hanuman Chalisa’ behind them. It becomes more frightening when in these situations, school children respond with a glee and an affirmation to a call on “Are you not Hindus”. While there is nothing wrong in this question itself, it is the forcefulness and loudness in which it is executed that is meant to put down the other, sometimes even a teacher who is maintaining a balance and secular view. This image takes us back to the sight of children reveling in bringing down a poster of the Babri Masjid during an annual function³ organized by Sri Rama Vidya Kendra High School, a school run by a prominent RSS leader in Karnataka.

These actual incidents reflect the stereotyping of a community having invaded young children’s minds. Irrespective of one’s real experiences, non-Muslim children are spewing hatred towards the Muslim community. When I write ‘non-Muslim’ here, it includes people of various social identities, tribals, dalits, denotified tribes, bahujan who are by and large being used as vote banks and caste-Hindus who have benefited from the mainstream society. There is a misplaced pride in being a Hindu and in reducing the other. This animosity has spread like wildfire.

Our role - Educators need to stand up against hate

In a country where Muslims already have the highest proportion of youth (ages 3-35 years) who have never enrolled in formal education, the present system of alienation and hatred is bound to take more and more children out of schools, and deprive them from the right to education. For vulnerable families, defense against discrimination and survival is naturally paramount to going to schools.

We need to make sure that the marginalized in today’s times have space within the academic world. We have seen the high rate of students leaving school in India because of discrimination. Suicides in higher education institutes are also being recorded. Human Rights Watch (2014) study details the discrimination Muslim children have faced in schools. From being blamed for causing floods in Uttarakhand by upsetting God to being denigrated on Muslim festivals, children have faced it all.

The video from Muzaffarnagar School where the school owner and teacher, Tripti Tyagi, is instructing Hindu children to beat up a Muslim child who is merely 8 years old, is revealing of the damage that can be caused through a teacher. As Hindu adults, many of us are all the carriers of this suspicion and alienation towards the ‘other’. What does a young child possibly pose as a threat to the teacher? What is this unfounded hatred towards a community at large? If teachers stop caring, what

² Bookworm Beyond Borders, January to March 2023 Edition. Bookworm, Goa.

³ <https://thewire.in/communalism/rss-run-school-makes-children-re-enact-babri-masjid-demolition>

are we possibly left with?

We need to operate from the framework and basic premise of humanity. The 'Hindu' teacher also needs to be a 'teacher' in the school space and a 'Hindu' in her personal practices. As educators, we need to embrace each child, each student fully. Where we see biases cropping up, we have facts and the Constitutional framework to substantiate the core value of human equality.

We find more and more that learning about historical realities are getting distorted to suit the Hindu Nationalist agenda. With our students, colleagues, and even with ourselves, we need to question old myths that value some "types of people" over others; we need to learn the history of our nation and the facts about the people we hear some of our politicians denigrate.

In the example mentioned earlier in this article, the library facilitator gradually took the children through an experience of partition, and it became a history lesson. What is being a Muslim, why was Pakistan formed, how did people lose friends, the loss on both sides and the humanity on both sides – a dedicated time for this was essential for the children. This readiness is needed at the level of the school as well as teachers.

Jharna Sahu⁴ shares how children in the Shaheed School wanted to stand up for the teachers when they were being attacked by local Hindutva goons. They questioned why do we need to revere the mythological Hindu Goddess Saraswati when actually it is the real people in Jyotiba Phule and Savitri Phule who paved the way for education for the marginalized. This has been possible only because of the sustained efforts within the teacher group to be politically more aware of their own backgrounds and the children.

Hostile environments impede student learning; those who come from the vulnerable space as well as for those who are becoming part of the 'bullying' force are impacted. Teachers need to step in to make the space safe for all. Children need to learn from the beginning that it is not okay to mock another's religion and/or enforce yours on anyone. Values of respect and dignity need to be part of our curricular learning as much as the academic content.

We cannot escape how much more critical our role has become. A publicly funded school would have made this possible, but now the system has been failed to ensure the growth of the private sector.

In conclusion

The trauma that children of minority religious groups could possibly be going through is no longer limited to one-time instances of riots or narrowed to specific families. The negativity is something they experience on a continuous basis in and around their social interactions with anyone outside their own social group. These 'adverse childhood experiences' where children from a very young age are engaging with the world through various forms of insecurities and distrust, where children fear for themselves and their loved ones with the continuous need to survive becoming the determining feature of lives, and the basic needs of respect, care and dignity have been backgrounded, are original to our Indian model of racism. We have executed this caste apartheid for centuries and have been expanding this to anyone differing from the Hindu Rashtra theory. We are successfully breaking our social fabric, 76 years of independence, in the 21st century, and functioning as uncivilly as we can. In these times, education is the main weapon of mass instruction in our Hindutva political space. When we live this, the loss is not only of a country which claims to be secular with terms as 'Unity in Diversity' being part of our social fabric, or of a distant Constitution. It is a loss of humanity. It is a loss of personhood. We become lesser human beings.

As we resist hate and everyday bias, and engage with facts gracefully in our classrooms, educators have to glue the nation back together in the months and years to come.

-The author is an activist working in the education sector.

⁴ <https://hindi.roundtableindia.co.in/?p=11088>

The Fetters on the Campus, Fascists at the Helm!

- How the Campus Democracy has Reached its Brink of Death in the Fascist Period

NIRANJAN KS

The fact that the education system is always and everywhere, the reflection of the prevailing social system and social relations, is not unknown for us. But still, when we talk about curbs on campus democracy, it becomes necessary to reiterate this fact in order to emphasize the relation between fascism, the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary and most chauvinistic sections of the finance capital and reactionary transformation of the education system. In the history of India, we have gone through a fierce situation, half a century ago, i.e., during the emergency. But the current fascist offensive going on in India has some qualitative differences with the emergency period. These qualitative differences are reflections of the nexus of all reactionary ideological and social forces that are allied with the interests of the finance capital. That's why, the changes, the attacks on the democratic rights of the students in the educational institutions and in public spaces take place in new and unprecedented ways. Building new perspectives on this becomes pivotal for advancing the anti-fascist struggle and also, the struggle, we are waging for building a scientific, secular, democratic, free and universally accessible education system.

First of all, we should understand that the fascism of the current scenario, came out of the womb of neo-liberalisation. This relation can be easily understood by answering a simple question, why are fascists attacking the campus democracy? Because they have to stop the democratic and political culture and push the students into the chasms of depoliticisation, so that a massive upswing against the corporatisation of education shall not arise anymore. They are not doing it through a linear method. They have manifold methods, they use as per convenience, according to the situation. Ultimately, the curbs on democracy serve the agenda of neo-liberalisation of education under the norms of WTO, IMF and World Bank. Here, the attack on Central Universities like JNU, Jamia, etc. has a different angle. These universities always stood as the voice of anti-neo-liberal and anti-corporate struggle. This created a consciousness in the students to fight for saving public education. That's why these universities are becoming more focused areas of the fascist attacks on democracy. Replacing public education with profit-oriented private education presupposes the death of student voices and politics in these campuses.

The recent developments themselves showcase this drastic change. This transformation is not just by using police and para-militarisation as the primary tools but by using RSS outfits. Through cronyism, the RSS-minded people have already captured the bureaucracy, which includes the administration of the university and the examination conducting agencies like NTA. The question pattern set by NTA clearly reflects its intention of setting questions, which are relatively easy for the "WhatsApp University" students. Now, the syllabus of NCERT is also altered in such a way that the above-mentioned Scientific, Secular, Democratic content of the syllabus can be completely washed out. For that, the same propaganda of projecting Muslims, Christians and Communists as the enemies of the Hindus is used. They say that our history is Muslim-biased, Marxist-written and Colonial-minded and rewrite the history based on their saffron outlook. This is an ideological attack on our education by bringing back the decadent and obsolete millennium-old brahmanism as the guiding philosophy of understanding the world. That's why, in the period of fascism, the social roots of attacks on democracy are not as simple as the ones that happen in normal cases.

As examples of fascist attacks, we can see what developments are taking place in the educational institutions. The historical Shaheen Bagh Movement was one of the milestones in Indian history as it broke the silence among the students against the fascist rule. The movement faced a lot of state repression and witch-hunt. Still, many students, who led the anti-CAA-NRC movement are facing incarceration charging the draconian UAPA and other laws. Also, in the current scenario, the systematic way of curbing dissent in Jamia can be witnessed very clearly. In this post-Shaheen Bagh Movement period, the state-administration nexus is using all forms of repressive methods. This is evident from the incidents like arbitrary cancellation of admission of Safoora Zargar, putting student activists in debarred list, suspension of professors, cancellation of JTA elections, issue of Show Cause Notices, judicial bonds to anyone who organizes any kind of protest and massive militarisation of the campus. Ultimately, these curbs on campus democracy are the preparations to privatize Jamia. Introduction of PPP model for the Jamia Medical College exposes this roadmap. On the other hand, in JNU, the attacks on democracy began from 2014. But it intensified during the anti-fee hike period. Unlike Jamia, most of the attacks are not directly done by the state. The police and administration become silent spectators,

while the ABVP-RSS goons unleash brutal attacks on the students. The attacks on activists, especially, leftists during the anti-fee hike protests, ram navami, during the BBC documentary screening and on the birth anniversary of Shivaji, they created a situation of terror by attacking the students, pelting stones on them and even vandalizing the JNUSU office, which ultimately led to the closure of Teflas, which served as a major space of political discussion, documentary screenings, seminars, etc. in JNU. The situation of JNU can be summed up in the words of S. Roy who wrote in his article, "On Fascism" that "The difference between ordinary bourgeois dictatorship and fascism is that while ordinary bourgeois dictatorship generates terror through machinery of state-police and the military- the fascists must employ a section of the people- armed, violent-upon the rest of the population. The police and the military are reduced to the secondary function of protecting the fascist hordes." In Delhi University also, we could witness RSS-ABVP goons applying force on labor activists like Nodeep Kaur, during the farmers' movement and the police were standing as protectors of these goons. During the BBC documentary screening issue also, the police arbitrarily detained students and put a campus ban on two student activists.

The situation of SAU also, was not something different. It saw protest against the stopping of stipends and scholarships, which in fact was the beginning of the process of commercialisation of education. The suppression of dissent in SAU, is a part of this quick neo-liberal strategy which is going on now. In the case of the stipend issue, we can see that 6 students were expelled, 4 rusticated, 1 debarred and 1 suspended. Only those students were taken back, who either suffered from medical issues or were coerced to submit unconditional apology. Four professors, who sent letters opposing the permission given to the police forces to enter the campus spaces, were also suspended. Very recently, Prof. Sabyasachi Das resigned from his job as a professor of Ashoka University after a social media backlash received from many BJP-RSS IT Cell for his academic paper, named "Democratic Backsliding in the World's Largest Democracy". A BJP MP called this Research Paper as "anti-national". At the same time, the University distanced itself from the paper by stating "To the best of our knowledge, the paper in question has not yet completed a critical review process and has not been published in an academic journal. Social media activity or public activism by Ashoka faculty, students or staff in their individual capacity does not reflect the stand of the University," These incidents are clear examples of the fetters put on the academic community by the fascists.

The issue going on in Jadavpur University gives a very different angle of viewing the methods of curbing campus democracy. In Jadavpur, ragging was used as a tool for unleashing contemptuous propaganda against the student activism. The fascist BJP and the ruling TMC have joined their hands to push the student activism to its brink of death. The right-wing forces unleash its campaigns against the left force, the legacy of the student struggles and the political consciousness that developed as a result of the struggles. Even if the left forces, even after having a consistent presence in JU campus, could not put an end to this culture, ragging cannot be viewed as a result of student activism but as a result of the infusion of "independent" culture, which was in fact a kind of depoliticisation of students, and has a bearing with the surge of hegemonic and hierarchical tendencies among the students. But in Jadavpur, the fascists are using this as an opportunity to inflict terror on activists like Urmi and Tathagata. No person aligned to RSS was arrested with regards to this issue but both the activists, who suffered these sinister attacks were put in police custody. The Jadavpur administration has issued notifications restricting the ex-students from entering the hostel premises. Here, we can see that hiding the reality that it is the depoliticisation of the students, which led to the surge of ragging, they are using this as an opportunity to depoliticise the masses, which will kill the democratic culture of Jadavpur University.

All over India, new forms of attacks on campus democracy are surging as a result of the fascist onslaught on the students. The fascists kill our freedom by giving undue freedom for the students aligned with the most reactionary forces and the police. Here, Rosa Luxemburg's words become relevant "Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently." The crisis of democracy we are facing in the educational institutions can be countered only by a mass unity of the students against fascism. If the result of 2024 becomes favorable for BJP, then the democratic voices will succumb completely into the poisonous, inhuman "Hindu Rashtra". It will be disastrous for the oppressed people of India. Countering this becomes an urgent task for the students to save our campus democracy.

- The author is Convener, Central Organising Committee, AIRSO.

All India Secular Forum

Memorandum on UCC to 22nd Law Commission
July 13, 2023

Introduction

1. The 21st Law Commission – after comprehensive consultation, research and analysis of the implications of UCC for the whole of India – recommended that "**Uniform Civil Code is neither necessary nor desirable**. . . . reason being that as India is a diverse nation, consists of various religions, beliefs and faiths and therefore various personal laws exist, and keeping this in mind the Commission has suggested various changes in personal laws rather than codifying all the personal laws into a secular law [like UCC], as doing so would violate the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution [emphasis through **bold fonts** in this Memorandum is ours]."

Acting on "the reference" of the Ministry of Law and Justice, dated June 17, 2016, the 21st Law Commission began "examining" the "vast matters" of the UCC and prepared a detailed report after conducting research and holding consultations with experts. Two years later on August 31, 2018, the Commission published a 182-page-long [consultation paper](#) on "Reform of Family Law".

The above assessment of the 21st Law Commission that "**UCC is neither necessary nor desirable**" has not been questioned or countered to date by either the Supreme Court or the 22nd Law Commission. Notably, the 22nd Law Commission has not so far placed in the public domain its critical evaluation of the Report and recommendation of the 21st Law Commission.

Hence, the Public Notice issued nation-wide by the 22nd Law Commission inviting opinion on UCC does not make any sense at all. This raises serious concerns regarding the very intention of both the 22nd Law Commission and the Central Government at whose direction the aforesaid Public Notice was issued.

A. Constituting Law Commissions for Political Gains

The following six Paragraphs (i.e. No. 2 to No. 7) draw upon an elaborate Online interview with Mumbai-based Ms. Flavia Agnes, an eminent and widely acclaimed scholar of family laws and women's rights activist lawyer.

Source: <https://thewire.in/rights/ucc-bogey-muslim-bashing-electoral-needs-flavia-agnes>

2. Ms. Flavia Agnes has questioned the timing and intention of raking up the Uniform Civil Code in the context of the forthcoming general elections in 2024. Interestingly, the Modi government has done nothing in the past 4 years on the suggestions of the 21st Law Commission Report that called for ending gender discrimination and removing unequal property rights in all family/personal laws *irrespective of the religion or culture*. Yet the controversial issue of the UCC is being whipped up to serve political needs.

3. According to her [Agnes], the call for seeking opinions on the UCC aims at agitating the Muslim leadership and reaping political dividends for the ruling party. Through Muslim bashing, the ground for furthering right-wing politics is being prepared, she says. "As the issue gets controversial, it will be benefiting the ruling party [through religious polarization of its Vote Bank]. This is the main purpose of calling for opinions. The whole idea is to bring the UCC controversy into the political arena in the context of the elections that are coming soon," Ms. Agnes said.

4. Ms. Flavia Agnes even questioned the intention of the 22nd Law Commission to solicit people's views on the UCC, even as the previous Law Commission's compressive report on the same issue is gathering dust. As she put it, "The issue of UCC has been decided by the 21st Law Commission. But the 22nd Law Commission is again asking whether you want UCC. . . !"

5. The 21st Law Commission report contains a lot of suggestions for ending discrimination and giving economic rights to women *while opposing the imposition of the UCC*. For example, on the first page of the consultation paper, the 21st Law Commission made it clear that no consensus could emerge on the UCC, and therefore, the need of the hour is "**to preserve the diversity**" **without contradicting the fundamental rights**. The consultation paper said:

"In the absence of any consensus on a uniform civil code the Commission felt that the best way forward may be to preserve the diversity of personal laws but at the same time ensure that personal laws do not contradict fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution of India."

Crucially, the 21st Law Commission not only called the UCC "**neither necessary nor desirable**," but also supported ending gender discrimination and doing away with inequality:

"This Commission has therefore dealt with discriminatory laws rather than providing a uniform civil code which is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage. Most countries are now moving towards recognition of difference, and the mere existence of difference does not imply discrimination, but is indicative of a robust democracy."

6. Ms. Agnes said that it [the 2018 consultation report], "concentrated on economic rights" and "non-discrimination". The 21st Law Commission report . . . aimed at "weeding out" discrimination **wherever it existed in various personal laws**. Moreover, it underscored the fact that the **Hindu undivided family property** was "discriminatory" against women but it was used for "tax-evasion only by Hindus" and called for ending this practice.
7. According to her, "The main concern of the 21st Law Commission was that the **Hindu undivided family property** should be scrapped and the tax benefits to Hindus should be taken out. Similarly, it also suggested the **codification of Muslim Personal Laws regarding property rights and the difference between Sunnis and Shias should not be there**. Women and widows including child-less widows should get their property rights. There are also suggestions regarding **Christians and Parsis**. If a **Parsi** marries outside the Parsi community, she loses her right. The recommendation was that such practices should not be permitted. **Regarding Christians**, whatever discrimination regarding widows and inheritance exists, it should go. Even regarding the **Special Marriage Act**, whatever discrimination is there, that should be taken out. . . another key suggestion of the 21st Law Commission was about **the division of matrimonial property upon divorce** – which does not exist anywhere in law and it recommended "**equal division of property acquired after marriage**". **Four years after the publication of the report, the Union government has not moved a finger!**

B. UCC Opposed by Nation-wide Diverse Communities, *not only by Muslims*: Need to come out of the Politically motivated & Misleading Hindu-Muslim Binary Trap

8. **A false impression** is being deliberately created and nurtured that UCC is opposed/resisted only by Muslims. However, as will be elaborated below, the reality is that a broad section of India's diverse communities ranging from **Laddakh** (Boudh) to **Lakshadweep** (Muslim) and **Kachchh** (Kachchhi Hindus) to **Kohima** (Christian multiple Naga tribes), protected by the Constitution (See Section 'C' below), resolutely resist UCC since it will *hegemonise and dismantle* their family/personal laws, *rooted historically in rational, equitable and socially just cultural framework as enshrined in the Constitution*.

Voices of Protest to Imposition of UCC from India's Diverse Geo-cultural Regions: Fighting for '*Unity in Diversity*', *not Uniformity*

Source: <https://scroll.in/article/1052115/why-the-uniform-civil-code-has-few-takers-in-the-north-east>

Meghalaya: The Khasi People

A common civil code, its critics say, would lead to the dilution of the special privileges that the Constitution guarantees to tribal communities in the North East and elsewhere in the country too. Here are some examples. These special entitlements, enshrined in **Article 371** (A, B, C, F, G, H) and **the Sixth Schedule** of the Constitution, allow for a certain degree of autonomy to communities to function under their customary laws. Guwahati-based social scientist Walter Fernandes explained: "Their [tribal communities] customary law will be affected and that is basic to their identity."

Among the first to voice dissent to PM Modi's proposal during his speech at Bhopal on June 27, 2023 was **Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma** (A BJP Ally). Speaking to reporters in Shillong, Sangma said that a "**common civil code was antithetical to the 'Idea of India' whose strength and**

identity is its diversity.”

“As a political party, we realise that the entire North East, as a matter of fact, has got unique cultures,” said Sangma, who helms the National People’s Party, a key ally of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the region. **“We want these to remain and not be touched.”**

The provisions of the Sixth Schedule apply to almost the whole of Meghalaya, save some pockets in the capital Shillong.

National People’s Party parliamentarian WR Kharlukhi broadened Sangma’s concerns. “Meghalaya is a **matrilineal society** and clans are named after the woman,” he said. “In marriage, too, we have our own law. **Even the British could not change our system.”**

The state’s civil society groups have also reacted sharply to the proposal. Any move to tinker with the customary laws would lead to agitations, they have [warned](#).

The Khasi Students’ Union (KSU) on Monday *asked the Centre to thoroughly examine its decision to implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC)* and warned of anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)-like protests if the Centre remains adamant.

The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) has unanimously passed a resolution, urging the Centre **not to implement the UCC in the Sixth Scheduled areas.**

Agnes Kharshiing, the president of the Civil Society Women’s Organisation, said if the government were to implement a common code, **it should ensure that local traditions and customs were not done away with.**

“The Constitution is for the people of India and not to please some political powers,” said Kharshiing, alluding to the BJP, which is a strong votary of a uniform civil code.

Nagaland: Multiple Naga Tribes

‘One-size-fits-all approach’

Source: <https://morungexpress.com/unequivocal-opposition-to-ucc-gains-momentum-in-nagaland>

In Nagaland, where [Article 371A of the Constitution](#) confers special protection to the state’s customary practices, the proposal of a Uniform Civil Code has been met with [fierce opposition](#).

In a strongly worded statement, the Hoho, the apex body of the Nagas, said any attempt to enforce “**a one-size-fits-all**” approach would undermine the constitutional provisions, unique history, and indigenous culture and identity of the Nagas, as well as the principles of **unity in diversity** in the country”.

K Elu Ndong, general secretary of the outfit, lashed out at the proposal. **“The so-called majority or Hindu laws cannot be acceptable nor applicable to the tribals,”** Ndong told *Scroll* over the phone. **“Let Hindus first remove the caste system.”**

Another Naga civil society outfit went to the extent of issuing an [open threat](#) to burn down the houses of all 60 legislators in the state.

The ruling Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party, an ally of the BJP, has also taken a strong stance on the matter. **“Implementing the UCC will have a negative impact on the freedom and rights of the minority communities and the tribal people of India and it will have adverse results for national integration,”** it said in a [statement](#).

The imposition of a common code, the statement added, **“has the serious potential to threaten the peaceful environment.”**

Mizoram

‘Majoritarian project’

Source: <https://morungexpress.com/unequivocal-opposition-to-ucc-gains-momentum-in-nagaland>

Mizoram, which was the first state in the country to pass a [resolution](#) opposing a uniform civil code,

in February, continues to stick to its guns. Mizoram is governed by the Mizo National Front, a constituent of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance that administers India.

A vast majority of the tribal-majority state enjoys the protection of [Article 371G of the Constitution](#) – which, like Article 371A in Nagaland, guarantees certain customary rights to the Mizos.

The state's lone Rajya Sabha MP K Vanlalvena, who belongs to the ruling Mizo National Front backed by the National Democratic Alliance, said *the realities of India meant a common civil code was untenable*.

"The citizens of India are not common," he said. *"We are different tribes and communities. Different tribes have different customary laws and cultures so we should not have the same civil law."*

Aizawl-based political scientist Joseph K Lalfakzuala said *a uniform civil code pandered to the "majoritarian" idea of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption. It was, he claimed, "against the basic structure of the Constitution"*.

"The politics behind the motivation to implement UCC can be understood in terms of the *[Hindu] right wing's agenda to please the majority community*," said Lalfakzuala. *"The UCC is non-accommodative in nature."*

Sikkim

In Sikkim, too, [protests](#) have broken out following PM Modi's speech in support of a uniform civil code. Civil society groups have said such *a common code would be detrimental to the interests of the local communities that enjoy certain concessions under Article 371 F of the Constitution*.

A retreat by BJP?

With the resistance in the North East growing by the day, the Centre seems to be taking a step back.

On July 3, 2023 during a meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on personnel, public grievances, law and justice convened to discuss the matter, BJP MP and the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on law and justice, **Sushil Kumar Modi**, reportedly said that the [tribal population](#) in the North East and other parts of the country should be outside the purview of the uniform civil code.

The only way forward is to acknowledge and internalize the Founding Principle of India – *Unity in Diversity*. This is the key lesson we learnt from Indian people's historic Freedom Struggle of more than 150 years against British Imperialism. India can ill afford to dilute, devalue or distort this invaluable lesson.

C. Constitutional Protection to Diversity

and Inviolable Sanctity of the Federal Rights of States/UTs Article

1(1): India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States.

Article 371A: Special provisions with respect to the State of Nagaland

– (1) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, –

(a) no Act of Parliament in respect of –

- (i) religious or social practices of the Nagas,
- (ii) Naga customary law and procedure,
- (iii) administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law,
- (iv) ownership and transfer of land and its resources,

shall apply to the State of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides.

Article 371G: Special provisions with respect to the State of Mizoram

– (1) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, –

(a) no Act of Parliament in respect of –

- (i) religious or social practices of the Mizos,
- (ii) Mizo customary law and procedure,
- (iii) administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Mizo customary law,
- (iv) ownership and transfer of land,

shall apply to the State of Mizoram unless the Legislative Assembly of the State of Mizoram by a resolution so decides.

Provided that nothing in this clause shall apply to any Central Act in force in the Union Territory of Mizoram immediately before the commencement of the Constitution (Fifty-third Amendment) Act, 1986.

Constitutional Sanctity of the Federal Structure & Federal Rights

Family/Personal Laws in the Concurrent List: Restriction on the Centre to pass a Law (e.g., UCC) relating to Family/Personal Laws without duly consulting the States/UTs

Seventh Schedule (Article 246): List III – Concurrent List

Entry No. 5: Marriage and divorce, infants and minors, adoption, wills, intestacy and succession, joint family and partition, all matters in respect of which parties in judicial proceedings were immediately before the commencement of this Constitution subject to their personal law.

Entry No. 6: Transfer of property other than agricultural land, registration of deeds and documents.

Entry No. 13: Civil procedure, including all matters included in the Code of Civil Procedure at the commencement of this Constitution, limitation and arbitration.

Entry No. 15: Vagrancy, nomadic and migratory tribes.

D. UCC: India's Rich Diversity & Plurality vs. Uniformity

Source: <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/if-one-family-cant-run-on-2-laws-how-can-the-nation-pm-modi-pitches-for-ucc-in-poll-year-520705>

In first public remarks on the need for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in an election year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said **"if one family cannot run on two laws, how can a nation?"**

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/family-nation-not-same-ucc-cant-be-forced-chidambarams-criticism-101687921313249.html>

Former Finance Minister Sh. P Chidambaram said the comparison between a family and the nation to justify Uniform Civil Code like PM Modi did in his address to the party workers in Madhya Pradesh, **is flawed.**

He continued: **"A family is knit together by blood relationships. A nation is brought together by a Constitution which is a political-legal document.** Even in a family, there is diversity. The Constitution of India recognised diversity and plurality among the people of India,"

Notably, the Constitution provided ample provisions for these ideas i.e. diversity and plurality to flourish (See Section 'C' above). However, in recent years, the 'majoritarian' political project reinforced the retrogressive idea of uniformity. This has tended to act against India's rich diversity, thereby imposing uniformity as a hegemonic notion in all spheres of life including politics, media, education, religion, philosophy, culture, law, literature, fine arts and even scientific research (e.g. the NRF agenda of NEP, 2020). This trend is pushing diversity and plurality in the oblivion and uniformity is incrementally occupying the democratic space. ***Ironically, it is diversity and plurality that has been the hallmark of the civilization in ancient India!***

The evidence for this unacceptable and tragic but 'popular' phenomenon is frequent coining of the following irrelevant, meaningless and misleading political slogans by the ruling dispensation:

'One Nation, One Law' 'One

Nation, One Election’
‘One Nation, One Entrance
Exam’ ‘One Nation, One
Language’ ‘One Nation, One
Religion’
‘One nation, One Philosophy’
‘One Nation, One Knowledge
System’ ‘One Nation, One Leader’

This is precisely why UCC as a **‘Majoritarian Project’** is fast gaining political traction without even examining the impressive and rich diversity in family/personal laws, as revealed above in Section ‘B’. Such misconceived slogans do irreversible harm to the society and the country while the people suffer.

E. Constituent Assembly & the Constitution: Citing Constitution Only When Convenient

Since the Hon’ble Prime Minister declared recently his agenda to implement UCC in line with the 2014 BJP Manifesto, the party leadership as well as Senior Ministers are claiming that they are doing only what the Constitution directs the state to do. This claim needs to be viewed in perspective.

UCC in Constituent Assembly

UCC was debated in depth in the Constituent Assembly in which members representing various religions and cultural roots participated enthusiastically. Yet a consensus could not be reached. This is the likely reason why UCC was ultimately placed in Part IV of the Constitution and not in Part III. There is another significant reason why UCC was not enshrined as a Fundamental Right in Part III. It was argued that the Constituent Assembly debating UCC was not an elected body. Hence, it won’t be appropriate if a controversial issue like UCC is pushed in the then assembly. It was agreed to wait for the then forthcoming first Lok Sabha election and let the elected body consider and debate UCC to approve it as a Law.

a) We are now told that it is **Article 44 in Part IV** of the Constitution that provides for UCC which is cited below for reference:

44. Uniform civil code for the citizens. – The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India.

Observations & Questions

- (i) UCC is in BJP’s Manifesto since 2014. Yet, why has the issue of UCC not been a priority agenda for the BJP’s Central Government for the past 9 years?
- (ii) If UCC is in Constitution, why has the BJP’s Central Government not implemented the recommendations of the 21st Law Commission in its 182-page-long [consultation paper](#) (August 31, 2018) on “Reform of Family Law”?

The 21st Law Commission Report unambiguously called for ending gender discrimination and removing unequal property rights in all family/personal laws ***irrespective of the religion or culture.***

The consultation paper said:

*“In the absence of any consensus on a uniform civil code the Commission felt that the best way forward may be **to preserve the diversity of personal laws but at the same time ensure that personal laws do not contradict fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution of India.**”*

- (iii) Which of the recommendations of the 21st Law Commission’s Report (2018) have been implemented by BJP’s Central Government in the past four years? If no action was taken in 4 years, does it not imply that BJP is not committed to protect women’s property rights?
- (iv) Notably, Article 44 does not **‘direct the State’** to implement UCC. Rather, it asks the State to **‘endeavour to secure’** for the citizens a uniform civil code.” This is not because UCC is not in Part III (Fundamental Rights) of the Constitution.

Hence the Question: What **‘endeavour to secure’** UCC for the citizens has been made ***in the past 9 years?***

The Supreme Court, in a number of its acclaimed judgments, has unambiguously ordered that Part IV (Directive Principles of State Policy) must be read in **'harmonious construction'** with Part III (Fundamental Rights) of the Constitution. The Supreme Court has further clarified that whereas Part IV stipulates the **'goals of the State'**, the Part III provides the **'means to achieve'** those goals. In this sense, the provisions in Part IV are also to be perceived as binding on the State, just as is the case with Part III.

It is in this perspective that we draw the attention of both the Central Government and the 22nd Law Commission to the following questions:

- (a) Presently, BJP's Central Government is citing Article 44 in order to justify its decision to enforce UCC since now UCC has become a political urgency to polarize the votes on religious grounds in the context of the impending Lok Sabha elections in 2024. How can this stance be justified even when UCC is being widely resisted by diverse geo-cultural communities from various parts of the country (See Section 'B' above)? .
- (b) As revealed above, the attention of the Central Govt. has now been drawn by Article 44, though belatedly. However, Part IV of the Constitution comprises several Articles of crucial significance from the standpoint of socio-economic well being of the society and fulfillment of the Constitutional vision of India as enshrined in the Preamble.

Some of the Selected Articles of Part IV that deserved priority attention of the State

Article 38(2): Minimise and endeavour to eliminate inequalities in income, status, facilities & opportunities.

Article 39 (a): Secure that men and women equally have right to adequate means of livelihood.

Article 39 (b): Secure that Ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good.

Article 39 (c): Secure that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment. ***[If this Article was implemented, there would have been neither Adanis and Ambanis nor the impoverished millions of citizens sleeping on the city pavements!]***

Article 39 (d): Secure that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

Article 39 (e): Secure that the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused

Article 39 (f): Secure that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.

Article 46: The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular of the SCs and the STs, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

Question: During the past 9 years, which of the Articles of Part IV listed above drew the political attention of BJP's Central Government and the State policy was directed towards fulfilling the agenda inherent in the said Article?

Clearly, None of the Articles listed above were implemented or even cited in the public domain since these called for a socialist ideology leading to equitable distribution of wealth which is why citing them was inconvenient. In contrast, Article 44 is being widely cited by the political establishment since UCC has become essential for retaining power in and beyond 2024.

F. UCC: The Way Forward

1. Let us all be vigilant to ensure that the Constitution is pursued and implemented diligently, without any dilution or distortion whatsoever.
2. The Federal Structure and Federal Rights of the States/UTs are duly honoured by involving the State & UT governments in drafting UCC with their rich variations, diversity and plurality, thereby liberating India from the idea of UCC that has the potential of causing avoidable social tension and being harmful to the integrity of India.
3. ***No single religion or culture should be ever perceived as the only source of knowledge in***

drafting UCC. On the contrary, there is every reason to draw upon the rich traditions of the tribal and other communities in general and the north-eastern tribes in particular for their roots in rationality, equality and social justice. To take an example, the Khasi Tribe (also Jaintia & Garo tribes to varying extent) of Meghalaya can be a model for UCC since it is a matrilineal society with the following outstanding features:

- (a) The woman, not the man, has a natural Right to property since her birth;
 - (b) After her marriage, it is the husband who shifts to her home and lives there;
 - (c) Both the wife and the husband have equal right to take a decision to divorce and/or remarry;
 - (d) There is no concept of illegitimate child at all as she/he belongs to the whole family;
 - (e) All issues of tension between the wife and the husband are resolved, to begin with, in a meeting of the whole family chaired by the Grand Mother;
 - (f) If the issue is not resolved to the satisfaction of both the wife and the husband, they would go to the Village Darbar where their issue would be resolved in an open meeting of the entire village;
 - (g) If either the wife or the husband are still not satisfied, they can approach the higher level District Council of the Khasi Tribe. Hence, there is no need to approach the regular Courts.
4. Learn from the rich and rational cultural traditions of the Nation-wide Geo-cultural Diversities and incorporate their rational features in enriching and transforming UCC, **including the Hindu Code Bill, if needed.**
5. Draw upon the 21st Law Commission's hitherto ignored findings and recommendations (See Section 'A' above) and incorporate them in the process of building a national discourse on UCC.
6. As recommended by the 21st Law Commission,
- (a) *"the best way forward may be to preserve the diversity of personal laws but at the same time ensure that personal laws do not contradict fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution of India."*
 - (b) "Weed out" discrimination wherever it exists in various personal laws, irrespective of the religion or culture, instead of imposing a Uniform Civil Code on the entire country and causing avoidable socio-political tension and fragmentation.

This is a win-win agenda for all religious and cultural communities across the country for social transformation and reconstructing India as per the Constitutional vision enshrined in the Preamble – an India that secures to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic & political;
LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith & worship;
EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;
and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation.

Key Lessons for UCC Discourse
CELEBRATE DIVERSITY!
INTERNALISE THE SENSE OF DIVERSITY!
ENRICH & PRESERVE DIVERSITY!
and
LEARN FROM DIVERSITY!

Reproduced from <https://countercurrents.org/2023/07/uniform-civil-code-the-way-forward/>
on advice from Anil Sadgopal, member, Presidium, AIFRTE

Recent developments in Education

A brief overview of the recent developments in the sphere of education around the world

- SHANTANAV

United States: A recent study conducted by the Hope Center for College, Community and Justice at Temple University finds that nearly one in four undergraduate students and one in eight graduate students in the US are suffering from food insecurity. This implies almost 4.5 million students in the US are food insecure. In addition to this, nearly 8% of undergraduate students and 4% of graduate students suffer from homelessness, translating to 1.5 million students. Sara Goldrick-Rab, who leads the Hope Center and is a Professor of Sociology and Medicine at Temple University, outlines the key findings of this study in a detailed interview to the Jacobin magazine⁵. Unsurprisingly, the percentage of food insecure students is higher among marginalized groups such as African Americans. These findings lay bare the sorry state of the US education system, where the overall student debt from college/university education is over 1.8 trillion dollars!

Brazil: In June, President Lula launched a new children's literacy programme called the National Commitment to Literate Children. The primary objective of the programme is to ensure that 100% of Brazilian children receive primary education. This is one of the key goals of the broader National Education Plan (PNE) which aims at allocating 10% of the State GDP towards education. Lula, in his previous tenure as President, already introduced several progressive educational reforms. However, many of these advancements were rolled back by his successor Jair Bolsonaro, whose administration openly encouraged children as young as eight to begin working.

South Africa: More than 80% of South Africa's grade four pupils (aged 9-10 on average), struggle to read in any one of the 11 official languages. These were the findings of an international assessment carried out by Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)⁶, in which more than 50 countries participated. One of the primary objectives for the South African government authorities was to use the outcome of this study to identify strengths and weakness of the educational system and to respond by adequately altering the curriculum and policy. A part of the study overlapped with the COVID-19 pandemic which, like most of the Global South, exacerbated existing deficiencies in education – resulting in the closure of schools, increased rate of dropouts, leading to a significant deterioration in accumulated knowledge.

Vietnam: A recent article in The Economist⁷ discusses the reasons behind the high quality of schools in Vietnam. It states, highlighting a recent data from the World Bank, that on aggregate learning scores Vietnamese students outperforms their counterparts in Britain and Canada. The quality and calibre of the teachers are central to this. Indeed, Vietnamese teachers undergo frequent training and are provided enough freedoms to make their classes more engaging. In fact, in order to account for regional inequalities, teachers posted to remote areas are paid more. This is primarily due to the sustained efforts and progressive policies of the Communist Party of Vietnam: provinces are required to spend 20% of their budget on education, the overall curriculum is frequently updated, educational spaces are modernized. This is in stark contrast to the foundationally weak Indian public school system, which is being systematically dismantled through sustained underfunding and gradual privatization.

⁵ <https://jacobin.com/2023/08/college-expense-food-housing-insecurity>. More on the report: <https://hope.temple.edu/npsas>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-65618058>. The PIRLS-2021 report: <https://pirls2021.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/files/PIRLS-2021-International-Results-in-Reading.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.economist.com/asia/2023/06/29/why-are-vietnams-schools-so-good>

My SON's Inheritance- A Secret History Of Blood Justice and Lynchings In India by Aparna Vaidik, Aleph Book Company, 2020, Price: ₹ 499.00

- VIJAYLAXMI

The scent of violence seems to be present everywhere in the new India- from the morning newspaper to the evening TV news. The recent incidents in Manipur, the brutalities that happened in Gujarat, the recurrent cases of caste-based violence, the news of lynchings- violence seems to have entered our common psyche so much that such instances fail to shock us anymore, if they do not have enough shock value. Like Arendt's attempt at trying to understand the brutality of Nazis during Holocaust, Aparna Vaidik tries to understand the India of the present, and uses her lens of history to find answers from the past. Her book 'My son's inheritance' is a book for understanding the present India, and also to analyse the kind of inheritance we are leaving for our future generations.

About the author:

Aparna Vaidik is a historian, author, and educator. Since 2016 she has been part of the civil society protests against lynchings and right-wing government policies. She studied history at St. Stephen's college, University of Delhi and University of Cambridge and went on to complete Ph.D. in History from Centre for Historical Studies, JNU. She is also a founding faculty member of the history department of Ashoka University. (Source: Wikipedia)

Review:

"Sir, aap ye peedi ke liye virasat me kya chhod ke ja rahe ho?"

(Sir, what are you leaving for this generation in inheritance?)

- Asks Major Jai Bakshi to Colonel Abhay Singh in the movie 'Aijaari'. It is almost the same question this book asks of the previous generations, albeit in a different context. News of lynchings have become so commonplace that it has bred a sort of complacency in the minds of those who open their daily newspapers sipping their morning tea in their comfortable armchairs in the safety of their homes. The same lot who has been following the customs and rites of the ages, without asking any question, who find comfort in conservatism, and give it the title of tradition. They are not just peaceful bystanders, but equally complicit in the crimes, because as Elie Wiesel, author and Holocaust survivor, said *"silence always helps the oppressor, never the oppressed."*

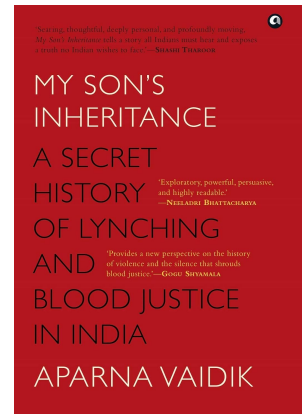
More than a mere peripheral criticism of this bloody violence, this book ventures to find its roots, a search that ends at the doors of our epics. It goes on to say-

"A role of normalising and invisibilizing (sic) violence in its various forms- pejorative naming, erasure of personhood, disembodiment of Barbareek, robbing Eklavya's thumb, asking Karna for his kavach kundal, all done in the name of maintaining the order of things. This was blood justice."

A repetition of incidents which gave out only one message- you have your world and I have mine, both shall not cross. Or else, the punishment was always meted out to the Other. The Other- robbed of a place in history or literature- for they were not given access to education, the Other who did all the labour that the privileged found it filthy to do, the Other who were given names like Dalit, Harijan and Bahujan, but never the stature of complete citizens.

This book attempts to clear the myth that the roots of India lie in non-violence, that lynchings are an exception. It traces historical and religious texts to highlight the banality of evil that already existed in the Indian society, merely covered up in the name of customs.

It poses the question- *"if myths nurtured and affirmed a society's sense of being, how was one to reconcile the apparent violence of the myths and the notion that India was a land of spirituality, tolerance and non-violence?"*



Though the entire book is an analysis of this violent inheritance, she ends on an optimistic note- *“this is your inheritance. You are free to choose the elements of your inheritance that you wish to own, to discard, to celebrate, to be indifferent to, or even to fight. Your inheritance will acquire the meaning you give it.”*

This book connects the violence of the present to the evils of the past- evils that became commonplace owing to them being part of customs and common memory. It is a must-read for those who are trying to make sense of the hatred that makes a man stab into the belly of a pregnant woman and the violence that makes a woman give away another woman to be raped at the hands of a mob.

Vijaylaxmi is a member of AIFRTE Secretariat



Image source: <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-mob-lynching-7-instances-which-shook-india-2639925>

1. A 19-member National Syllabus and Teaching Learning Material Committee has been formed to revise the NCERT textbooks according to the new curriculum. The committee includes Sudha Murthy (Chairperson, Infosys Foundation), Shankar Mahadevan (musician) and Sanjeev Sanyal (economist).

2. Prof Ajay Pratap Singh, the Director General of the Kolkata-based Raja Ram Mohan Roy Library Foundation, revealed at the recently held Festival of Libraries 2023 in New Delhi that the Ministry of Culture is planning to bring a legislation to move 'libraries' from State list to Concurrent list. The governments of Kerala and Karnataka have expressed their concerns on the same and the move is feared by many as a part of a wider agenda to interfere in the functioning of libraries and spread the Sangh Parivar ideology.

This change might lead to a situation in which libraries are forced to buy books from Sangh parivar publications and usage of libraries for conducting programs to spread Hindutva propaganda.

3. Central government has given itself the power to appoint key functionaries to five privately managed deemed universities that receive substantial government funding. The institutions are TISS, Mumbai; Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra; Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Ahmedabad; Avinashalingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore and the Gurukula Kangri, Haridwar.

Institutions like TISS have had a relatively progressive academic culture and this change would lead to the interference of government in institutional autonomy.

4. The Professor of Practice portal opened for the PoP scheme for HEIs as a part of NEP 2020 has received over 4300 applications.

The maximum strength of PoP in any HEI is limited to 10 % of the sanctioned posts and the maximum period of engagement is 4 years. A formal academic qualification is not deemed necessary for these positions.

Diganta Biswa Sharma, brother of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sharma, was invited to join as PoP to teach Indian Knowledge System at Dibrugarh University. Instances such as these point to the fact that this scheme is meant to encourage nepotism and infiltration of BJP/RSS ideologues into university spaces.

5. Guidelines for incorporating Indian Knowledge Systems in Higher Education Curricula have been issued by UGC.

The guidelines have been controversial for the way in which it has portrayed Indian knowledge, limiting it to the Vedic knowledge systems. It is also another means of inducting Hindutva propaganda into the curriculum.

6. The syllabi of Economics and History subjects in Delhi University saw drastic changes under the curriculum revision as per UGCF. While Delhi University teachers have alleged that a paper on "economics of discrimination" has been dropped from the undergraduate syllabus of BA Economics without consulting with the concerned department, the Undergraduate history syllabus has reportedly removed papers on subjects such as 'Brahmanisation' and inequality, introducing instead matriarchal perspectives in the chapters that previously dealt with patriarchy.

- compiled by Vijaylaxmi, member of AIFRTE secretariat

In spite of intense activities by the member organisations of AIFRTE, we have not received written reports from most of them. We request all member organisations to send brief reports of their activities to us at aifrtenewsletters@gmail.com for the future issues.

West Bengal : Education convention



On 17 June the AIFRTE, WB Preparatory Group organized an Education Convention in association with other radical groups, namely, APDR, CESTUSS, Nehai, Azad Gana Morcha, Samaj Bigyan o Prakriti Parichay Magazine, Nispolok Magazine, Sikkha Sanglap, PDSF, AISA, ASSPSI, PTAB, WPSUF, RYA and DYSA. The Convention was centered on recent syllabus changes and scientific outlook. Speakers from various groups addressed the house which had a gathering of 81 people.

The programme was conducted by Ashoke Mukhopadhyay. List of speakers: Kushal Kar (PDSF), Milan Samaddar (ASSPSI), Sanjib Acharya (APDR), Sugata Ray (Samaj Bigyan o Prakriti Parichay Magazine), Tuhin Maparu (Azad Gana Morcha), Subrata Bagchi (CESTUSS), Anindya Chattopadhyay (Sikkha Sanglap), Jagadish Sardar (Nispolok), Hindol (DYSA), and Barnali Mukherjee (AIFRTE).



Andhra Pradesh



Demonstration were held in Srikakulam, Vijaynagaram, Vishakhapatnam, East Godavari, Guntur, Tirupati, Chittoor, Kurnool, Nandyal and Anantpur districts of Andhra Pradesh against implementation of NEP 2020, shifting classes 3,4,5 from primary schools in habitations to high schools located in far away places, communalisation of textbooks, implementation of CBSE directives in state board schools and demanding filling up of 50,677 school teacher vacancies.

The government school teaches under the leadership of APTF(1938) and DTF participated in the demonstrations against threats from the government that disciplinary actions will be taken against them for opposing government policies. The student activists



from AISF and two groups of PSDUs also participated in the demonstrations. These demonstrations which sported the banners of Andhra Pradesh Save Education Committee (APSEC) and AIFRTE were organised by the above referred student and teacher organisations.

Delhi :



A citizens' protest was held at UP Bhawan, Chanakyapur on 26 AUGUST 2023 to protest against the enhancing communal mind-set and asking for beating of a Muslim child, by a teacher of a public school at Neha, Tripta Tyagi.



Sacking Sudipta Bhattacharya of Vishva-Bharti - AIFRTE outraged!

AIFRTE is outraged by the action of the Vishva-Bharati vice-chancellor Bidyut Chakravarty's in sacking Economics Professor Sudipta Bhattacharya, who is also the President of the Vishva-Bharati University Faculty Association (VBUFA), five years before his retirement on grounds of 'gross misconduct'. Many students and teachers of the campus have termed this "an act of vengeance" on his part. They have also accused the V-C of stifling dissent and pursuing an agenda of 'saffronizing' an institution distinguished for decades by the humanist legacy of its founder Rabindranath Tagore.

Prof. Bhattacharya has led several protests of students and teachers against the actions of the V-C and has approached the PM, the Chancellor of the university, and the Education Minister on these issues and against several punitive disciplinary actions against students, including suspension and allegedly even threatening to shoot students who gheraoed him some weeks ago, as well as removal of teachers and employees. It is pointed out that the V-C's dictatorial behavior has severely vitiated the atmosphere on the campus which has dropped from its rank of 11th position in 2015-16 to an all-time low of 98th among Indian universities in a recent survey.

Although the termination notice to Prof. Bhattacharya has been passed by the Executive Council of the University, he was not even approached to give his defence before the notice was passed and has now been given only two weeks time to respond. This violates all university rules where serving faculty cannot be summarily dismissed. The All India Federation of University and College Teachers Federation (AIFUCTO) has also strongly condemned this draconian action. The former President of the Delhi University Teachers Union (DUTA) and two-time President of the Federation of Central Universities Teachers Association (FEDCUTA) Prof. Rajib Ray has also expressed his shock against the termination notice and demanded that it be immediately withdrawn. Prof. Bhattacharya has stated that he will contest the termination in the Calcutta High Court.

- AIFRTE demands that the termination notice be immediately withdrawn and an inquiry be conducted against the functioning of the V-C.
- The Chancellor and the Education Minister must immediately intervene to prevent their appointees from pursuing motivated agendas on the campus and destroying the functioning of an institution as reputed as the Visva-Bharati University.

Apr 28, 2023 : AIFRTE Statement on NCERT 'Rationalisation' of CBSE syllabus

The ongoing debate on the NCERT's claim to be rationalizing the CBSE curriculum framework and syllabus has created confusion and unrest within academia. Objections have been raised concerning the deletion of important periods of India's history such as the rise and advance of the Mughal empire, the role of different communities during the freedom struggle and the subsequent evolution of India as a constitutional Republic, and of the social and political affiliation of the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi. Given the character of the communal underpinnings of the present regime, these have tended to dominate the public sphere but are in fact only the tip of the iceberg. The so-called rationalization is a deep and damaging assault on the very nature of education and spearheads an anti-scientific, ideologically limiting and anti-democratic approach to the very process of learning and creative advance of knowledge.

The portrayal of ancient Indian philosophies as being uniform and continuous cannot be supported by any meaningful evidence which is in fact witness to the sharply conflicting nature of Charvaka materialism, Buddhism, Jainism etc., with the vedantic tradition which itself reveals the diversity of the six schools of philosophy. The Sufi-Bhakti medieval monotheistic and even agnostic traditions only amplify the complexity and range of ideas resulting from the advent of Islamic thought in the sub-continent.

The deletion of historical narratives of particular struggles for social and economic justice, for gender liberties etc., creates a false image of a social order marked by conformity and denies the power

of dissent in advancing new ideas and social norms.

The freedom struggle was not merely the engagement of traditional ideas with so-called 'western' thought. It was a questioning of entrenched inequalities and historical oppressions of caste, class, gender, linguistic and regional forms of discrimination. This was the substance that contributed to the idea of a national unity that found expression in the Constitution and rejected firmly the idea of a religion-based 'Hindu Rashtra' despite the partition of the country and Pakistan's establishment of an Islamic state.

The exclusion of Darwin and the theory of evolution highlights the casualness with which scientific advances are approached. Its impact would be funny if it were not so dangerous. A recent cartoon has two schoolchildren discussing if the "modern monkey evolved from ancient Indians"! The above examples only serve to show how important it is both to conceptualize and contextualize the nature and purpose of a curricular framework and the syllabi that are prepared to achieve its goals. An ideologically motivated chopping and changing cannot but be the greatest disservice that can be done to the future of India's children and youth.

AIFRTE condemns the wasteful and conceited exercise of the NCERT's 'rationalization' of the CBSE curriculum which displays more arrogance than understanding.

AIFRTE demands that the imposition of these alterations be stopped forthwith and a transparent and open debate involving discipline experts and the learning community of teachers and students be immediately initiated.

May 17, 2023 : AIFRTE Statement on the ED action against Dr. Navsharan who has been questioned for more than eight hours under the PMLA

Dr. Navsharan, who is an Advisory Board Member of the AIFRTE, is a reputed civil liberties and democratic rights activist with an impeccable record. She is also the daughter of the renowned theatre playwright and activist Gursharan Singh who's name is synonymous with the most committed role in furthering the movement for democratic rights in the Punjab.

Dr. Navsharan has been called ostensibly because of her association with Harsh Mander's Aman Baradari initiative but it is clear that the warning is being sent to all those who fight selflessly and courageously to protect the interests of the oppressed and fight for the right of all citizens to get justice and equality in society.

AIFRTE demands that ED immediately stops harassing Dr. Navsharan and that all attempts to involve her in any PMLA investigation be withdrawn forthwith.

May 2, 2023 : AIFRTE statement against state repression of JADS, Madhya Pradesh



AIFRTE strongly condemns the autocratic action of the Madhya Pradesh government and police force in attacking the activists of the Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan (JADS) who are protesting against the government sponsored illegal felling of trees and smuggling of timber.

Adivasi whistleblower and leading activist Antaram Awase has been arrested and JADS activists including Madhuri (also presidium member AIFRTE) and Nitin (secretariat member AIFRTE) have been targeted and false charges leveled against them. It is reported that 21 cases have been filed against Madhuri by the forest

department and the police, who are making ridiculous and false accusations against the sangathan and Madhuri who has been constantly campaigning against State government's connivance in tree felling and timber smuggling. Apart from the various complaints given by the Sangathan tree felling and smuggling of wood, Madhuri has been constantly informing the District Collector, District Forest Officer and the Superintendent of Police, Burhanpur of instances of tree felling SINCE 9th OCTOBER - the day rampant tree felling started!

In their attempt to suppress the organization and Adivasi movement questioning the government's role in the felling and timber smuggling, the Sangathan has been ridiculously accused of extorting money under the garb of applying for Forest Rights Claims! They have claimed that Sangathan membership receipts that each Sangathan family has with them, are somehow "a proof" of extortion!

AIFRTE condemns such a malicious campaign by the government and expresses its solidarity with the hundreds of Adivasis who are courting arrest in Barwani against the politically motivated arrest and vicious campaign against JADS activists.

AIFRTE demands immediate release of Antaram Awase, withdrawal of all false cases and an immediate end to the campaign against JADS. AIFRTE further demands that the M.P. government take steps immediately to stop the illegal felling of trees and smuggling of timber in the state.

16 June 2023 : Press Release

AIFRTE is outraged to learn that the Telangana government has prepared an FIR, which it has kept in secret, charging the renowned senior academician Prof. G Haragopal, along with some 150 other intellectuals and civil liberties activists, with 'offences' under the draconian UAPA law. This also includes prominent persons such as Prof M Gangadhar (Treasurer, AIFRTE), K Ravi Chander (EC member, AIFRTE) and 6 other leaders of Democratic Teacher Front Telangana. All are very active in the Right to Education movement.

We strongly condemn this underhand functioning particularly when dealing with a law that allows the state to declare, without any evidence, an individual to be a threat to the state irrespective of the person's public record, conduct and status.

Prof. Haragopal is a highly respected public intellectual. The state itself has for many years now sought his help and participation as a leading interlocutor with militant groups as he is held in high esteem by all concerned for his integrity and significant understanding of democratic and civil liberties issues.

We demand unequivocally the withdrawal of such an FIR and also the withdrawal of the draconian UAPA which allows the state and its oppressive machinery to illegally charge innocent intellectuals and activists at will.

May 7, 2023 : AIFRTE Statement on the wrestlers agitation charging the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president, the BJP's Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh with sexual harassment of women wrestlers.

While other issues of misgovernance and corruption have also been raised by the complainants who are leading sports persons, it is shocking that the central government only reluctantly set up a committee three months ago which is yet to submit any report. Leaks to the press suggest that the committee has failed to respond to the sexual harassment charges although even a minor has lodged an allegation. Yet no action has been taken under the POCSO act which demands immediate action.

However, total inaction on the part of the GOI against Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh has only ensured that he continues to function with impunity and gives press interviews maligning Vineeta Phogat, Sakshi Malik and Bajrang Punia as being controlled by corporates, opposition parties, and personal family rivalries. This is totally unacceptable.

Even the police have failed to move although two FIRs have been issued after ten days

following the orders of the Supreme Court. But no arrest has been made by the otherwise overactive police against students or civil liberties activists and supporters of opposition parties.

The wrestlers have therefore been forced to resume their agitation at Jantar Mantar and they are receiving support from sports persons, students, lawyers, civil liberties activists, and the general public including rural khap panchayats.

However, the regime continues to shamelessly support Brij Bhushan who defiantly stated before the press that he would only resign from his post if the PM Narendra Modi, or the HM Amit Shah or BJP president Nadda asked him to do so! He has thrown an open challenge to those who are behind this sports mafia don and they have shown that they lack the guts to move against him. A regime which moves bulldozers, custodial killings and encounters against others in the name of fighting mafia criminals, keeps its mouth shut and its hands tied against their own criminal goons.

The police attacked their dharna site, manhandled the wrestlers, cut electric supply and water to them the other night. They arrested and assaulted Delhi University students who gathered on campus to march in their support.

AIFRTE stands in complete solidarity with the leading wrestlers who have brought such honour to the country. We demand that their call for immediate arrest of the BJP's Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, disbanding of the existing WFI committee and organization of the structure of the WFI, be immediately implemented by the GOI.

AIFRTE also supports their demand for action against the police for attacking the peaceful dharna of the wrestlers. Our leading athletes must not be allowed to be harassed and subjected to such treatment by the government and its mafia goons.

AIFRTE Statement on Savitribai Phule and Fatima Sheikh



AIFRTE salutes Savitribai Phule (3 January 1831 - 10th March 1897) and Fatima Sheikh (9 January 1831 - 9 October 1900) on their respective birth anniversaries and recognises both their enduring friendship and their path-breaking and untiring contribution to the education of girls and deprived children of the oppressed lower castes and minorities. These pioneers in the field of education, which in India till then remained confined predominantly to elites and upper caste males, faced social ostracism and even physical assaults for running schools for bahunas and the down trodden. They taught together in all the schools that the Phules' started for spreading education among children of all religions and castes. Fatima Sheikh would also be involved in founding two schools in Bombay in 1851.

By the end of 1851, Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule were running three different schools for girls in Pune with approximately one hundred and fifty students. Like the curriculum, the teaching methods in the three schools differed from those used in government schools. The number of girls receiving their education at the Phule's schools are said to have outnumbered the number of boys enrolled in government schools.

Savitribai and Fatima met when both were enrolled at a teacher training institution run by an American missionary Cynthia Farrar in Ahmednagar. The Phules would take up residence in the home of Fatima's brother Mian Usman Sheikh as in 1839, Jyotirao's father asked them to leave his home because their work was considered a sin as per the Manusmriti and the Brahmanical texts derived from it. Usman Sheikh was a staunch supporter of the cause of girls' education. Fatima and Savitribai opened a school in Sheikh's home in 1849.

In the 1850s, Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule established two educational trusts. They were entitled: the Native Male School, Pune and the Society for Promoting the Education of Mahars, Mangs, and Etceteras. These two trusts ended up encompassing many schools which were led by Savitribai Phule and later by Fatima Sheikh.

Along with education for girls, the revolutionary social reformers also opposed child marriage and sati, stood for widow remarriage, and arranged for protection of widows and rape victims while assisting them in delivering and caring for their newborns and arranging for adoptions if so desired.

AIFRTE is both outraged and deeply offended by the fact that the present regime at the Centre has chosen to insult the memory and legacy of these courageous and radical role models for a progressive society and education system by announcing two extremely retrogressive measures that strike a blow against providing opportunities for education for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Other Backward Castes and Minorities.

The existing Pre-matric scholarships for these groups from Class I to Class VIII which incentivise their access to the constitutional fundamental right to education and keep them out of child labour have been unilaterally stopped. This has been done on the basis that school education is 'free' upto Class VIII.

At the same time, the Maulana Azad Fellowship for Minorities provided at the level of higher education has also been stopped as it is claimed that this 'overlaps' other schemes for assistance at higher education.

As it is, less than ten percent of these students complete Class XII and reach higher education and these moves by the Centre threaten their very right to education.

AIFRTE demands that not only should these scholarships be immediately reinstated, but they should also be increased so that no child is 'forced out' of education because her parents cannot afford to let her stay there. This is the least that must be expected from the Government more than seventy years after Savitribai Phule and Fatima Sheikh's courageous struggle.

AIFRTE therefore appeals to all its member organisations to observe 3rd to 9th January 2023 as Days of Protest in a decentralised manner against the Government's anti-people educational policies and to carry forward the struggle for the down-trodden, the discriminated on the path shown by Savitribai Phule and Fatima Sheikh.

22 June 2023 : All India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE) Statement on SAU.

AIFRTE is alarmed by the situation in South Asian University and strongly condemns the manner in which it is spiraling out of control. Starting with a student demand linked to scholarships and research grants which should easily have been resolved within the university through



negotiations by the administration with the help of the faculty, the situation was allowed to deteriorate by calling police on the campus resulting in an indefinite hunger strike by some students. A first year MA student Ammar had to be shifted to ICU and suffered a cardiac arrest which thankfully was reversed by emergency resuscitation but left him with permanent damage.

Shockingly, even after this the university authorities and administration took the insensitive and provocative action of suspending and expelling students without due process.

A number of faculty members tried to intervene and appealed to the authorities to negotiate with the students over their demands and their agitation.

However, the authorities did not respond. Faculty further appealed that rules and regulations be clearly articulated and followed so that such crises may be avoided in future. Again there was no response until the faculty was asked to appear before an inquiry committee that had suddenly been formed by the university authorities.

When they appeared before this committee, they were told to sit down with pen and paper and answer in some cases anywhere from 132 to 246 questions without leaving the room! As more than six months had passed since the events in question had occurred in 2022, and some questions clearly required legal assistance, the faculty, already deeply humiliated by the attitude of the authorities, asked for soft copies of the questions to be provided to them and two months time to consider and respond to the questions.

Again there was no official response and then suddenly on 16th June 2023, four faculty members were issued notices of suspension for asking that academic interests of the university community be protected.

The University is currently without a functioning EC or Governing Board and lately is being run completely non-transparently and unilaterally.

The situation should never have deteriorated in this manner and it cannot be allowed to continue any further.

AIFRTE strongly condemns the punitive actions against teachers and students undertaken by SAU administration and demands that:

- Suspension notices issued against faculty members should be immediately withdrawn;
- All disciplinary actions against students be withdrawn and treated as ultra vires until they maybe investigated through well-defined university procedures and norms demand;
- The institution should be run transparently and democratically keeping the interests and well-being of its different constituents in mind.

Image source 1: Facebook page of JADS

Image source 2: <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/other/the-beti-padhao-campaign-of-the-19th-century/articleshow/62436658.cms>

Image source 3: <https://www.thequint.com/news/education/south-asian-university-protest-student-collapses-on-ventilator>

BORN A WOMAN

- MEERA

At times they tell me-
I am a goddess,
And they drape me-
In sandalwood and red,
And carry me along-
Around the temple.

Sometimes they cry-
When I am born-
Who'll pay the dowry-
When she is finally off-
To her in-laws' place!

At times they gawk,
At me on the streets,
Their mouths whistling,
The songs brute and vulgar,
And I keep my head down.

Other times they parade,
My body on the streets,
For men to thrash around,
Spewing their hatred-
On my dead old soul!

From goddess to the streets,
It's the curse I have to bear-
For I am born a woman-
In a land that boasts about-
As the land of Bharat Mata!



Image source: <https://womenlawsindia.com/legal-awareness/crimes-against-women/>

MUSLIMS ON TRAINS

- MOUMITA ALAM

My Abba is searching for his daughters
He has forgotten his daughters
His daughters now call him, Baba.
From Abba to Baba
It's a journey from sanity to insanity
From Indian to trying hard to be Indian.

My Ammi triple checks
My Bhaia's lunchbox
And she writes on the box in capital letters-
Egg curry and Dim-Bhat in brackets
with a marker pen.
She is always numb if someone
mistakes egg curry for gosht!
My Bhaia is a daily commuter on a local train.
My mother doesn't know
They can even mistake palang saag as gosht!

My bhabi scoops out each beard
Till my brother screams in pain
She is terrified if someone
Finds her husband's name!

Sitting by the window side
I judge every co-passenger
Every loud creaking sound of the engine
mortifies me.
The ticket taker asks my name
I manage to mumble the first name
in unstressed syllables dropping the title.

Closing my eyes I pray for my station.
But which language should I pray, dear brothers?

**Abba : Father; Bhaia: Brother; Dim Bhat: Egg Curry; *Gosht: any meat - a Persian word.*

**palang saag: Spinach*



Image source: <https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2021/11/13/modi-s-anti-muslim-jihad>

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