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File FIR against Head Counsellor, Ms Hima Anareddy under Atrocities Act: NCST to IIT Mumbai

The NCST pulls up IIT-Bombay for its insensitivity, absence of adequate mechanisms or response and also directs implementation of measures to tackle lack of accountability towards Dalit students

[Sabrangindia](#) 25 Mar 2023



The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has warned the IIT Mumbai and directed that it needs to sensitise itself about discrimination against Scheduled Caste students (Dalits), ensure their representation in students organisations, faculty formations and among counsellors with immediate effect. Besides, IIT Mumbai that prides itself on being an “institute of excellence” has been pulled up for an absence of mental health programmes for students.

The NCST orders came on a complaint filed by the Ambedkar Periyar Phile Study Circle (APPSC) which is a student collective which responds to issues impacting students within and outside IITB.

Most significantly, the NCST has directed the filing of an FIR against Ms Hima Anareddy, Head Counsellor, under the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and also provide the Commission with the detailed investigation report of the suicide case of the 1st year

The Commission had deplored the apathy of IIT-B in its response to the complaint and the fact that it continued to allow Ms Hima Anareddy to hold responsible posts even after it had found her to be casteist and insensitive towards tribal and other students.



The hearing of the Commission took place on March 22, 2023 and a detailed Action Taken Report (ATR) has now been sent to the Institute for implementation and action within 15 days. The complaint had been filed by the student's complaint on June 16, 2022. Since then, another tragic death by suicide of a student at IIT-B, Darshan Solanki, has taken place.

Directives of NCST to Director, IIT Bombay, Powai, Mumbai in the ATR

- i. To register an FIR against Ms Hima Anaredy under Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989
- ii. To ensure recruitment of expert counsellors with an ST background in Student Welfare Centre to encourage and repose the faith of ST students and to make mental healthcare facilities more approachable for them.
- iii. To ensure that a faculty counsellor with an ST background is available on the campus for the ST students
- iv. To appoint a Convener with an ST background in the SC/ST Cell in addition to the existing two conveners of SC and General background
- v. To provide a detailed report with statistics pertaining to the composition of faculties, students and other staff members
- vi. To provide a detailed report with statistics pertaining to the composition of the SWC and composition of complaints dealt with by SWC.
- vii. To sensitise the campus on the issue of caste-related harassment and conduct conferences and workshops in the first 3-6 months of the commencement of every academic year
- viii. To encourage the SC/ST/OBC students enrolled in Master's and Doctorate programmes to apply for teaching posts in the institute
- ix. To provide a detailed investigation report of the suicide case of the 1st year student Darshan Solanki

According to the ATR that is available in the public domain, the NCST commission has held that

“The present case relates to apartheid, lack of proper counselling for the SC/ST students of IIT, Bombay. The petitioner allege that IIT Bombay has a Students Welfare Centre (SWC). However, it has no SC/ST Counsellor, the head counsellor Ms Hima Anaredy is brazenly vocal about her casteist and anti-reservation views that make SC/ST students uncomfortable about approaching her and the alumni initiative for mental health services named “Bandhu” lacks caste based mental health services.

“The petitioners through their representation to the Commission demanded termination of head counsellor Ms Hima Anaredy, recruitment of expert counsellors who are trained to handle caste-based issues, recruitment of professional counsellors with SC/ST/OBC background and organisation of compulsory caste sensitization programs and workshops for employees, faculties and students.

“Considering the violation of rights of the tribal students as grave and gigantic in nature, the Commission issued Notice dated November 11, 2022 to the Secretary, Ministry of Education, Government of India and notice dated January 30, 2023 to the Director, IIT Bombay, Powai, Mumbai seeking reply from the concerned officials within 15 days.

“A reply dated February 1.2,2023 was received by the Commission from the Director, IIT

Bombay, Powai, Mumbai stating that the notice dated November 1, 2022 addressed to the Ministry of Education was forwarded to Director, IIT Bombay, wherein it was stated that a number of steps are being taken to help all students. Mandatory sensitization course on caste related issues (especially SC/ST) has been planned by SC/ST student cell, manpower has been recruited and course content is under

preparation.

“The Bandhu self-help website, developed by SWC in collaboration with Tata Institute of Social Sciences does not deal with caste related issues. These issues are handled by SC/ST Cell. Relevant information will also be posted on Bandhu website. An interaction Session between SWC Counsellors and Mariwala Health Initiative (external agency) has already begun and is an ongoing process. Training of student mentors on affirmative counselling for marginalized communities including SC/ST Cell has been done by SC/ST Cell with support from Mariwala Health Initiative in July, 2022. The head Counsellor, Ms Hima Anareddy was asked to take down the casteist post on her social media page and warned against the posts in the future. It was submitted that she has been working in SC/ST cell since April 2022 on a joint survey on mental health.

“As a follow up to the letter of Ministry of Education dated December 2.12, 2022, it was submitted by IIT Bombay that the authorities are in the process of recruiting one SC and one ST Student Counsellor from the available roster.

“The Commission found the reply highly unsatisfactory and hence, the Commission issued Summons to the Director, IIT Bombay, Powai Mumbai to appear for a hearing before the Commission on February 22, 2023.

“During the course of hearing, the Commission asked the Petitioners who appeared in person and through video conferencing about the facts of the case as on date. They repeated and re-iterated their earlier submissions and submitted an additional document with supplementary information. They added that a representation was first sent to the Director, IIT Bombay on January 31, 2022. A survey was also conducted in May/June, 2022 by the petitioner to analyse the mental health status of SC/ST students. However, most SC/ST students refused to participate stating they have lost faith in the system, many students stated they were going through extreme stress due to caste based harassment and eight students stated that they felt suicidal. This information was also submitted to the authorities but no action was taken by them.

“It was also submitted that there is no proper System for grievance redressal and information about the same is not available to students. There is a mentorship programme in IIT Bombay but discrimination is also rampant therein. The authorities are flouting the reservation norms and not recruiting SC/ST candidates in the faculty. It all culminated in the suicide of a first year SC student Mr Darshan Solanki on February 12, 2023.

“In response, the authorities submitted that police investigation is under process in the tragic death of Mr Darshan Solanki and the report is awaited. It was submitted that a psychometric test is conducted at the beginning of each year to assess the mental well-being of the students. It was also submitted that another online platform namely “Your Dost” is available for students to address their mental health issues 24X7. They denied flouting reservation norms and stated that their faculty and students have ample representation from the SC/ST community.

“The authorities agreed that prima facie it appears from the social media post and the conduct of the head counsellor Ms Hima Anareddy that she is anti-tribal. It was submitted that she continues to work in IIT Bombay however, she has been removed from SWC.

“The commission takes a very serious view of the reply which has been found to be incorrect during the course of the sitting. It has been categorically accepted by the Director that the averment made in the reply is incorrect so far as it is concerned with the involvement and research work of Ms Hima Anareddy in the SC/ST Cell.

It is to be seen now, how one of India’s premier and much applauded institutes of higher learning responds to this sharp rebuke from the NCST Commission and whether some measure of accountability will ensure the security, safety and well-being of all Indian students.

The NCST’s ATR to IITB may be read here:

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