

Editorial

Saturday, November 23, 2019

Anti-corruption crusade at the time of CAB and framework agreement

CBI raided residence of Okram Ibobi in connection with Manipur Development Society scam recently. The government is late but it has nevertheless delivered a promise to an extent it made to come down heavily on corruption during the time of Congress. The people should appreciate this move from the government and expect more from it, such as Loktak multicore scam which PM himself mentioned in his speech in Manipur. We should also expect some action against those who were involved in extrajudicial killing also, given that BJP leader Ram Madhav said that these would be taken care of once BJP comes to power in the state. These actions from the government are expected by the people and they will appreciate it. It has been quite some time and the government's action on MDS scam in late. This makes us go beyond the narrative of a righteous government going after ex corrupt politicians and officials while interpreting the government's recent action against MDS scam especially when the state is facing severe economic and political crisis. Should we expect action from this government on these matters at only at opportune moments of the ruling party, say before the election or at the time of a political crisis?

Government's stand against corruption needs appreciation but the timing of its action rouses suspicion. Its action comes when the state burns with CAB row and Framework agreement. The action attacks the ex-CM at a time when the opposition in the legislative assembly, civil society organization and the masses are after the state government on these two issues. It points towards two things, other than BJP keeping its promise to go after corruption. First, it could be seen as an attempt to raise popular sentiment for BJP as people should see that it also deliver its promises even if some stand it takes might seem against the people of Manipur. At this, political and economic juncture it needs this to strengthen its position. Second, the move definitely hurts the congress and at the time when the people, civil society organizations and the opposition wants a special session of the state assembly. The contradiction between the government and the civil society organization has sharply increased after the government turned back on its promise of calling a special session of the assembly soon. This also reminds us of the recent action against the ex-Union Home minister and Finance Minister P Chidambaram. The action took place at a time when the first signs started appearing of Indian economy going sliding down to the lowest moments of UPA years. Now, Chidambaram is in jail but the Indian economy did not improve and unemployment rates are still very high. Can we expect the same fate for Okram Ibobi and the state of Manipur, similar to Chidambaram and Indian economy? The matter should not divert the attention of the people from their struggle against CAB and the vigilance it is maintaining against the Framework Agreement because ex-CM, whether he goes to jail or not, these issues burning the state do not go away.

Courtesy - The Wire
By : Janaki Nair

A golden jubilee for any institution is not something that should go quietly into the night. Yet Jawaharlal Nehru University, which is commemorating – ‘celebrating’ would be grotesquely inaccurate – its five-decade existence as ‘a premier university with the unique model of interdisciplinary teaching and research’ (to cite the official website's words) stood perilously close to just that.

Apart from some lacklustre and politically questionable programmes, including the lending of the golden jubilee logo to a pet company-sponsored event, the year has passed in turmoil rather than in celebration. Still, by the official golden jubilee calendar, November was supposed to celebrate ‘Jasn-e-JNU’ as a fitting closure to 2019.

What supreme irony indeed that the last five decades have climaxed in the bloodiest confrontation yet between those determined to transform the idea of the public university, and those committed to defending it! The story of JNU – and its place as the exception it has come to be – can only be framed within the Indian university system and its histories, and the extent to which one institution has rewritten those histories (there are of course many others).

M.C. Chagla, who piloted the bill to bring a public university like JNU into existence, pointed out that this would be a university of ‘an entirely different and new type’. ‘It must have a free atmosphere where the students can enquire and investigate, challenge every dogma and every doctrine and start on a voyage of discovery,’ he continued. ‘A university should provide an experience of living as well as an opportunity of living and this is what we expect of this university.’ To what kind of exceptionalism was he gesturing? For one, it was affirmed that existing hierarchies and structures of the 70-odd universities of the time (the 1960s) should not be replicated, since they had all been found wanting. In its founding moments, there was fierce debate between those who envisioned JNU as an audacious experiment – but whether as a place for the production of distinction, or as a site that would equalise access, remaining true to all the varieties of Indian democracy? Could these two at all be reconciled? Was a doctoral degree to be a universal right or a restricted privilege? Or both?

Over the past five decades, JNU has proved that such that such paradoxical values can be reconciled – achieving excellence while upholding its commitment to inclusive democratic ideals. How was a public university to pursue the ideals of distinction while yet fulfilling its commitment to opening up the worlds of thinking to those

‘Jasn-e-JNU’: What Lies Behind the Calls to Dismantle Public University Education?



who had been denied such opportunities for centuries, if not millennia?

As those who participated in the debate on the JNU bill pointed out, a real memorial to Jawaharlal Nehru, in whose name the institution came into being, could not ever be a ‘church’ or ‘caged in the cult of a prophet or any great man’. Yet a commitment to adhere to the causes that Nehru held dear was enshrined in the First Schedule: ‘national integration, social justice, secularism, democratic way of life, international understanding and scientific approach to the problems of society.’ The commitment was to build a new community, ‘a continuing membership of minds devoted to the tasks of learning and of the good life...inspired by love and guided by knowledge.’

To begin with, this meant that the university was not to be a mere department of the state. A founding commitment to autonomy was therefore a crucial building block, the compulsory autonomy of the public university as defined in the report of the Radhakrishnan committee (1948) at a time when the private university appeared almost an oxymoron:

“We must resist, in the interests of our own democracy, the trend towards the governmental domination of the educational process. Higher education is, undoubtedly, an obligation of the State, but State aid is not to be confused with State control over academic policies and practices. Intellectual progress demands the maintenance of the spirit of free inquiry.”

It was planned as a postgraduate institution, committed to research and writing as much as to teaching, and a residential university like none other that existed at the time. But did it deserve to be called, as it was by one of its severest internal critics the first few years of existence, the ‘government’s think tank’ serving the ‘ruling classes’? Or would it be the gadfly, critiquing and provoking people into action? Or both?

JNU’s reputation as a university that simultaneously produced establishment intellectuals and anti-establishment intellectuals is reluctantly acknowledged even

today. If significant cohorts of bureaucrats and civil servants, teachers and journalists are counted amongst its alumni, politicians of all persuasions, activists and critical scholars and commentators have equally emerged from its ranks. These contradictory impulses – of a commitment to sustain societal structures and processes while simultaneously imagining alternatives to them – have given JNU its public purpose and direction.

The red brick university with a difference was brought into being through a deliberative process, assuring prospective students a degree of fairness and transparency that is relatively rare in our university ecosystem. In its early years, JNU’s students fashioned by 1974 the justly famous ‘deprivation points’ policy of weightage for regional, class and caste deprivations. It was removed in 1984 following an unusually disastrous period of student-teacher antagonism, and restored only after sustained and momentous struggles by the student body in 1994. This is among the unique achievements that stand dismantled today.

Since its inception, JNU has been a residential university with a difference. Partly since its student body enjoyed a larger than usual role in determining institutional life, a true alternative to some aspects of life outside the university was imagined and has been sustained over the last half century.

Two significant achievements speak of the truly alternative values it has managed to sustain and protect over the decades. The first is the resetting of gender hierarchies, rare and even unimaginable in a society that has been deeply scarred by misogyny, violence against women, and harassment of women in daily and academic life. The JNU campus has enabled female students to feel relatively free in their daily lives and academic transactions, within and beyond the classroom, in hostels and in public spaces. JNU has paid a price for this freedom, since it has long had to live with the backlash against this achievement, earning the reputation of being too ‘permissive’. Growing resentment about the perceived ‘permissiveness’ of the campus has periodically called for re-imposition of more familiar gender hierarchies.

Second, this achievement has been sustained by the unusually high participation of the student body in the conduct of the university administration at all levels. Student elections are conducted through a widely acclaimed constitutional process which has kept JNU free, to date, of the kinds of violent, money-driven election processes that have become the norm in most universities in the city of Delhi, as well as the country. This relatively dispute-free election process, in addition to being relatively inexpensive and ecologically sustainable, run by an Election Commission composed of students themselves, consciously gives every political formation – from extreme right to every shade of left – a chance to contest and deliberate during the elections. This too stands severely challenged today.

JNU is no stranger to attacks on its achievements and its autonomy: the Morarji Desai government famously undertook an ‘enquiry’, the entire process being carried out through correspondence with the university by a joint secretary in the prime minister’s secretariat. The Morarji Desai Enquiry Report was never made public, though it is purported to have called for the closure of JNU. As an institution, it has pushed back to remain relevant. But over the past few years, the assault has been relentless.

Student opposition to hostel fee hikes must be seen not against the backdrop of JNU’s own statutes which are committed to inclusion, but against a long subcontinental history that inextricably links hostels to learning opportunities that were historically denied. Which Dalit autobiography today does not talk of the central role played by the hostel in refiguring opportunity?

In the state of Mysore, while Brahmin students attending institutions of higher education in its towns and cities were able to organise a system of *varanna* – being housed and fed by a caste fellow via a system of weekly rotation – most other castes had no such provision. Lingayat and other mathas stepped in to fill the gap, but the Mysore government was not far behind. The landmark Miller Committee Report of 1919 in Mysore, which recommended reservations in educational institutions and in government jobs, had this to say:

“We recommend that preference be given to the backward class pupils for admission into such [educational] institutions. ... We deem it essential that hostels should be constructed in all taluk headquarters to encourage parents to send their children from the village elementary schools to the secondary schools.”

We should ask why the strident call for dismantling the public university system is coming just at a time when it has emerged as the most inclusive of all institutional spaces. Why now, when more than two generations of privileged and underprivileged people have equally benefited from the public university system, are the state and the self-righteous ‘taxpayers’ vociferously demanding its end? Could it be because over the last five decades, what has already been dismantled with contradictory and unexpected outcomes are those very structures which had served elites so well? Is it because, as the poet Sukhamani tells us, ‘The steel nibs are sprouting!’

For an untaught lesson – You demanded our thumbs – There sprouted nibs of steel To write history afresh – Then, The people who poured Hot metal in our ears Would need ladders to climb To pluck hairs from our ears! At the end of its 50th year, this ‘township of the learned’ has played a role in helping steel nibs to sprout. Judging from the echoes of support from every nook and corner of the country for the cause of inclusive education, has JNU finally shed its exceptionalism to become part of a new national movement?

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BOSEM gears up with printing of textbooks

DIPR
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Printing of text - book for classes I – X by the Board of Secondary Education, Manipur (BOSEM) for the academic session, 2020 - 2021, is all geared up to meet the demands before the commencement of new academic sessions.

Chairman (BOSEM) Shri Th. Kirankumar, speaking at his office chamber, stated that the printing of text – book for the new academic sessions is nearing completion for almost all subjects of classes I - X. Under the

strict instructions from the Hon’ble, Minister Education, Shri Thokchom Radheshyam, the Chairman said that efforts are on in full swing so that the students could avail the books on time. He explained that in order to achieve the target of availing text - book timely, certain rules and regulations followed by BOSEM for buying of paper and issuances of order for printing to the firms were slightly modified. The printing of text – book are carried out in different local printing firms.

He said that this year the quantity

of order for printing of text-book was decided according to the performance of the printing firms in the previous years. More quantity orders for printing text – book were given to the selected printing firms having good records for meeting the deadline, maintaining quality of paper for the texts – book printed and the capacity of the printing press. He pointed out that before the issuance of order for printing text – book the official team of BOSEM made field verification to the printing firms. He continued that next year too more order will be given to those firms which maintained quality of printing text – book.

He expressed that the failure of timely availability of text - book printed by BOSEM before the commencement of new academic session has been a problem. However efforts are on to lessen the issue of non – availability

of text - book this time. He is optimistic that if at least for once, the text – book is made available in time then it would help in coping up with timely production of text – book in the future.

The Chairman highlighted the issues faced by the BOSEM in printing text – book was due to financial crunch. He expressed that timely arrangements will surely make it possible in meeting the demand for text – book in the market. In all, eighty-eight text – book for classes I – X including forty eight text - book for classes I – VIII and forty text – book for classes IX – X are printed by BOSEM.

The text – book to be distributed free of cost to the government schools under the Department of Education (S) will also be made available before the commencement of the academic session.

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