

The larger problem in BHU

What is the issue?

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- There is an ongoing unrest in Benaras Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi.
- 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.
- 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.
- Subsequently, stringent police action resulted in students and reporters becoming victims of a baton-charge.
- Soon, many other activists from women's groups and student organisations started protesting against the lathi-charge on women students.
- 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.
2. Women students are not allowed to eat non-vegetarian food in their mess.
3. They are not allowed to use mobile phones after 10 pm and access to the internet in hostels is strictly prohibited.
4. They are not given the freedom to wear dresses of their choice and are restricted in the name of customs.
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.
- **Caste** - Recently there was protest in BHU questioning the unconstitutional methods deployed for campus appointments.
- Officials seem to be exercising their discretion and caste prejudices become evident in making appointments.
- **Politics** - The deans and professors accused of harassment/molestation enjoy impunity.
- The students of the depressed classes who voiced their anger against preferential appointments were slapped with threats of expulsion.
- 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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