



## **Intellectual Custodians and their Colonized Minds**

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A twenty-two-year-old middle class Indian girl from Udupi made history recently when she became the first Indian woman to be elected as the President of the Oxford Students Union. She received 1996 out of 3708 votes in the students' union election, which was more than the total votes put together, casted to the other candidates. First to receive University education in her family, it was indeed a proud moment not only for Rashmi Sawant but for the Indian community, though a rather short lived one. She resigned from her position; as the custodians of intellect policing the University campus, imposed their intent on her comments posted on social media, as a teenager, years ago.

The university campuses are meant to facilitate an ecosystem where students can harness their thinking capabilities and skills to evolve as individuals who are prepared to lead and contribute constructively to the society while respecting the space of others. Unfortunately, such 'liberal' space has been subjugated by academic appointees for a long time, for which rigorous scholarly deliberations did not include tolerance for either people or ideologies contrary to their convictions. An academic imperialism has been prevailing over many university campuses where largely those of Indian origin in the position of authority, with colonised intellectual learning are unable to accept the decolonisation of the campus ecosystem. A young Indian girl from a small town sweeping the student union polls with fifty three percent votes shattered the ego chambers of 'brown sahibs' of the campus academia.

A report by Equality and Human Rights Commission called ‘Tackling Racial Harassment: Universities challenged’, shows that between September 2015 and February 2019; 1, 80,000 students across the United Kingdom (UK) suffered racial harassment in the first six months of their academic year. One in twenty students said they left their studies due to racial harassment and three in twenty staff said racial harassment caused them to leave their jobs. Professor Julia Buckingham, president of Universities UK, which represents 136 universities, said that the findings in the report are “sad and shocking”, and called on vice-chancellors to publicly commit to make tackling racial harassment a top priority. The report says that there was a strong perception that universities too often place their reputation above the safeguarding and welfare of their students and staff.

Only a few people like Mrityunjay Guha Majumdar, who served as the Vice-President of Graduate Union at Cambridge University have mustered the courage to talk about the exclusion and polarisation around ideologies in the campus. Political bullying by self-proclaimed Left Liberals towards Indians and especially towards those with Hindu identity has been witnessed many times. A Harvard Kennedy School academic of Indian origin had recently posted on social media, “Hindus are sick people of India, it is their religious books who (sic) train the mind.” Twisting of Hindu Holy scriptures and taunts on cow urine (gaumutra) by senior academics of well-known foreign universities will lead to a bigoted and unsafe campus environment.

However, the rise in radicalisation under the pretext of study of religious texts and theology on campuses has been a matter of concern. Henry Jackson Society publishes an annual report in which it analyses the number of university events in the United Kingdom where individuals with radical views, pro-jihad activists and anti-Semites are invited. In 2015-16, the number of such events was 128, which rose to 200 in 2017-18. The London University held 43 events that featured speakers with extreme Islamic views. The radical speakers at various events, to name a few included Yahya al-Raaby who has called Shia Muslims ‘devils’, Yusuf Chambers who has advocated death for homosexuals and Muhammed Taqi Usmani who claimed that Islam allows slavery under certain conditions. In 2015, Prime Minister of UK, David Cameron had called upon

Universities to play their role in challenging extremism and protecting impressionable young minds.

While radical voices have been accommodated in the foreign campuses, Indian parliamentarians, authors and filmmaker have been repeatedly denied permission to address students. The Oxford India Society (OIS) cancelled Dr. Subramanian Swamy's lecture on 'Economic development of India over the years' and Rajeiv Malhotra's lecture on 'Breaking India: Re-envisioning History" in 2015. OIS stated that the lecture faced strong opposition from Indian students and a few faculty members of the university. Incidentally, Zakir Naik, the Islamic preacher who has been banned to enter England and is at present absconding from the Indian soil, was called by the Oxford University Debating Society to speak on 'Religious tolerance' via satellite in 2011.

While the west endorses the indigenous knowledge and practices of India in Yoga and Ayurveda, their university campuses are dissuasive of giving a level playing field to Indians. The literature and the discourse in campuses have been in the hands of those, with colonized minds. When Katherine Mayo had written 'Mother India', portraying people of India, their faiths and beliefs, as uncivilized, barbaric and who publicly called non- whites inferior; Mahatma Gandhi had called her book 'a gutter inspector's report'. In the present campuses, white supremacists have been taken over by brown supremacists who are unable to fathom the call for decolonising the campuses, in course curricula as well as in social conduct. A young Indian girl, winning the student union election with the agenda to 'tackle the institutional homophobia and transphobia', 'decolonization of the syllabi' and 'to remove all statues proven to be imperialist, including Christopher Codrington' has paved the way for a clarion call to sanitize the campuses from racial prejudice.