The larger problem in BHU

What is the issue?

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- There is an ongoing unrest in Benaras Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi.
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- It brings to light the larger problem of orthodoxy mindset of the educational institution.
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What is the recent chaos?

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- The issue started off with an agitation by woman students of BHU, against a sexual harassment incident.
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- It took a violent turn when students took to protest in vice-chancellor's (VC's) office for his insensitive handling of the molestation issue.
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- Subsequently, stringent police action resulted in students and reporters becoming victims of a baton-charge.
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- Soon, many other activists from women's groups and student organisations started protesting against the lathi-charge on women students.
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- As the problem escalated, the UP CM was approached and several other universities in the state were also shut.
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What are the inherent drawbacks in the varsity?

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- The university is largely dominated by the ideology of “manuvaad”.

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- The university, thus for long, had been noted for its caste and gender based discriminatory practices.
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- **Gender** - The university has some restrictions and practises that are applicable only to female students. These include:
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1. Scholarships for women scholars are denied by charging that the money is being used for financing the marriage dowry.
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2. Women students are not allowed to eat non-vegetarian food in their mess.
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3. They are not allowed to use mobile phones after 10 pm and access to the internet in hostels is strictly prohibited.
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4. They are not given the freedom to wear dresses of their choice and are restricted in the name of customs.
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5. Women students are told that the campus is unsafe for them after 10 pm and curfew is imposed.
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- Why are the women unsafe after 10pm and where from/who the threat is, is largely unaddressed and uncared for.
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- **Caste** - Recently there was protest in BHU questioning the unconstitutional methods deployed for campus appointments.
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- Officials seem to be exercising their discretion and caste prejudices become evident in making appointments.
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- **Politics** - The deans and professors accused of harassment/molestation enjoy impunity.
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- The students of the depressed classes who voiced their anger against preferential appointments were slapped with threats of expulsion.
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- The affected students, women and those from depressed classes, have no legitimate avenue to voice their concerns.
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- The VC of the university is more politically driven or is more politically conscious in addressing these students grievances.
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- Legitimate grievances, when taken through students union, are suppressed by putting forward the notion that students are involving in politics.
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What is required?

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- Evidently, the recent protest is the culmination of decades of locked up resentment for a culture of suppression.
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- The BHU movement is a declaration of freedom for all women who are demanding justice against sexist rules, moral policing and victim shaming.
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- What is needed is not merely removing the existing VC but undertaking an institutional overhaul and establishing a more sensitive leadership.
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1. The charter and constitution of the university should be implemented in letter and spirit.
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2. It should be ensured that women on campus are made only safe and not made its captives.
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3. A functional and democratically elected students' union should be an active means to voice some of the legitimate concerns.
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Source: Indian Express

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