

Students are Producers, not Consumers.

A report from Mahanadi hostel

“When I see a mother research scholar of JNU run as fast as she can from her Lab to reach Indian Institute of Mass communication to receive her child from the school bus, I feel so troubled. It is not just running, she approaches many auto-rickshaw drivers so that one of them becomes ready to take her and child to a rented accommodation at Kishangarh where she cooks lunch, feeds her child and brings her baby back to JNU and puts him at baby care centre. She again rushes to her lab till the closing of baby care house. She takes him to drop at Kishangarh and comes back to lab where she keeps working for long hours.”

A research scholar of JNU

“Itni dikkat hai to saadi kyon ki...” [Why did you marry if you have so much of problems...]

Dean of Students, on 15th July(2015), during conversation with the students of Mahanadi hostel

After all, whom is this mother working so much for? Obviously, she is working for the university. She does not only continuously keep working for the academic production in the lab, but also, even under such pressure, cooks the food, takes care of the child, and therefore lives at rented accommodation in Kishangarh. The husband works elsewhere in order to let these things happen smoothly. Consequently, not only this mother, but also her child and husband too are involved in work so that the academic production keeps going on uninterruptedly, and this university, as university, can produce itself. As a worker, the time for production and reproduction is no longer separated for this mother. Such condition is not of this mother alone. Different segments of the workers/producers, within the walls of jnu factory, are increasingly getting regimented. There is a very important logic for this regimentation- the students are consumers, they will have to bear the costs of everything. For last few days, the administration is trying to impose this logic, e.g. the students are consumers, on the students of Mahanadi hostel.

On July 14, just immediately the day before the commencement of the registration for the current semester, circulars are issued, asking students to pay ‘electricity bill’ and Rs 750 every month as room rent. In the wake of this sudden crisis, a GBM (General Body Meeting) was organized on that very day tonight. In the GBM, the students, in the light of the following points, decided both not to pay the bills and to protest in front of the office of ‘Dean of Students’ next morning at 11am and the representatives of the student-union too expressed their support-

1. The students were saying that the administration and ‘Dean Office’ are arguing, in order to show Mahanadi hostel as distinct from other hostels, that, here, in the former, there are more facilities as compared to the latter. In other words, the students are using different types of electric appliances and Air-Conditioner (AC) in their rooms. As a result, the

electricity bill is very much high here, and the students are consumers; therefore, they will have to bear the costs of everything. To put forward the crisis of the registration, the administration is trying to extract forcefully the payment for the bill and, in addition, wants to begin to do the same with the other hostels by setting it as an example.

2. Let us take the matter of electric equipments first, particularly the use of AC. There can be two things in this regard. First, if not to use AC is a matter of moral conduct, there should be no AC morally in jnu. The ACs thus, from all the places, must be removed. Second and this is what the allegation of the administration is based upon, that there is over-consumption of electricity. A student was saying that, in the first place, there is no data with respect to per capita consumption of electricity in JNU and therefore the argument that there is over-consumption in Mahanadi is baseless. On the other hand, for over several months, in the name of survey of the equipments of electricity, the warden and the hostel manager are taking photographs by raiding into the rooms of students. When the student protested against the violation of privacy, they were misbehaved, and moreover, the viewpoints of women and children were not even heard.
3. There were many other students who told that it is not an issue of per capita consumption at all. Because the argument of overconsumption, as being brought forth by the administration, is completely fraudulent. As is the case of Mahanadi, men, women and children live in every room. In many rooms, both the man and the woman are students of JNU. So, both are involved in academic production. Both are working equally. Most of these researchers are in 4th or 5th year of their PhD research without any fellowship. The housing allowance is deducted by the university from the fellowships of those who are getting it. In such situation, we should see issues of both over-consumption and the circulars for payment of electricity bill in the context of the 'social wages'. The students are not consumers. On the contrary, they are producers. Through the work of students, this university maintains itself as university.
4. If seen in the context of 'social wages', the objective conditions of Mahanadi hostel become more evident. Take, for instance, the case of women and children. Unlike other hostels of JNU, there is no mess in Mahanadi. The commodities here do not therefore come on subsidized rates as is the case of those in many other hostels. They are bought at market price. The university doesn't spend money both for mess management and in the form of wages for the mess-workers. Because, here, the women/men do unwaged domestic labour. The care-work for children is also done by women without any wage. If, because of the pressure of academic production (say, the pressures of thesis chapter, of supervisor, of project, of fieldwork, etc.), we employ others for care and domestic works, we pay wages for this, additionally. Those who cannot afford such incurrence get the support of labour of their relatives (mostly their mothers or sisters). They too work without any wage. In this way, sometimes, the entire 'family' is found to be involved in university production. In such given condition, many research students do part-time under-paid work apart from that of academic production.

5. There are many students who accounted for numerous issues of Mahanadi hostel, which, though are discussed in IHA meeting for over several years, are paid no heed by the administration. For instance, the hostel does not have solar panels. It does not have the gym facility. As for as maintenance of hostel is concerned, some students just escaped major incidents by margin like ceilings of some houses caved in. moreover, water seepage is common in most of the rooms. Water tanks over the terrace are in very bad shape which account for water leakage waste of water. All roads leading toward Mahanadi are broken and matter get aggravated due to lack of street light on these roads.

With these issues, on July 15, we, the students of Mahanadi hostel, more or less 40 in number, gathered to protest in front of the 'dean office'. Initially, the dean refused to meet, saying he would talk to only one of us. We repeatedly told that we all would talk to you. These are the problems of all of us and you are "Dean of Students". Talk to each and every one of us. When, somehow, the conversation started, the dean kept repeating that you were consuming and thus you would have to pay. In the beginning, he sought to provoke the students on the issue of AC, and later, when we, while placing the points decided at the GBM, pointed out his being illogical, he out rightly said: "What is rational for you is irrational for me and what is irrational for you is rational for me." He proclaimed himself to be "undemocratic". On his complain, a proctorial inquiry has been instituted against one student on the ground that the latter has committed a behavior with him full of 'misconduct', 'aggression' and 'abuse'. On July 20, during the proctorial inquiry, in the letter signed by 40 students and with individual presentation of around 10 students, the worthlessness of complain of the dean was highlighted. On the same day, the dean office' issues yet another notice, addressed to the president of Mahanadi hostel, asking her to constitute a committee comprising three members which will be headed by the rector to discuss the issue of electricity bill. The letter arrives to the president on July 23, afternoon. The GBM told that, due to the academic pressure (say, that of registration, thesis submission, extension under 9B, etc.), we could not take any decision regarding the formation of the committee. On July 24, the day the president in person submitted the letter to the dean office about this decision, the dean returned the same letter to the president with his note on it through an official which finally arrived on 29th of July. In his note, the dean has written that the tone of our letter is "extremely arrogant and derogatory", with amusement and sarcasm with respect to our work, asking whether there was no disruption in our "academic work" when we came to dean office for indulging in 'disturbance' (the dean considers protest as disturbance), whereas to send the names of the representatives was causing problem in our academic work. The order was given, in the letter, to send the names latest by July 29. Our GBM decided to reject the proposal of any such committee formation and said that we are in favor of mass-representation-general assembly which is open to all- students, teachers, and workers. We will not pay the electric bill and the room rent. The extraction from our social wage is not acceptable. We are not consumers. Again, on 30th of July, the dean refused to meet us. According to him, there was possibility of abuse in the letter containing the decision of the GBM. Following all this, he told later that the matter had been referred to the rector and thereby sought to escape from questions of the

students. As of now (10th of August), we have not received an answer from the rector. Interestingly, though ironically, the letter of being found guilty in proctorial inquiry has definitely arrived.

Once the dean, rector or the administration starts talking about seeking for representatives, forming committee or struggling to get clearance from any department, etc. the question of resolving the problem through discussion is no more left. This is just one more proof of how the proceduralism of representative democracy has been internalized by the logic of bureaucracy. The problem is not that the figure of either a representative or a leader builds up in the process of the movement. The problem is how to keep breaking up the fetish of this figure in the process of the movement. In other words, the weapon, that is to say the student-union, which had emerged through the struggles, has gradually turned out to have got fettered. And how will we crack this fetish? Because of ignoring the process, we have not been able to oppose effectively even the mechanism called “Lyngdoh committee recommendations” which ensures the regulated and regimented recycling of the fettered student union. The logic of juridical and bureaucratic procedure is essentially that of the capital, and that is the soul of parliamentary democracy. It is not inadvertent that both administration and left organizations of the campus want to set far aside the effective movemental activity in the form of mass-representation/general assembly/student-workers’ council. The left organizations justify their position under the disguise of the stages of the movement. In their account, the student is not producer; rather, s/he is privileged, and therefore is a consumer. Their struggles take note of the objective conditions of the student-life in the context of protecting this privilege. It is as though “save, save” is the only revolutionary slogan of this age!

They also see the problem of hostel from the standpoint of political privilege/consumption, not from that of social-worker/social wage. They are completely blind as to how there is a bloody and murderous collusion between jnu administration and house-owners in munirika. The question of room-rent in munirika is not only directly related with the housing question in jnu factory, but also reproducing that question over and over again. In this situation, the administration must pay Rs 8000-10000 per month to each and every newly admitted student so that they can rent room outside and work here, or otherwise, the student will live wherever they will find place in JNU factory. They will occupy.

The question is not that of how to restore the old constitution. The question in fact is how to think about politics afresh in the wake of new objective conditions. The incessant reified and regulated recycling of both the regimented segments of the workers of the jnu factory and their respective bodies (JNUSU, JNUSA and JNUTA) can’t be smashed through external solidarity. Rather, how can solidarity be forged as workers, if the university reproduces itself, as university, through the collective labour of the workers as workers? The crisis aggravates and deepens if the conflicts within a segment and among the segments intensify- that is,

conflicts of women with the men, those of Dalits with Brahmins, that of teachers with students, students with the contract workers, etc.

Quite recently, in an incident, the teachers were resentful to the camp made for guards which is located in the backside of Brahmaputra hostel in the neighborhood of the teachers' residence. In complain, they pointed out the life of these people as 'unhygienic' causing repulsion and violation of their privacy. Now on such complain, the camp has been fenced from all sides. It's now a good-looking ghetto! In an another episode, just few days back, which however takes place in one form or another every day, some guards, in a scuffle, physically fought with their supervisor and chief security officer. Some of these guards have been expelled. The companies in this university do not pay minimum wage of any segment of the contract workers. On average, the women and men get Rs 130-140 and Rs 150-160 respectively as daily wages from Rs 311 as is fixed for unskilled workers. Many teachers openly indulge in child labour. Recently, on the pretext of 'over-consumption of electricity, the library was shut down at 11pm. Although, due to the protest promptly held at library by the students, the administration has deferred its decision, there were some students who were trying to justify the rationality of the administration later at Brahmaputra hostel. According to these students, if there is overconsumption, it is well-justified to shut down the library! The logic of being consumer is deeply internalized and well imbedded in us. This is the ideology of contemporary capital which is being imposed everywhere in the form of the policy of 'austerity'.

Then, how will the question of solidarity be resolved? To find the answer to this question outside movements is worthless. Some students say that it is 'anarchy' to talk about mass-representation or general assembly. They consider to think about it in terms of 'student-workers' council' is merely a day dream. On the contrary, the struggles across the world over- with the ideals of equality and justice- are experimenting for more democratic forms. From Chile to jadavpur, from China to FTII, such experiments are taking place. At the centre of these experiments lies the possibility of the solidarity of the workers. That is, the solid and real rejection of the force-field of value-regime of capital; or in Marx's words, the question of 'real movement'. Anarchy is the condition of neo-liberal capital, which is being governed by capital and operating for capital. The necessity is to turn this controlled reproduction of anarchy against the capital and to take it in the direction of movement of the working class. Can we not think of UGBM, in true sense, in terms of the General Body Meeting of all the workers of the university? Can we not think of UGBM in the form of constellation of the movement resulting from the struggles from within and among the different segments of the workers? The meaningful rejection of Lyngdoh perhaps indicates in this direction: "unity in struggle and struggle in unity"; for, to protect the illogicality of this system is no longer possible. In the words of Muktibodh-"You are death, you are emptiness, you are worthless; in your decimation only lies your meaning"

From the residents of Mahanadi hostel JNU