The Editor

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Subject: Anarchist slogans in universities.

Recent incidents of hateful, anti-India sloganeering at Jawaharlal Nehru University and Jadavpur University and the reluctance of university administration to act against such actions has disturbed many including those who do not have steady party affiliations but feel the need to take a stand on issues of justice as well as peace and security.

The specific incident of 9th February at JNU specially concerns teachers and we need to acknowledge that some of our students have strayed into violent anarchist thinking without considering the dangerous consequences of calls for break up and violence in a society that is full of fault lines and is surrounded by instances of revolutions that went horribly wrong from Russia and China to Egypt and Syria, more recently. That such irresponsible thinking has grown under our watch is both a moral and professional failure on our part and should be of supreme concern to us as teachers after 02/09.

While I concur that the sedition charge on sloganeers is an instance of state excess, at the same time, for teachers to stall full investigation into the matter is also dangerous encouragement to violent ideologies and groups and a blow to the prestige of universities. While I respect my leftist brethren who fight for equality and social justice (and for freedoms more selectively), I also request them to think a bit more for peace and harmony specially in a democracy that allows open dissent and reform without violence. From revolutionaries specially, I ask, what did the Bolshevik ordeal achieve after slaughtering millions including leftists, peasants and  workers. Indeed, what has any violent revolution from the French to the Chinese achieved after killing millions and returning back to the liberal welfare trajectory. I hope my left leaning friends would join me in taking a clear stand calls for the violent break up of India and models drawn from dictatorships.

It is true that sedition charge against anti-country sloganeering would be unjust. But it needs to be probed whether there is more than just dangerous sloganeering happening on our campuses. As faculty, we should have been the first to be alerted by violent and anarchist mindsets. By refusing to seriously deliberate on our own professional failure and showing hyper sensitivity towards police action (as of now), are we not exaggerating the issue of governmental interference and bringing down the prestige of our institutions ?

I must clarify that I do not speak as a ‘nationalist’; indeed, I share the post-nationalist respect for multiple identities and concern with freedom of speech including the right to critique the government, the state and ‘national culture’ too. But, I strongly feel that the slogans of 02/09 at JNU (if proven) went far beyond post-nationalist humanism and flirted with dangerous anarchism and thus need to be punished and not shielded. We have watchful institutions like the NHRC that will ensure that no innocent person is punished. To block or influence investigation at this stage would be jumping the gun.

Instead, as teachers, we should be focused more on an earnest dialogue with mislead pupils and colleagues who have shown violent anarchist streaks and remind them that had incidents like the attack on parliament in 2003 and the planned nuclear attack by Pakistani army in 1999 succeeded, the country could have faced mayhem. We have no special immunity against the virus that has already sickened much of south and west Asia except our liberal democracy. But democracy is a precious and yet fragile system and we need to do our very best to cultivate a culture that respects this. As teachers, are we doing enough on this front while framing resolutions and shielding suspects from investigation.

In light of the fact that the demon of violence has devoured its own feeding hand repeatedly as in Pakistan, Syria and erstwhile East Pakistan, I am hopeful that we will be able to win back Khalid Umars to the path of peaceful protest—on and off camera too.

Let us discuss these issues earnestly and without bias since silence and evasion, in this grim moment, would be highly unconsenscious.

Sincerely,

Devesh Vijay

Department of History

Zakir Husain Delhi College.

New Delhi-110002

Ph: 9811664877; 011-23233420 (office)

Res: D-14/A/2, Model Town, Delhi-110009.