

To
Rahul Rekhawar,
Hon. Collector,
Kolhapur District
Maharashtra State,
India.

7/9/2023.

**Topic: Incidents occurring in the educational sector since June 2023.
Appeal for Intervention and action.**

Hon. Sir,

In the past few months, alarming incidents have occurred in the educational sector in the districts of Kolhapur-Sangli-Satara, which are under the jurisdiction of Shivaji University. A planned program is being implemented in various educational institutions, targeting teachers by deliberately inciting students on religious grounds, putting pressure on the management of educational institutions and disrupting the harmonious educational environment. These are important institutions in this area, particularly because boys and girls of the Bahujan community are able to avail of higher education.

Unfortunately, they are being targeted and are being pressured to take stands against the Constitution of India.

In the wake of the sectarian violence that took place in Kolhapur in June, 2023, women of all castes and faiths have come together in an innovative platform in Kolhapur called Women Protest For Peace (WFPF) or Shanti Sathi Stree Sangharsh to support each other in times of crisis and also to raise societal awareness about women's issues, particularly that of women's safety.

Through this forum, women are trying express anger and distress by holding silent protests to demand peace and justice against hatred and injustice.

Since June 2023, many women working in the education sector have had to submit to pressure politics of religious organizations in Kolhapur district. Against this backdrop, a Fact Finding Committee (FFC) was formed on behalf of WFPF in order to gather information about cases that occurred recently and draw conclusions from the evidence.

The FFC gathered information from the following institutions:

1. Kolhapur Institute of Technology (KIT), Gokul Shirgaon, Kolhapur

2. Vivekananda Institutes of Education:
 - a. Vivekananda College, Kolhapur
 - b. Dattajirao Kadam Arts, Science and Commerce College, Ichalkaranji
3. Seventh-day Adventist School, Kolhapur
4. Rayat Shikshan Sanstha:
 - a. Chhatrapati Shahu College, Kolhapur
 - b. Pandit Nehru Vidyalaya and Junior College, Kaulapur, Sangli.
 - c. Yashwantrao Chavan College, Pachwad, Satara
 - d. Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu College, Kolhapur
 - e. Chandrabai-Shantappa Shendure College, Hupari, Kolhapur

Observations:

1. The incidents that took place in the months of June -August 2023 in various educational institutions in Kolhapur and Sangli districts are not isolated occurrences. They are predetermined and have a pattern of direct intervention by external elements in educational institutions.
2. Educational institutions have become targets of Hindutva groups and organizations.
3. There is a deliberate attempt to create tension and rifts on religious lines among students, their parents, and general citizens by targeting educational institutions.
4. In these educational institutions, the main intention is to create pressure on the management. It must be noted that it is mainly women teachers who are being targeted. Many teachers are sent on forced leave or transferred under pressure without due process or even a simple inquiry.
5. Many concerned teachers/administrations have expressed the opinion that tension is being created in this manner in view of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections coming up in 2024.
6. The role of the police is not balanced. Their bias towards the majority Hindutva organizations was apparent.

Apart from this, such incidents are occurring in many other institutions, according to information received by the FFC. However, due to pressure, they have not come out publicly.

As secular, conscientious citizens and women who are aware of the future of teachers and students, we express our concern and condemn the incidents.

We demand:

1. An independent committee be appointed to conduct an impartial inquiry into these incidents.

2. Strict action be taken against those found guilty.

3. Launching of a helpline to respond to complaints and also reach out immediately to affected parties in case of such incidents.

Alongside, in order to prevent such incidents from occurring in the future and keeping in mind the larger goal of maintaining social harmony, representatives of the management of educational institutions, teachers, students and parents should be invited for a thorough discussion on this issue and guidelines to deal with such incidents should be evolved.

Our forum is ready to take the initiative and implement any collaborative action program on this issue.

Sd/-

Dr. Megha Pansare, Shramik Foundation
Tanuja Shipurkar, Mahila Dakshata Samithi
Rehana Mursal,
Meena Seshu, Sangram Sanstha
Bharti Powar
Seema Patil, Andha Sradha Nirmulan Samithi
Smita Vadan, Muskan
Sudha Patil, Muskan
Pranita Mali, Maharashtra Minority Christian Development Council
Anupriya Kadam, Vidhrohi Sanskritic Chalwal
Kiran Deshmukh, Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad
Charushila Patil, Jijau Brigade
Ranjana Patil, Jijau Brigade
Hema Desai, Jijau Brigade
Alka Deepak Devlapurkar, Anandi Mahila Jagruti Sanstha
Jayashree Kamble, Avani Institute
Pushpa Kamble, Ekti sanstha
Deepa Shipurkar, Aman Foundation
Alka Devlapurkar, Anandi Mahila Jagruti Sanstha
Anuradha Mehta, Dalit Mitra Bapusaheb Patil Library
Sarika Bakre, Swayamprabha Manch
Ulka Yadav, Mahila Dakshata Samithi
Ashwini Jadhav
Manisha Warang-Ranmale
Dr. Bharti Patil
Tabsum Imran Malladi
Tajnum Jameer Mole |
Nasim Chikode
Series Sheikh

Yasmin Desai
Farzana Shaikh
Manisha Brihaspati Shinde
Meena Tashildar
Shubda Hiremath
Hemlata Patil
Munira Shikalgar
Ashwini Jadhav
Malika Sheikh

Inciting Disharmony in Educational institutions in Western Maharashtra A Fact Finding report Sept 2023

Fact-Finding Committee (FFC) Report from Kolhapur/Sangli/Satara Districts of Maharashtra, India.

Teacher's Day, 05.09.2023

Since June 2023, many women working in the education sector have fallen prey to the politics of pressure incited by external forces in schools and colleges in Kolhapur-Sangli-Satara districts, which are in the jurisdiction of Shivaji University. Against this backdrop, a Fact-Finding Committee was formed on behalf of the forum Women Protest For Peace (WPPF) or Shanti Sathi Stree Sangharsh.

The FFC met with the concerned teachers and the management of the institutions and other stakeholders. Information published in local newspapers where such incidents occurred was also analysed. The FFC also received preliminary information about the incidents from the social workers Mrs. Pranita Mali and Mrs. Seema Patil, Kolhapur.

Details of the incidents are as follows:

1. Kolhapur Institute of Technology, Gokul Shirgaon, Kolhapur.

On 08/06/2023 a woman professor in the college was asked to take a 'value education' class. After the class started, some students started a discussion on the topic of 'gender discrimination'. They made derogatory statements about the minority community: "Muslims are rapists. Hindus are never involved in any kind of riots. Babri Masjid was demolished by

order of Supreme Court, etc.” The professor took a clear stand regarding these statements, based on facts: “Rape is not limited to any religion or caste. Rapists have no religion or caste. Rape is the most heinous form of crimes against women.”

Some of the students secretly filmed the video of her talk, edited it and posted it on social media. The video went viral. Based on this doctored clip, some Hindu organizations put pressure on the college management and the professor, demanding action against her. They threatened to stop the examinations if no action was taken. They demanded that she render a public apology and insisted that she should publicly apologize at Shivaji Chowk, Kolhapur.

According to the letter issued on June 16, 2023 regarding this incident, disciplinary action was taken against the professor. Without investigating who did the filming in the class without permission, who contributed to distorting it and spreading it, the institute sent the professor on compulsory leave. However, the professor flatly refused to apologise.

Progressive women in Kolhapur, as well as other progressive youth organizations, met the management of the institute. They argued that the professor had not violated the discipline of the college in any way. They demanded that the action against the professor be withdrawn, that she should be reinstated in service immediately; the matter be investigated impartially, and that action be taken against the students who doctored and disseminated the video. This issue was also discussed at the national level, with the 'India Academic Freedom Network' and other organizations releasing leaflets supporting her.

Even after that, the management advised her to apologise, but she refused. The institution then asked her to 'work from home' for a few days. At the end of the forced leave period at the end of the semester she was allowed to join service on 21.08.2023.

2. Vivekananda Education Society

a. Vivekananda College, Kolhapur (Reference: Daily Lokmat, Kolhapur. July 18, 2023)

On July 17, 2023, there was a controversy over the hijab. A teacher asked a student wearing a saffron to leave the class. Subsequently, angry students argued and asked why Muslim girls were allowed to sit in class wearing the hijab. This created an atmosphere of tension in the college premises for some time. Students mobilized and organized protests in large numbers, in front of the college office, with students shouting slogans such as “Jai Shri Ram”. Police were also called in to calm the students. No information was given by the college administration regarding this incident, but the video of students sloganeering went viral on social media. The college has not taken any action.

b. Dattajirao Kadam Arts, Science and Commerce College, Ichalkaranji

Controversy over religious dress: (Reference: Lokmat News Network 22.07.2023)

On the morning of 21.07.2023, two students came to Dattajirao Kadam ASC College wearing saffron scarves. They were stopped at the entrance by security guards and teachers. They confiscated the scarves and asked the students to retrieve them on their way out from college. After this information spread, some students argued that other religions were allowed certain garments, why not them. At this time, some college students wearing hijab were also stopped at the entrance. As soon as the information about this spread, supporters of both the communities gathered outside the college in large numbers, sloganeering started and tensions rose. As soon as the information about this incident came to light, Deputy Superintendent of Police Sameer Singh Salve, Inspector Raju Tashildar, Satyawan Hake, Pravin Khanpure reached the spot along with the Rapid Action Force.

A large crowd from both sides had gathered in the petrol pump area in front of the college. A stampede broke out as the police used lathi charge to disperse the crowd. There was a big traffic jam on the Kolhapur Road as this was going on in the main road itself. Deputy Superintendent Salve, Principal Dr. Anil Patil, supporters of both the communities held a meeting which was filled with tense accusations. The college administration

bought time by announcing that they would discuss it with their senior officers and take a decision. Police security was deployed in front of the college throughout the day.

Hindutva organizations have warned of protests in front of the college if the college administration did not take a proper decision on religious dress by the next Monday (24.07.2023). The organisations said they would stand outside the college and distribute saffron scarfs to all the youth entering the college. This did not happened, but there is an uneasy calm in the town.

3. Seventh-day Adventist School, Kolhapur

On August 4, 2023, during a school examination, a student wrote 'Jai Shri Ram' on the answer sheet. As per the examination rules, no writing/picture can be drawn on the answer sheet which will show identification. The teacher told the boy not to do so, but the boy became very aggressive. He then urged other students to write 'Jai Shri Ram' on their answer sheets. The teacher, herself a Hindu, got angry and punished the boy. This news reached a mob of 40-50 men outside who, as soon as the school was over, barged into the school and demanded that the school management apologize for punishing the student. There was loud sloganeering and banging of doors. Inspector Ajay Sindkar of Shahupuri Police Station intervened and held a meeting between the school administration, Hindutva activists and parents. In this meeting, the school administration promised to act against the concerned teacher.

Amidst a tense situation in the school, the next day the school management, teachers and some other people met former Shiv Sena MLA Mr. Rajesh Kshirsagar and discussed the incident with him. No concrete conclusion was reached during this discussion. Mr. Rajesh Kshirsagar explained to the teachers to calm down and asked the school management not to escalate the matter. He said that since he was very 'positive' about the school, and he would not escalate the issue if the concerned teacher was asked to resign. When the parents of the concerned child were called by the school, they said that they had no

complaint, and they only wanted their child to study further. When the said incident took place, police security was also provided in the school for two days. The management did not come forward to take concrete action by filing a police complaint against the mob entering their school.

When the fact-finding committee met the school administration, the administration behaved very politely. But they were not eager to talk. The following points emerged from the discussion:

- i. Seventh-day Adventists have many branches in Maharashtra and in India. Incidents of this nature are occurring in many of them.
- ii. This is an attempt to disturb and destabilise the students.
- iii. Many parents have met the teachers and administration of the school and expressed their sympathy. They also hoped that this should not affect the students.
- iv. The mob demanded that the school put up pictures of national and political leaders in the school. After that, such photos have been put up everywhere in the school.
- v. Seventh-day Adventists school management has advised a wait-and-watch policy for some time to calm the situation. Therefore, the teacher concerned has been advised to remain on leave till further orders.
- vi. According to the information received by the committee, on another occasion, when a cleaning staff was called to mop water spilled in the corridor, the children asked her what religion she belonged to. When told that she is a Christian, the students insisted she chant 'Jai Shri Ram'. Also, 'Jai Shri Ram' was written on all the school boards. When asked if this information was true, the administration categorically denied that it had happened.

4. Rayat Shikshan Sanstha

Attempts have been made to vitiate the atmosphere and disturb the peace in many colleges of Rayat Shikshan Sanstha. To discuss the matter, the fact-finding Committee met Ms. Saroj Patil, General Body Member of

Rayat Shikshan Sanstha. The facts that emerged about various colleges under the Rayat Shikshan Sanstha umbrella are as follows.

a. Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu College, Kolhapur

On August 12, 2023, Ms. Saroj Patil was chairing a meeting of the College Development Committee (CDC) when a group of 20-25 boys entered the room by kicking the door open. Among them, nine students belonged to the college hostel. All of them wore saffron scarves around their necks and saffron marks on their foreheads. When asked how they came in without permission, they became aggressive and started an argument about hostel facilities. The administration had explained to the students that the hostels were being repaired and thus no hostel admissions would be given this year. On being persuaded, some hostel facilities were provided to the needy students in a long corridor. The Hindutva organization decided to use this issue to enter the CDC meeting and create a ruckus. The college administration was clear that they were unable to offer facilities this year and had informed the students. Ms. Patil told the FFC that she intervened on behalf of the students who apologized and are now continuing to stay and study in the college.

b. Pandit Nehru Vidhyalay and Junior College, Rayat Shikshan Sanstha, Kavlapur, Sangli District.

On the day of the farewell ceremony of class 10, the students gave a Ganesha image to the staff. Chandrayaan-3 mission was launched on July 14, 2023. On the second day, in the backdrop of Chandrayaan-3 launch on July 15, 2023, a discussion was held among women professors on the scientific progress of the country and theism in the college staffroom. At that time, a female professor removed the Ganesha image from the staff room, taking the stand that it is not appropriate to have images of deities of any religion in the educational institution as per the ordinance of the Rayat Sanstha. The teacher concerned told the FFC that since the headmaster Mr. Mulla was on vacation acting headmaster Mr. Gaikwad was in-charge.

After that, on July 17, July 25 and August 22, 2023, groups of Hindu youth and villagers came to the college three times and put pressure on the institution against the teacher. They demanded that she should apologize, and the school should take action against her and transfer her with immediate effect. The teacher refused to apologize.

Gram sabhas were also held on this question in the school premises. Various groups in the village used this incident to create pressure in the institution and mobilise villagers by giving a religious colour to the matter. Discussion about Hindu-Muslim relations are ongoing in the village, in schools, and colleges. The concerned teacher is having to live under extreme mental stress. The FFC also found that Principal Mulla was transferred from the college to maintain peace in the village.

c. Yashwantrao Chavan College, Pachwad, Satara

Ms. Saroj Patil and Principal Dr. Manjushri Bobde met with the FFC and narrated the following incident.

A lecture was organized on August Kranti Din August 9, 2023 at the college, the guest speaker, made some remarks in his speech about the stories related to Hanuman are from the puranas (Hindu mythology and folklore). In the same speech he also referred to Comrade Govind Pansare's book 'Who was Shivaji?', and tried to explain the importance and work of Shivaji Maharaj. Some of the students present at the lecture were Hanuman devotees and their feelings were allegedly hurt. They became agitated and objected to the speech of the guest speaker. The vice principal calmed them down and apologized to the students.

When this happened a teacher in the college commented that most students copy and pass their exams and they should stop doing this and instead read Comrade Govind Pansare's 'Who was Shivaji?'. On the second day, a mob of villagers and former students came together and demanded that she apologize for mentioning Shivaji in the singular, without according to him the status of Majesty. (This is a sore point with Hindutva organisations with activists claiming Shivaji Maharaj as a much-loved

leader and ruler and Hindutva organisations according to him the title of Emperor)

At this time the sub-inspector of Pachwad village and the husband of the teacher was also present. She refused to apologize, stating that she only mentioned the book and did not refer to Shivaji Maharaj in the singular. Interestingly the Sub-Inspector of Police wrote to the college to take disciplinary action against the teacher. The college authorities have since forwarded the letter to the Rayat Shikshan Sanstha, for further action.

d. Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu College, Kolhapur

Speaking of the incident at the Chhatrapati Shahu College, the concerned professor said that she had not gone back to college since the incident more than three weeks back and has reported sick. The FFC met Dr. Laxman Kadam the principal of the college. Information obtained from discussions with them is as follows:

The college administration had decided to make special efforts to ensure that students maintain discipline in the college premises. On 17.08.2023 at 12.30 p.m the senior college professor was checking the dress code and identity card of all students when she noticed a student outside the classroom. She asked him in which class he studied and to show his identity card as it was not visible as he was wearing a saffron scarf. After telling the student that he should not come wearing such a scarf because the identity card is not visible and that the discipline of the college should be followed, he yelled at her and left the premises.

After that, in the staff meeting held around 1.30 pm, Principal Dr. Laxman Kadam said that when some Hindutva organisations came to meet him with complaints, he came to know about the incident. The professor clearly said that it was only a disciplinary matter.

Dr. Kadam told the FFC that a large group of Hindutva organisations came to meet him and barged into his office. They started shouting slogans. The

principal called the police and pacified the crowd. The group demanded to know the dress code regulations of the college.

They repeatedly argued, asking if there were different rules for Hindus and Muslims. Hijab and cap are allowed, but why not saffron scarf, they asked. The principal told them that it is mandatory for students to adhere to the dress code (no jeans, shorts etc) with the prominent display of the identity card. There was no problem if students wore saffron scarves or any other clothing like saffron scarfs, Hijab or skull caps, the issue was that the identity card was not prominently displayed by the student. The mob demanded that the principal produce professor Mulani asking for her to apologize to them. The principal flatly refused.

Dr. Kadam said that three groups of different Hindutva organisations came to meet him and demanded an apology from the professor. Dr. Kadam decided to apologise on her behalf but they were not satisfied. After that, Shri. Ravikiran Ingwale of the Shiv Sena came there and took a stand in favour of the institution. (Note: Mr Ingawale took the opposite position in the KIT college case, described earlier in this report). Mr. Ingawale was allowed to meet the professor. He told her that if she wanted to work in the college, she would have to stop telling Hindus to adhere to a dress code. He told her she may go work elsewhere and insisted that the principal send her on forced leave. The college has decided that it is better to calm the situation and have issued a memo to the professor. She is presently on compulsory leave. The principal has advised the Rayat Shikshan Sanstha to transfer her with immediate effect. The professor is nearing retirement.

e. Chandrabai-Shantappa Shendure College, Hupari, Kolhapur

A professor in the college made a social media post about Adv. Prakash Ambedkar laying flowers on Aurangzeb's grave and saying that since injustice is being done to both the Muslims and Dalits, they should unite. As Hupari village is very sensitive on all matters communal, it got a very negative reaction from the villagers. Principal Bhosale was surrounded by a mob and a case was registered against the professor. There was a

demand to transfer the teacher with immediate effect. The institute transferred the teacher.

Observations

1. The incidents that took place in the months of June -August 2023 in various educational institutions in Kolhapur and Sangli districts are not isolated occurrences. They are predetermined and have a pattern of direct intervention by external elements in educational institutions.
2. Educational institutions have become targets of Hindutva groups and organisations.
3. There is a deliberate attempt to create tension and rifts on religious lines among students, their parents, and general citizens by targeting educational institutions.
4. In these educational institutions, the main intention is to create pressure on the management. It must be noted that it is mainly women teachers who are being targeted. Many teachers are sent on forced leave or transferred under pressure without due process or even a simple inquiry.
5. Many concerned teachers/administrations have expressed the opinion that tension is being created in this manner in view of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections coming up in 2024.
6. The role of the police is not balanced. Their bias towards the majority Hindutva organisations was apparent.

Recommendations

- An independent committee be appointed to conduct an impartial inquiry into these incidents.
- Strict action be taken against those found guilty.
- Launching of a helpline to respond to complaints and also reach out immediately to affected parties in case of such incidents.

In conclusion

Apart from this, such incidents are occurring in many other institutions, according to information received by the FFC. However, due to pressure, they have not come out publicly.

As secular, conscientious citizens and women who are aware of the future of teachers and students, we express our concern and condemn the incidents.

Alongside, in order to prevent such incidents from occurring in the future and keeping in mind the larger goal of maintaining social harmony, representatives of the management of educational institutions, teachers, students and parents should be invited for a thorough discussion on this issue and guidelines to deal with such incidents should be evolved.

The Women Protest for Peace forum is ready to take the initiative and implement any collaborative action program on this issue.

Women Protest For Peace, Fact-Finding Committee:

Megha Pansare, Rehana Mursal, Meena Saraswathi Seshu