

The poetics of being Anti-Bharat: Some concerns on TISS fiasco

BY: [YASHOWARDHAN TIWARI](#) JULY 2, 2021

The recent **outrage** on an M.A. thesis completed at TISS Hyderabad, which sketches Bharat as an unwarranted, unethical occupant force in Kashmir, is a timely societal intervention and raises several questions of prime importance about the administration of our higher education institutions and academic freedom. This outrage was long due, given the outrageous literature being produced in our premier institutions in the name of scholarship since decades.

Flirting with anti-state, anti-national agendas on university campuses seems to have become the fashion of the day. Such a backdrop provides strong grounds to spark a serious debate on several potential fronts, such as, but not restricted to, regulation of academic bodies, extent of intervention of government in research work, limits of academic freedom, maintaining the rigor and credibility of scholarship et al.

Some pages of an M.A. thesis written at TISS Hyderabad under the supervision of one Prof. Nilanjana Ray propped up on social media platforms a few days ago, the thesis bearing the title “Engendering Conflict: Understanding the impact of Militarization, Conflict and Pandemic-Induced Lockdown on Domestic Violence in **India Occupied Kashmir**”.

The very title of the paper makes it crystal clear that the paper has been written with an *a priori* presumption that **Bharat has occupied Kashmir**. This immediately translates into meaning that the nation-state called Bharat is a dominating, occupant force in the land of Kashmir. Since ‘occupied’ isn’t a neutral word but rather a loaded one with heavy politico-historical connotations attached, it can be inferred that the paper views Bharat as a colonizer and an imperial power hell bent on subjugating Kashmir.

This flawed and may we dare say, seemingly seditious, presumptive basis of the paper clarifies itself when the same paper **refers** Pakistan occupied Kashmir as **Pakistan Administered Kashmir** or **Azad Kashmir**. Further, the paper also puts forth the argument of Pakistani invasion of Kashmir post-Independence being a “freedom movement”.

So, the paper doesn’t stop at portraying Bharat as a colonial aggressor, but also goes to the extent of subtly peddling the Pakistani stand of entire Kashmir being its legitimate part. Territorial aggressions of Pakistan are put as virtuous moves of the supposed freedom movement, while Bharat is labelled as an imperialist presence in the region. Such audacity, much wow!

This highly controversial dissertation paper intrigues one to put forth questions at several levels.

First, the dissertation paper raises fingers at both the supervisor and the college administration. No doubt that since the paper has been developed under the guidance of a specific professor, that particular professor should be primarily liable for its content due to the reason of being in a power position vested with the discretion to give a certain direction to the content of the paper.

At the same time, it is well known that dissertation papers are meant to pass through rigorous approval processes and review stages which involve the larger college administration. Here, the college administration can’t escape liability because the approval of this thesis indicates that either the thesis title has received a stamp of explicit approval from them or has survived the entire process due to extremely lax administrative procedures and people. So, either it’s a case of sheer complicity or utter laxity on part of the administration. In both the situations, the manner of application of mind of the administration is bound to be held accountable.

Second, a larger concern that should be expressed by the civil society is with regard to a justified usage of taxpayer’s money for research purposes and academic work. Given that TISS is **fully-funded** by the University Grants Commission, Government of Bharat, we’re sure that the larger, sane portion of

Bhartiya people aren't paying taxes from their hard-earned income for fueling academic work contributing to the orchestration of the Balkanization project of Bharat.

Why, then, should such advocacy of balkanizing Bharat be funded by the Bhartiya taxpayers? Why should the common Bhartiya citizen be coerced into paying for the study and promotion of such research that doesn't even recognize the legitimacy of Bharat's territorial integrity? If such a sorry state of affairs continues, the civil society and government together might also begin to start thinking about the pros and cons of defunding such institutions.

Third, a connected point to the above is the limits that should be constitutionally set on academic freedom. The thesis title throws a challenge on the face of the revered Bhartiya Constitution by denying recognition to the territorial sovereignty and integrity of Bharat defined under Article 1 of the Constitution.

TISS Hyderabad should make the entire document publicly available for the entire citizenry, especially the legal fraternity, to view for themselves whether the paper is seditious in nature or not, which it prima facie seems to be. Also, we need to examine that wouldn't the prohibition of such research fall under the category of reasonable restrictions placed on academic freedom guaranteed by the Bhartiya Constitution. It would indeed be odd to think that the constitution would allow such academic freedom which subverts its own definitions of Bhartiya state's sovereignty and integrity.

Fourth, it has been **alleged** that the thesis was based on a miniscule research sample size of 13-14 individuals. If this be true, a further scrutiny should be conducted as to whether the thesis intended to base itself on qualitative or quantitative research methodology. In the former case, it would be blatantly wrong for the paper to argue a straightjacket claim of a quantitative nature on such method.

The latter would be a case of total lack of academic rigor as such a small sample size can't be used for quantitative research. If proven, it will be a sad day for the Bhartiya academic community, which has produced such great scholars throughout, that the standards of academic rigor have fallen to such a low level in our premier institutions.

Fifth, it is very interesting and intriguing to note that a new dimension of patriarchy, called the "patriarchy of resistance", has **allegedly** been explored in the paper. The argument supposedly goes on to manufacture a tenuous link between military presence and domestic violence in Kashmir.

After deeming Bhartiya military personnel to be a manifestation of colonial aggression, the paper implies that the domestic violence being faced by Kashmiri women is a result of military deployment, and that the withdrawal of troops and addressal of Kashmiri desire for self-determination and autonomy would by itself resolve the issue of rampant domestic violence.

One isn't able to wrap one's head around the implications of such a flimsy argument. If domestic violence is being termed "patriarchy of resistance", it has a connotation of being justified in a sense, because the actual perpetrators of the violence are abdicated of their responsibility and are seen as indulging in such acts as a consequence of their resistance movement, perhaps rightly so to some extent according to the paper.

The Kashmiri men are then deprived of their own agency as the perpetrators and are not being held liable for the systemic rot in their society for which ideally, they are responsible, because the onus of the crimes is being shifted on the Bhartiya state. This line of argument defies the common sensical standards, and we would indeed be deeply grateful if any blessed soul could kindly enlighten us on how such an argument can hold its ground.

Nevertheless, the claims of domestic violence prevalent in Kashmiri society should be taken seriously by the Bhartiya state and society at large, and efforts should be made to effectively remedy the situation by a proper implementation of law and order in the region. These claims, in fact, to the disappointment of the paper's author and guide, strengthen and give all the more reasons for Bhartiya state's increased presence in the region.

Lastly, the central government needs to be goaded to develop a proper, constitutional regulatory framework for looking into the nature, standards and academic rigor of research work being conducted in various institutions. Also, it needs to thoroughly scrutinize the course syllabi being taught, role of professors and administration in such brain washing of students and other related issues.

Home and Defense ministries of the Central Government should step in to take the necessary steps in accordance with the law of the land. Such rot in our premier institutions can't be tolerated by the civil society and diligent taxpayers who help run the Bhartiya nation-state with their sweat and blood.

On a side note, scholar Abhinav Prakash recently [tweeted](#), "In TISS, academic freedom means lack of diverse opinions, critical thinking means homogenous propaganda, freedom of expression means silencing others and dissent means reading handouts from intelligence agencies of hostile states." We shudder at the very thought of things coming to such a pass, and genuinely hope that all the issues will be rectified in the near future.

This article has been co-authored by Mr. Mritunjay Tripathi along with Mr. Yashowardhan Tiwari . Mr. Tripathi is a Post-Graduate in Public Policy from Jindal School of Government & Public Policy. He is currently the In-charge of Think India, West Zone.