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Student Activism on the University
 Campus: Is it the Privilege of Arts and
 Social Sciences Disciplines?

M D Usha Devi*

During the past few days, a major debate on the public forum through the print and the on-line media as well as on the television channels is centering around the issue of JNU [Jawaharlal Nehru University] row. While the JNU row is getting blown up, it is also dragging another row at the Hyderabad Central University [HCU] which took place couple of months ago. Both these incidents have at the centre of debate, the issue of student activism and the freedom of speech and the right to dissent in a Sovereign Democratic Republic. The concept of student activism on the university campuses in India is not something new. The university education system provides fertile ground for the students to pursue different ideologies and philosophies depending on the courses of disciplinary studies they pursue. As students get exposed to different disciplinary perspectives during the course of their study through curriculum and other reading materials, their interest in different ideologies begin to take roots. When such interests are further nurtured by the faculty teachings and intellectual deliberations on and off the campus, their ideas get further crystallized to take different forms of articulations in terms of verbal expressions [in speech and writings], behavior and actions. It is these kinds of articulations, which sometimes can overstep the legal boundaries, causing commotion and chaos. This is precisely what has happened with some of the JNU student leaders.

From the time the row erupted at the JNU and subsequent condemnations and arrests of a few student leaders, there has been spate of debates and dialogues in the media and television channels. Additionally, scholars, academicians and intellectuals from across diverse fields have kept the issue alive through their serious writings in the newspapers and academic journals. These scholars have voiced both strong support and strong dissent with respect to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in general and the issue relating to freedom of speech in particular under a democratic set up. However, the most crucial issue relating to the JNU row is that of seditious speech by a few student leaders, which has evoked unconstitutional and anti-national acrimonies. This kind of student activism on the university campus is something, which calls for serious scrutiny although student activism in general is a positive feature in any academic institution.

With the JNU row taking a new twist and turn because of the public uproar and the pandemonium it has created across the country, people have begun to question the very academic tradition and culture of the JNU, its faculty and the student community, not to mention those

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